



## Editorial

### Successful ZEF Evaluation – What next?

ZEF has been externally evaluated by a panel of leading experts, and got the best possible marks for its innovative multidisciplinary research program, its international doctoral studies program, and its international outreach. Some reservations are expressed in the evaluation relating to administrative capacities and local networking. ZEF management, in collaboration with Bonn University, will address these matters swiftly. But then, what next at ZEF?

ZEF aims to remain at the forefront of innovative thinking, research and teaching on development issues. The ZEF strategy (see [www.zef.de](http://www.zef.de)) provides the planks for ZEF's future directions. The related thematic issues are defined by the global development challenges and opportunities, i.e.:

- Poverty, inequity, and the related issues of rights, public goods, and growth
- Governability, governance and effective institutions in the development process
- Natural resource scarcities to be managed in sustainable ways.

The Land of North Rhine-Westphalia has responded to the evaluation by pledging sustainable long-term funding for ZEF. In doing so, it has given the important signal that a productive and relevant ZEF can count on support. The ZEF teams will happily respond to the signal.

Prof. Dr. Joachim von Braun

## Prospects and Limits of Ethnic Mobilization

Christian Wagner, Ana Devic, Ulrike Joras, Mario Krämer, Conrad Schetter, Andreas Wimmer

Ethnic conflicts have been of the utmost importance in political and public discourse for more than a decade, as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the wars in the Balkans, the violent conflicts in the region of the Great Lakes and the recent events in Afghanistan after September 11 illustrate. Ethnic conflicts are considered as crucial challenges to national and international politics and are often accompanied by a gradual collapse of state authority. Furthermore, these conflicts undermine successes of development poli-

identities represents only one of several ways for political mobilization. Hence ethnic self-definitions compete with different patterns of social identity, e.g. membership of a social class or strata.

### Problems are instrumentalized

In Guatemala, the guerrilla dominated by Ladinos – descendants of Indian natives and Spanish immigrants – instrumentalized the critical situation of the indigenous population since the 1970s. Hereby, the guerrilla intended to enlarge its constituency. Although the number of indigenous supporters increased strongly, the guerrilla continuously perceived the conflict rather as a struggle for social justice than as one for ethnic identity.

The multiethnic Serbian province of Vojvodina illustrates another ex-



*Informal settlement in Durban.*

ample of the interrelation between ethnic and other forms of political mobilization. In this province, efforts for a regional, supra-ethnic movement became increasingly important in recent years, apparently challenging centralized rule in Belgrade and the domination of Serb ethno-nationalism. However, both during and after Slobodan Milosevic's regime, the situation in Vojvodina has been characterized by what might seem paradoxical: while autonomist

cy and destabilize entire regions by triggering extensive migrations. Ethnic identities are defined by the belief in a common origin and are expressed by a common language, historical consciousness, religion etc. Labeling violent conflicts as 'ethnic' entails the risk of oversimplifying complex issues. Different research projects at ZEF demonstrate that the instrumentalization of ethnic

sentiment is widely shared among Vojvodina's inhabitants of all ethnicities, pan-ethnic regionalist parties have continuously been unsuccessful in their attempts to gain significant following.

### Different value systems are used

Strategies of ethnic mobilization are also in competition with different value systems such as religious perception. The



*Ruin in the Natal-Midlands.*

example of Afghanistan shows that various military and political movements started to make use of ethnic identities only after the collapse of communist rule in the beginning of the 1990s. Although these ethnic identities predominate international media coverage of the Afghan War, the inner-Afghan conflict offers a different picture. On the one hand, Islam constitutes a universalistic framework of orientation, which prevents the emphasis of ethnic identities. On the other hand, ethnic identities only remain a subordinate reference of identity for the

majority of Afghans. Group solidarities on the basis of clans, tribes or villages are the dominant references of identification. Therefore, an ethnicization of conflict took place in Afghanistan, but not an ethnicization of the masses.

The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) intended to achieve an ethnic mobilization of larger parts of the African population in Kwa-Zulu/Natal (South Africa) since the late 1970s. However, this ethnic mobilization of native Zulu speakers gained little support, particularly in urban but also in numerous rural areas. It therefore had only limited influence on local dynamics of violence that came to the fore after 1983. Exclusive and potentially conflicting self-identifications as Zulu were not even adopted by numerous IFP supporters, and local fault lines were more of a political than an ethnic nature. Territorially defined sub-groups of local political organizations deliberately instrumentalized violence for the purpose of political mobilization. In other words: In several rural communities of KwaZulu/Natal, violence is less a consequence of ethnic mobilization than a tool for political mobilization.

### Even democratic systems fail

The ongoing civil war in Sri Lanka illustrates the problems accompanied by ethnic mobilizations in the context of demo-

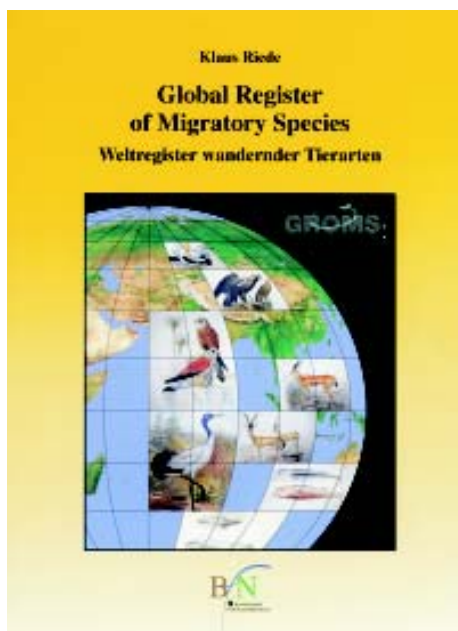
cratic competition between political parties. Domestic conflicts concerning the distribution of development resources, access to education, land ownership, employment, minority rights and questions of regional autonomy escalated due to strategies of ethnic mobilization by Sinhalese and Tamil political parties. This resulted in the collapse of parliamentary democracy and its institutional mechanisms of conflict resolution and eventually led to the transformation of a political conflict into civil war.

The relationship between ethnic mobilization and political modernization was the main focus of the project "Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict" (cf. New Publications). The main hypothesis was that the introduction of democracy and equal opportunities will lead to a politization of ethnicity if the new elites are not in a position to resort to existing networks of civil society in order to secure their power. The argument was developed from systematic research on empirical literature and was explored with the cases of Iraq, Mexico and Switzerland.

The preceding examples reveal similarities and differences in the political mobilization of ethnic identities that shall allow the development of preventive strategies that are important for the implementation of development schemes. This objective has also motivated a volume to be published in the summer, integrating a comparative perspective on "Facing Ethnic Conflicts".



*All authors are research fellows or guest researchers at ZEF. Andreas Wimmer is ZEF director.*



## Global Register released

Two books and a database on CD-ROM on animal migration have now been released as a result of the project "Global Register of Migratory Species". The database contains 2,880 migratory vertebrate species and their common names in English, French and Spanish, their threat status according to the International Red List 2000, an extensive bibliography of 4,300 references, and digital maps for 545 species. Maps are compatible with any Geographical Information System (GIS), which allows geographic queries and threat analysis by intersection with other GIS layers (examples are included on the GROMS CD).

Riede, K. (2001): The Global Register of Migratory Species – Database, GIS Maps and Threat Analysis. Münster (Landwirtschaftsverlag), 320 pp. + CD.

Riede, K. (Ed.) (2001): New Perspectives for Monitoring Migratory Animals – Improving Knowledge for Conservation. Proceedings of an International Workshop on behalf of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bonn Convention. Münster (Landwirtschaftsverlag), 166 pp.



# New evidence on community-based health insurance schemes

Abay Asfaw and Johannes Jütting

It is broadly recognized that apart from being one of the ultimate goals of social and economic progress, health care development is one of the most crucial prerequisites for well-being, human capital formation, poverty reduction, and sustainable economic development. This has been clearly demonstrated in a recently completed study of the Commission of Macroeconomics and Health of the World Health Organization ZEF has contributed to. However, most of the people in low-income countries have no access to basic health services, ultimately due to a lack of income. Within its program on social security systems in low-income countries ZEF analyses the prospects of community-based health insurance schemes to overcome existing barriers in access to basic health care services. Community-based health insurance schemes are one of the most recently mentioned options to narrow the existing gap between demand for and supply of financial resources in the health sector as well as to reduce the existing inequalities in access to basic health care services. Three broad questions are being addressed: First, are poor people willing to join a health insurance scheme and can such schemes work in rural and disadvantaged areas? Second, what is the impact of these schemes on social exclusion and access to health care? Third, what are important determinants for a successful performance of the schemes?

The first question has been investigated in rural areas of Ethiopia, where nearly half of the population do not have access to basic health care services. In a recently completed study, we examined health care demand behavior, the willingness of rural households to join and pay for potential health insurance schemes and the institutional environment. The overall results of the study are very encouraging.

More than 90 % of the interviewed households are willing to contribute to insurance. Households are willing to pay an average 7 Birr per month (or around one Euro which is equivalent to 3.5 % of their monthly income) to become a member.

The financial viability of a hypothetically introduced health insurance scheme has also been analyzed by comparing the monthly payments by the members

(households) with the expected costs of illness. Assuming a universal coverage of community health insurance and 7 Birr per month per household premium level, it is possible to generate more than 150 million Euro per annum. This amount is much higher than the maximum amount of money ever used as a recurrent budget in the health sector of the country. Besides the financial aspect, the institutional environment is also conducive to introduce small-scale insurance schemes as the idea of collective pooling of risks is already well known and practised. The so-called ‘Iddirs’



*Women are also interested in joining a mutual health insurance system.*

are one of the most stable, widely available and democratic indigenous institutions in Ethiopia, which help people to cover the expensive cost of funerals and sometimes give financial assistance to the family of the deceased. Iddirs could hence be used as a point of departure for health insurance.

In a nutshell, the Ethiopian case study shows that even in one of the poorest countries of the world, the introduction of community-based health insurance schemes is possible and can promote the health sector in two ways: (1) they alleviate the shortage of finance, which is the single most important problem of the Ethiopian health sector, by ensuring sustainable and broad-based sources of finance, and (2) they address the equity issue by ensuring the access of basic health services for the disadvantaged groups of the population.

The effects of community-based health insurance schemes on social exclusion and poor people's access to health care have been studied by ZEF and partner institutes

in a multi-country setting drawing on the experience of Senegal, Rwanda, India and Thailand. Household surveys have been undertaken in all of the four countries in order to estimate the impact of being/not being a member of a health insurance scheme. The overall findings suggest that barriers to modern health care access can be overcome by community-financing schemes even in the context of extreme poverty. In most of the analyzed schemes members of a health insurance scheme had a higher probability of visiting health care providers, i.e. used health services more often and paid less out-of-pocket compared to non-members. These findings reveal that risk-pooling and pre-payment, no matter on what scale, improves financial protection for the population they serve. An important policy conclusion is that it is critical to move away from resource mobilization instruments that are based on point-of-service payments such as user fees. If pre-payment and risk-sharing can be encouraged, it is likely to have an immediate poverty impact: directly, through preventing impoverishment due to catastrophic health expenditures, or indirectly, through ensuring access to health and thereby improving health and allowing the individual to take advantage of economic and social opportunities. However, community structures per se do not automatically lead to better access for the poor. Important determinants of successful schemes include appropriate scheme design and management as well as the existence of a viable health care provider. Regarding the former, the fee collection procedure is of utmost importance. Fees could be collected in a certain period of the year, in cash or in kind with possible exemption mechanisms for the poorest. Also, demand-targeted subsidies by charitable organizations or the government can help to promote the participation of the poor. Public health policies can promote the building and strengthening of community-based health insurance. Specifically, they can assist communities in organizing and promoting micro-insurance schemes as well as provide information about their viability. Moreover, health policy could help to design an appropriate regulatory framework for insurance and re-insurance.



*Abay Asfaw has recently finished his Ph.D. thesis on the prospects of community-based health insurance in Ethiopia. Johannes Jütting coordinates ZEF's work in the area of health insurance.*

# Mitigating greenhouse gas emissions

Reiner Wassmann

Fifty scientists from 14 countries attended the workshop on “Tropical Agriculture in Transition – Opportunities for Mitigating Greenhouse Gas Emissions?”. The workshop was jointly organized by ZEF and the Fraunhofer Institute for Atmospheric Environmental Research and was held in Bonn from Nov. 9-11, 2001.

The topic of the workshop has gained special attention thanks to the Kyoto Protocol, which introduced new mechanisms to finance the mitigation of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in developing countries. Production from tropical agricultural systems will need to increase to meet the rising demands of an increasing human population together with changes in consumption patterns over coming decades. Intensification and/or extensification of agricultural production using conventional technologies may, in turn, increase GHG production.

The workshop participants identified the hot-spots of GHG emissions from tropical agriculture in three different activities: (a) deforestation for reclaiming new agricultural land as a source of carbon dioxide, (b) rice-based production systems as sources of methane and nitrous oxide and (c) animal husbandry as a source of methane. Among these activities, deforestation causes the largest emissions. Thus, the participants widely agreed that the prevention of defo-

restation - and the re-forestation of degraded land - should have priority in national climate protection programs of some developing countries. Agroforestry may offer economically viable windows of opportunity for sustainable use of tropical forests whereas necessary funds to drive re-forestation programs could be generated through the ‘Clean Development Mechanism’.

The scope for mitigating emissions from rice-based systems and animal husbandry is rather small in comparison to emissions deriving from fossil fuel consumption. Nevertheless, alternative management practices offer win-win options in which GHG emissions can be reduced and the production system as a whole can be improved at the same time. Examples are:



Rice production is a major source of tropical greenhouse gas emission.

- Optimized timing of nitrogen fertilizer reduces nitrous oxide emissions as well as fertilizer needs.
- Temporary drainage in irrigated rice fields can reduce water consumption and methane emissions.
- The common practice of straw-burning, which causes severe air pollution and GHG emissions, can be averted through sound residue management, which improves soil fertility.
- Introducing pasture in degraded land can sequester substantial amounts of carbon.

Future research has to include participation of stakeholders from all conceivable levels, i.e. farmers’ cooperatives, non-governmental organizations, national agricultural research centers and extension services to devise simple and financially interesting incentives for reducing emissions. The feasibility of environmentally friendly production techniques has to be disseminated to the public via ‘success stories’ (documented in public media) and on special demonstration farms.



*Reiner Wassmann is based at the Institute for Meteorology and Climate Research/ IMK-IFU in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, which was formerly a Fraunhofer Institute and now belongs to the Research Center Karlsruhe. He is also senior fellow at ZEF.*

## Doctoral Studies Program

### ZEF’s New Alumni Network for Participants in the International Doctoral Program

So far, around 150 doctoral students from 40 countries have participated in the International Doctoral Program for Development Studies since its foundation in 1999. Twenty-seven students have already finished their studies. ZEF intends to stay in touch with these former students, as they are probably its best “ambassadors” around the world. Therefore, ZEF and the Friends of ZEF have initiated an Alumni Network of development-oriented scientists and policy-makers who have been in affiliation with ZEF’s International Doctoral Program. Information on all ZEF alumni is now accessible for the ZEF alumni on a special homepage ([http://](http://www.zef.de/zef-alumni)

[www.zef.de/zef-alumni](http://www.zef.de/zef-alumni)). This homepage is an information platform for all former participants of the International Doctoral Program, including the current students who are abroad for their field research. The ZEF alumni can follow the professional career of their former colleagues or find their current addresses. Each batch has an individual mailing list.

New applicants for the International Doctoral Program for Development Studies should have the following profile:

A successful application requires an excellent master or diploma degree in one of the following areas: Economics, Political Science, Agricultural and Resource

Economics, Engineering Degrees, Geography, Mathematics, Natural Science or Agriculture. Excellent proficiency in English is a precondition. The applicant should be younger than 32. The deadline for applications to the doctoral program and scholarships are: September 30, yearly, for non-EU citizens and DAAD scholarships (available only for applicants from developing countries), and May 31, yearly, for EU citizens and scholarships of the Robert Bosch Foundation.

*Information is available from Günther Manske (E mail: [docp.zef@uni-bonn.de](mailto:docp.zef@uni-bonn.de)) and from the ZEF homepage (<http://www.zef.de>).*

# Memorandum of Understanding Signed Between World Bank and ZEF

Joachim von Braun

ZEF and the World Bank have signed a Memorandum to work together through the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN). GDLN is an interactive, multi-channel network with a mandate to serve the developing world. GDLN's goals are to reach across geographic borders, time zones, and language barriers and to improve decision-making through access to real-life experience shared by experts, practitioners and decision-makers. *ZEF is now the first Distance Learning Center (DLC) in Germany and a Program Partner to GDLN.* In order to be effective ZEF has established its own facilities to provide the connection to GDLN via satellite as well as videoconferencing equipment. A series of dialogue events are planned for the future.



Joachim von Braun is director at ZEF.

## At a glance

The research project "Secondary Forests and Fallow Vegetation in the Eastern Amazon Region, Brazil", which aims at the development of sustainable alternatives to slash-and-burn agriculture, has launched the following homepage: [www.shift-capoeira.uni-bonn.de](http://www.shift-capoeira.uni-bonn.de).

The homepage gives an overview of the study region and research topics.

Furthermore, it reflects on "Fire in Agriculture" by means of farmer children's paintings.

The Uzbekistan project, which started recently, has also launched a homepage: [www.uni-bonn.de/khorezm](http://www.uni-bonn.de/khorezm). The project entitled "Economic and Ecological Restructuring of Land and Water Use in the Khorezm Region" aims at the development of concepts for an ecological and legal-administrative restructuring of land and water management in the Aral Sea Basin.



## Publications

### Articles (Selection)

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### ZEF Discussion Papers on Development Policy

No. 45 - Wimmer, Andreas & Schetter, Conrad, (2002): State-Formation First. Recommendations for Reconstruction and Peace-making in Afghanistan. Center for Development Research (ZEF), Bonn, May 2002

No. 46 - Torsten Feldbrügge, Joachim von Braun: Is the World Becoming A More Risky Place? Trends in Disasters and Vulnerability to Them. Center for Development Research (ZEF), Bonn, May 2002.

No. 47 - Joachim von Braun, Peter Wobst, and Ulrike Grote "Development Box" and Special and Differential Treatment for Food Security of Developing Countries: Potentials, Limitations and Implementation Issues. Center for Development Research (ZEF), Bonn, May 2002.



## Viewpoints

In March, ZEF and ZEI were subjected to an in-depth evaluation regarding their optimal long-term structural adjustment and funding. In an interview, Professor Dieter Oberndörfer, head of the Evaluation Commission, gave us a feedback based on the results of the report.

*ZEF: Professor Oberndörfer, what is the general impression the Evaluation Commission has gained regarding ZEF?*

**Oberndörfer:** With the creation of ZEF an internationally competitive academic institute was successfully founded. The German research landscape has been fundamentally enriched, and the institute will contribute to giving more weight to the German voice in the international development policy debate.

ZEF's activities address pivotal issues of current debate in international development policy and development research. At the same time ZEF demonstrates competence in "classical" fields of research together with innovative potential, thus being able to establish itself in innovative research areas. ZEF successfully strives to develop proficiency at the cutting edge of research with minimal duplicity and justifiable initial investments. Its program comprises practical, application-oriented research and policy advising. The Commission was impressed by the organizational structures of ZEF, which correspond excellently to the demands of modern, flexible science management.

All ZEF departments are staffed with excellent leadership and personnel who have performed their tasks with outstanding academic quality. This is illustrated by the large number of publications, conferences and the close international networking of the departments. The research projects for public and private clients have substantially contributed to practical and application-oriented policy advising and knowledge transfer in important fields of development policy and the respective institutions.

*ZEF: How would you characterize the specialties of ZEF in comparison with other similar institutions in Germany and abroad?*

**Oberndörfer:** The interdisciplinary program of development-related issues on the basis of solid disciplinary research distinguishes ZEF from other German and also many international research establishments, i.e. through its combination of natural and social sciences of different fields. The linkage between research in Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Economics is, in fact, a pioneering feat in Germany. ZEF's comparative advantage not only consists in its interdisciplinary program and the wide range of themes covered, but also in its international character and the use of English as its working language. In this respect, ZEF is unique in Germany. ZEF especially proves its "uniqueness" in the German academic landscape with its international doctoral program.



*ZEF: What recommendations does the Commission give to the university and the government of North Rhine-Westphalia?*

**Oberndörfer:** If the current volume of third-party funding is to be managed appropriately and without curtailment in other areas, additional staff is indispensable for personnel and accounting. Vice versa, this also means that the volume of third-party funding will have to be noticeably reduced if the core budget is to be lowered after 2004 and less funds are to be available for management and administration. A sufficient number of permanent positions in ZEF for project management (including for

the doctoral program) is a necessary prerequisite for ensuring substantial continuity in the center's activities over certain time periods and for maintaining the successful profile it has achieved to date.

*ZEF: What are the crucial areas that ZEF should focus on in order to further improve its capacity?*

**Oberndörfer:** ZEF has hitherto focused on knowledge transfer at an international level (e.g. in an advisory role and in forums such as the UN, UNESCO, FAO, World Bank, Global Development Network, G8-Task Force, Davos Forum) and on some important developing countries. However, there are deficits in knowledge transfer within Germany. This requires a more offensive dissemination of the center's results through enhanced public relations activities and more active participation of ZEF's scientists in the national dialog and advisory boards.

*ZEF: According to the recommendations of the Commission, what direction should the institute take in the future in order to develop optimally?*

**Oberndörfer:** The commission's evaluation report and the summary of its findings draw an exceptionally positive picture of ZEF's performance and scientific potential as well as of its model character for the scientific landscape in Germany, and for practical and application-relevant development research. Not least in view of the gradual reduction in the number of relevant chairs and institutes for development research that has been in progress elsewhere for years, the Evaluation Commission recommends by unanimous vote that ZEF's work program by all means be continuously supported and further expanded. It is not meant to be a new "direction" in the sense of a change of course, but an extension and a reinforcement of this model.



# Projects to improve access to justice need to consider court personnel

Christina Jones-Pauly, Stefanie Elbern

**Justice reform has become a popular topic. The World Bank has instituted a new unit on legal and judicial reform practice. One big issue is access to justice.**

What is the true role of lawyers, what is the role of court personnel in accessing justice? In late summer, Kluwer Law International are publishing an edited volume on *Access to Justice: Role of Court Administrators and Lay Adjudicators*, edited by Christina Jones-Pauly and Stefanie Elbern, both members of the Department of Political and Cultural Change at the ZEF. The volume depicts the cultural context of adjudication within the African and Islamic systems of

law. Examples include the popular Queen Mother's Court in Ghana, the local political party adjudicators in Burundi, the Children's Courts in South Africa, the South African Muslim Judicial Council, the citizen-assessors assisting judges in Tanzania, and the Sudanese arbitrators in criminal disputes.

In some systems such as Tanzania, lawyers are banned at the lowest court levels. In other systems such as Sudan, litigants are less concerned about having legal representation and more concerned about being able to check the biases of judges by insisting on litigants being able to choose the persons settling the dispute. Hence, the book concludes that judicial reform programs which concentrate on training lawyers may be unrealistic. Since non-lawyer

personnel are more important in the process of access to justice, the training of these persons should be given attention at least the same as to lawyers.

Up to now, studies have concentrated on political personalities or chiefs, but neglected examining roles of personnel in local adjudicating organs. Some of the recent activist literature on the gender bias of courts hindering women's access to justice has begun to include references to the role of support legal personnel and arbitrators. The volume represents a rare combination of interdisciplinary contributions from academic legal anthropologists, legal scholars, and judicial practitioners. In contrast to many works concentrating on decision-making by judges and the norms applied, this volume highlights the importance of the perceptions of the litigants and the supporting court personnel such as clerks and assessors for improving access to justice. It is hoped that this new volume will spur further scholarly research on the personnel aspects of access to justice.



*Christina Jones-Pauly is Research Fellow, Stefanie Elbern is Research Assistant at ZEF.*

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## What role can local communities play in natural resource management?

Stefanie Engel

Ten years after the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the world's natural resource base continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate. The upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg will once again discuss how a development can be put into practice that simultaneously serves economic, social and environmental objectives. It has become increasingly clear that sustainable natural resource management cannot be achieved without involving the local population, who depend on these resources for their livelihood. As a consequence, many countries are currently devolving rights and responsibilities on natural resource management from government level down to local community level. This is devolution from the mere support of participatory approaches to a complete transfer of rights to local user groups. However, the actual outcomes of a community-based natural resource management remain mixed. A new research group at ZEF analyses these out-

comes and the factors leading to the success or failure of such approaches.

Local communities may be more capable than national governments of managing natural resources because they have a higher stake in successful management, better information on local conditions, the ability to adapt to changes in these conditions more easily, and lower monitoring costs. However, it is also increasingly recognized that it is naïve to think of local communities as a homogeneous unit which – given rights over the resources – automatically acts to the benefit of the group as a whole. Devolution may lead to revenue-seeking activities by the more powerful and prevent the government from exercising an important role in assuring the inclusion of marginalized groups and solving externality problems.

ZEF research will focus on a variety of natural resources (forests, water, biodiversity) and countries (Ghana, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam). For exam-

le, in Ghana, recent projects will be analyzed which aim to establish democratic resource user associations to improve irrigation management in a context of strong traditional hierarchies. An objective of the ZEF research will be to explain differences in communities' abilities to obtain compensation payments and environmental provisions under such contracts.

The results of this research will lead to policy recommendations on how current programs could be improved to achieve the objectives of sustainability and poverty reduction and a better understanding of the potential role of partnerships between governmental agencies, local communities, and other stakeholders.



*Stefanie Engel (née Kirchhoff) holds a position as Junior Group Research Leader funded by the Robert-Bosch-Foundation and heads the recently established group on "Determinants and effects of alternative institutions for natural resource management in developing countries".*

# Soil organic matter(s)!

C. Martius, R. Sommer, and P.L.G. Vlek

## Maintaining and managing soil organic matter is the key to long-term soil fertility in the tropics.

The organic matter of soils is formed in intricate processes by microorganisms, earthworms, and termites. Today, the role of these soil organisms as “ecosystem engineers” is increasingly recognized. Sustainable management of soil fertility in agro-ecosystems requires the maintenance or, first of all, restoration of “ecosystem health”. Tropical drylands in particular are extremely vulnerable to desertification, increasingly so with global warming. Here, managing and building up soil organic matter can respectively provide erosion protection or soil salinity reduction.

Nevertheless, conventional agriculture in the tropics and subtropics has seen soils as little more than a dead substrate on which to plant. Little attention has been given to preserving the soil’s organic matter. On tropical and subtropical soils, this neglect is resulting in a decline in agricultural productivity, in spite of the growing inputs of fertilizers and pesticides. Thus, soil degradation is one of the most serious but often underestimated environmental problems worldwide nowadays.

In many tropical regions the management of soil organic matter has been an elemental constituent of traditional agriculture and therewith, by maintaining soil fertility, represented a valuable tool for improving rural livelihoods. But, this knowledge

has found astonishingly little practical application in conventional agriculture.

To identify reasons for this state of affairs and to strengthen the importance of an improved soil organic matter management, ZEF organized an international workshop two years ago. The participants were solicited to develop guidelines for further research and policy changes. The results have now been published in a book (see box).

The workshop participants widely agreed on three key priorities in management and research:

1. To establish an early warning system network: Easy-to-use and reliable indicators and threshold values for organic matter quantity, quality and its degradation should be developed that will indicate critical stages and trends of land use. Therefore, a network of scientist working in national and international programs on the management of soil organic matter (such as the Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Program – TSBF) as well as in national agricultural research services should be developed. This has to be done under the umbrella of a global coordination of local task forces joining the efforts of developed and developing countries.
2. To reinforce science: The appropriate management of soil organic matter in the tropics still requires considerable research regarding the variability of soil organic matter quantity, quality and

function. Common databases and models must be developed to improve our understanding of the soil ecological system. Scientists need to develop and refine both direct and indirect soil organic matter management techniques, such as no-tillage land preparation, the use of hedgerows or contour farming and the integration of livestock. Sound scientific planning becomes even more imperative, e.g. within the context of the rehabilitation of dryland ecosystems.

3. To strengthen participation of stakeholders: Many organic-matter-preserving technologies are already available, but are not applied. The key to a successful transfer is a greater interaction between farmers, decision-makers and scientists.

It also became evident that an explicit economic valuation of soil organic matter including the non-nutrient values, e.g. ecological sustainability or reduction of poverty, is needed. This will allow the assessment of trade-offs between farmers’ conflicting goals, that is the need to preserve soil fertility in the long run versus the short-term maximization of agricultural production.

ZEF’s work in the area of soil degradation and desertification will be based on this workshop’s guidelines. Opening the eyes of decision-makers, particularly those in tropical countries, is critical. They must realize that neglecting the conservation of soils will carry human, social, and economic costs that – although difficult to calculate – will undoubtedly be very high.



*Christopher Martius and Rolf Sommer are senior scientists, Paul Vlek is director at ZEF.*

DEVELOPMENTS IN PLANT AND SOIL SCIENCES

### Managing Organic Matter in Tropical Soils: Scope and Limitations

CHRISTOPHER MARTIUS  
HOLM TIESSEN  
PAUL L.G. VLEK  
editors



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## Recommendations of the workshop released

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Editorial Board: Dr. Johannes Jütting, Dr. Christopher Martius, Dr. Anja Schoeller-Schletter, Dr. Rolf Sommer, Patricia Frericks  
Tel.: 0228/73-1811  
Fax: 0228/73-5097  
E-Mail: [zef@uni-bonn.de](mailto:zef@uni-bonn.de)  
Internet: <http://www.zef.de>

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