

Abstract2-1-3

Water and poverty in two Colombian watersheds

Nancy Johnson

International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Nairobi, Kenya; n.johnson@cgiar.org

James Garcia

Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT), Cali, Colombia; j.garcia@cgiar.org

Jorge E. Rubiano

Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT), Cali, Colombia; j.rubiano@cgiar.org

Marcela Quintero

Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT), Cali, Colombia; m.quintero@cgiar.org

Ruben Dario Estrada

Consortio para el Desarrollo Sostenible de la Ecorregión Andina, Cali, Colombia; rdestrada@cgiar.org

Esther Mwangi

International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Washington, DC; e.mwangi@cgiar.org

Adriana Morena

Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical, Cali, Colombia; adrimoreno9@hotmail.com

Alexandra Peralta

Department of Agriculture, Food and Resource Economics, Michigan State Univ.; peralta3@msu.edu

Sara Granados

Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical, Cali, Colombia; sgranados.fao@cable.net.co

ABSTRACT: Watersheds, especially in the developing world, are increasingly being managed for both environmental conservation and poverty alleviation. How complementary are these objectives? In the context of a watershed, the actual and potential linkages between land and water management and poverty are complex and likely to be very site specific and scale dependent. This study analyses the importance of watershed resources in the livelihoods of the poor in two

watersheds in the Colombian Andes. Results of the participatory poverty assessment reveal significant decreases in poverty in both watersheds over the past 25 years, which was largely achieved by the diversification of livelihoods outside of agriculture. Water is an important resource for household welfare. However, opportunities for reducing poverty by increasing the quantity or quality of water available to the poor may be limited. While improved watershed management may have limited direct benefits in terms of poverty alleviation, there are important indirect linkages between watershed management and poverty, mainly through labour and service markets. The results suggest that at the level of the watershed the interests of the rich and the poor are not always in conflict over water. Sectoral as well as socio-economic differences define stakeholder groups in watershed management. The findings have implications for policymakers, planners and practitioners in various sectors involved in the implementation of integrated water resources management (IWRM).

KEYWORDS: Watersheds, poverty dynamics, multi-stakeholder platforms, participatory poverty assessment, Colombia

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