

Review of: "The Contribution of Subsistence Agriculture to the Livelihoods of the Smallholder Farmers in South Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of Congo"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Summary: The paper lacks clarity of the research design, lacks methodological logic, and is not convincing with the presented results and discussion.

Introduction

Improved livelihood does not imply directly an improved social status. Why the assumption or proposition that increased yields lead to better socioeconomic status? It could also be assumed that the opposite is true: an existing solid social status of the peasantry would have increased the prospects for public support of the food and agriculture sector.

Try to improve the definition of social status, as this concept is important in the paper (this is done only indirectly in the result section on p.8).

The following cause-effect series mentioned in the introduction is not empirically robust, but just speculative: Sustainable livelihood strategies include social, physical, human, natural, and financial assets → they result in the sustainable use of natural resources, income, food security, and wellbeing → which leads to improved socioeconomic status of people

Are the 2 objectives of the paper really relevant and measurable?

M&M

More farms than 389 should have been selected, anticipating a less than 80% response rate.

Not clear how the qualitative variables were developed and later used. Need for more clarity.

Clarity should prevail regarding the difference between correlation and cause-effect.

Results

Confusing statement: "Despite the low yields of the crops grown, an ANOVA analysis showed

that there was a significant difference in the yields of crops grown by the farmers in South Kivu province ($F = 0.0088$, $P = 0.05$) (Table 4). The difference in the yields of crops grown could, however, not improve the socioeconomic status of the farmers in South Kivu province (Table 3)." So which farmers had low yields? Then again, why should yields in one season have an impact on the socioeconomic status?

The result section clarifies the concept of socioeconomic status: “some variables of socioeconomic status, that is, household head, education level of wife, income status, and family support of the farmers”. But the conclusion from Tab 5 is wrong: The mentioned socioeconomic variables cannot be influenced by agricultural practices. Here, a correlation is wrongly identified with a cause-effect relation.

The next error follows immediately: “It was revealed that in addition to practicing subsistence agriculture, the educational level of the household head and the wife, and their income status significantly affected their socioeconomic status ($P < 0.05$)”. No: The method defined that the educational level is an element of the socioeconomic status.

Discussion

This chapter is used to explain key results with related research findings. Highly speculative with often questionable arguments.

More discussion is expected on how the qualitative research part is influencing the quantitative part.