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Socio-Economic Aspects of Rubber Cultivation in Southern China

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Abstract

The Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province in Southwest China has experienced widespread and dramatic land use changes mainly through the conversion of rainforest areas. Socioeconomic studies indicate that given high international product prices rubber is a profitable crop also for subsistence smallholder farmers who mostly belong to various ethnic minority groups. The adoption of rubber cultivation has resulted in profound changes. The altering of land and labour allocation towards permanent monoculture agriculture is accompanied by higher climatic and economic risks. In addition, the loss of agro-biodiversity can have potentially negative implications for food and nutritional security of the rural population. So far little quantitative information is available on the economic and natural resource implications of rubber cultivation in Southwest China. In early 2013 a large scale socio economic survey has been conducted among some 612 rubber farmers in 42 villages in Xishuangbanna. The survey instruments consisted of a village level and a comprehensive household questionnaire including information on household characteristics, different farm and non-farm income sources, shocks experienced and expected risks. A rubber module that included detailed information on inputs and outputs over one entire production period on a plot level was central to the survey.

This paper provides a first quantitative analysis of the economics of rubber cultivation in Xishuangbanna. Differences in the net revenues from rubber and total household income among different locations, household types and ethnic groups are shown using descriptive statistical analysis. The findings of this study provide a better understanding of the socio-economic implications of the introduction of rubber cultivation into smallholder farming. A number of policy issues will be identified that provide entry points and hypotheses for subsequent analysis using positive and normative economic models.

Keywords: China, rubber cultivation, socio-economic, Xishuangbanna