



Farm forestry in semi-subsistence and monetary economies and its interdependency with the land tenure system - Case studies from central Laos

Abstract

The objective of the research work is to identify the role of farm forests in rural economies of central Laos that vary with regard to the degree of economic development, as well as to characterize the interdependency of farm forestry and the land tenure system in these settings. To do so, the study employs the theoretical concept of Land Capability Classification as well as the Farming Systems Approach.

The investigation is conducted as an explorative field research that follows the principles of the Case Study Approach. It comprises the comparative assessment of three cases that cover a variety of bio-physical and socio-economic conditions. The research is based upon a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis approaches.

The fieldwork is carried out in two consecutive phases of exploratory and in-depth analysis. Research tools are derived from the field of land evaluation, as well as from empirical social research. Secondary data is drawn from a variety of sources. Primary data is obtained employing a mix of tools that includes problem-centred expert interviews, group interviews, observations, random-sample measurements as well as exploratory surveys of 101 households and in-depth survey of 73 households. Data collection is completed with individual household case studies. Land classification is carried out based on the land attributes of slope, soil productivity, distance to natural watercourses and distance to village. The spatial analysis reveals that farm forests are generally assigned to sites of intermediate productivity and slope, such as abandoned upland paddies and marginal pastureland. These land plots are subject to customary and legally acknowledged property claims and afforestation becomes a means to exert and to legalize customary claims to such land.

The socio-economic analysis identifies the availability of land resources being the prime prerequisite for farm forest establishment. It was shown that farm forestry predominantly benefits population strata with above-average access to land, labour and capital resources and tends to manifest the existing socio-economic dissimilarities among the

households in economically less developed contexts.

Households with customarily deprived access to land resources can benefit from the property-creating function of afforestation only if there exists an abundant, yet unclaimed land reserve. To also allow such households to participate in farm forestry, the stimulation of land markets and the transfer of land titles under civil law will be necessary.

From the comparison across cases it is concluded that farm forests will increasingly be assigned to land of higher productivity the more the economic development of central Laos progresses and thus, alternative income opportunities lessen the importance of primary agricultural production for peasants' livelihood. In addition it is expected that farm forestry becomes increasingly commercially oriented. This trend calls for formulation of appropriate policy instruments and institutional arrangements that enable farmers to establish and sustainably manage their farm forests and to market the timber.

Recommendations refer to the work of rural development projects, as well as to the intended extension of farm forestry pilot schemes beyond the project areas.



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