



Tropentag, September 11-13, 2024, hybrid conference

“Exploring opportunities ...
for managing natural resources and a better life for all”

Ideas and legacies underlying land-use dynamics of agricultural frontiers in the Peruvian Amazon

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Abstract

Agriculture is crucial for the economy of the Peruvian Amazon. It contributes significantly to domestic consumption and international trade, and efforts to fight poverty rely heavily on it. Sadly, agriculture is also strongly linked with deforestation since it has expanded at the expense of biodiverse Amazon forests. Such a concerning link sets a crucial challenge for conservation endeavours to increase their effectiveness. Addressing this challenge requires understanding what fuels deforestation from its linked sides. Identifying the diverse perspectives influencing land-use dynamics of agricultural frontiers in the Peruvian Amazon is a step toward such an understanding. Based on institutionalist theories, this work portrays an overview of these diverse perspectives, how they gained relevance, and how they come together to influence the Amazon region of Peru. The analysis considers results from a literature review and expert interviews occurring now. This overview is part of a PhD research and considers national- and international-level institutions to provide a basis for a future research phase focusing on the local level. Preliminary findings reveal several sides of the agriculture-deforestation link: national and regional governments, political groups, agricultural industries and traders, farmers associations, NGOs, international cooperation, indigenous communities, drug traffickers, and religious groups, among others. Moreover, profound institutional, political, and social changes and events have affected the Amazon over the last century: The Marginal Highway, Velasco's Agrarian Reform, the internal armed conflict, Fujimori's neoliberal structural adjustment, and the first forest law undergoing prior consultation, among others. Ideas that stand out from the preliminary results are those related to economic development, modernisation, and poverty alleviation, as well as those associated with the need to conserve forests and protect indigenous territorial rights. The presentation will provide initial reflections on these results to open discussions.

Keywords: Agricultural frontiers, ideas, institutions, Peruvian Amazon