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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Implementation of Cocoa Crops as a Measure for Replacement of Illicit Crops in Western Boyacá, Colombia

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Abstract

The negative impact of coca (*Erythroxylum coca*) growing is not only in the social side. As illegal crop, producers have to deforest areas within native forests to grow it and they apply a variety of chemical products for plant protection and leaf processing without an environmental management plan. That is why this illicit activity has promoted not only social problems but also land degradation in rural zones of Colombia. In the western part of Boyacá (Colombia), production and processing of coca leaf were important economic activities for the farmers during the years 2000–2005. However, in 2006 a group of peasants decided to eradicate coca fields and replace them with cocoa crops (*Theobroma cacao*). The first governmental programme which supported them was the National Policy for the Eradication of Illicit Crops. This study analyses the current productive system of these cocoa crops with its specific practices, looking for the benefits for soils and landscape and the perspectives for improving it, with the opinion and experiences of people from the board of the Cocoa Farmers' Associations and agronomists from the region and from governmental institutions. Also this paper aims to analyse how a specific national policy influences the change to modify the local land use and management. So far, social and land degradation processes are being stopped and there are possibilities to continue developing sustainable land management in the western region of Boyacá. The farmers' organisation is one of the most important achievements in this process; it is a bottom-up initiative strengthened by a top-down national policy.

Keywords: Agroforestry, coca, cocoa, farmer organisation, replacement illicit crops, sustainable land management