

Watershed-scale Strategies for Public Investment in Soil Conservation in southern Honduras: Socio-economic Evidence. (A06-thurow122544-Oral)

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Abstract:

Over 80% of Honduras is steeplands. Public investment in soil conservation on steeplands in Honduras has been justified for its on-farm benefits, i.e., improved crop yields and/or ongoing sustainability. Since basic grains for household consumption are produced on steeplands, its benefits are unlikely to offset the public costs of promoting it. Furthermore, most Honduran voters live in cities, so they are disinclined to rank the well-being of steepland farmers as a policy priority. In 1998 Hurricane Mitch transformed how Hondurans think about steepland conservation. Population and industry is concentrated downstream from cropped steeplands. Serial externalities arise from this landscape mosaic: poor upland mismanagement increases the risk of landslides and flooding, so downstream infrastructure is vulnerable. Yet neighbors situated downstream from cropped steeplands have virtually no levers to influence steepland farmers. Due to serial externalities, downstream stakeholders stand to benefit from steepland management as much or more than the farmers who install conservation technologies. Generally speaking, public investment in steepland conservation is more likely in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster is than when voters are less aware of serial externalities.

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