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Making Social Forestry Work: A Comparative Study of Smallholder Reforestation Projects in Paraguay

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Abstract

Paraguay has one of the smallest forest plantation areas in Latin America currently estimated at 66 000 hectares. Additionally in the second half of the 20th century the dramatic deforestation rate assessed by the World Resources Institute reached 2,65 %. Those are just some of the reasons explaining the particular importance of promoting plantation activities within the country. One such initiative has been the project for management of natural resources (PMRN) of the German Development Agency (GIZ) involving assistance for smallholders in the establishment of forest plantation plots.

This paper tries to explain the observable difference in the performance of two nearly neighbouring communities. It asks why in the same region (Department of San Pedro) and operating under the auspices of the same external project (PMRN) the results of the two case study areas (in Cuatro Vientos and Choré communities) are so divergent.

After the analysis of the relevant documents and a field visit to both areas, the variation between the plantation results can be explained by the degree of self-organisation and institutional capacity, with the formalised cooperative in Cuatro Vientos as a potential “champion” and the loose producers committee in Choré as the visible “laggard”. The paper discusses the initial conditions, external factors of influence and project outcomes regarding forest plantations. It broadly assesses the socio-economic and environmental impacts of plantations, producers’ attitudes towards planting trees, plantation integration at the farm level, options for value added chains and micro-finance and finally long-term continuation of the efforts after the project. It finally points to the importance of governance and institutional set-up in plantation forestry and provides lessons learned for making social forestry work at the grassroots local level.

Keywords: Development, Paraguay, smallholder plantations, social forestry, socio-economic impact