

Coping with soil degradation from a transdisciplinary perspective: insights from marginal upland farmers in Southern Leyte, Philippines

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Keywords: Soil degradation, marginal upland, transdisciplinary, farmers, ecosystem service

Across Southeast Asian, the most vulnerable and food insecure farmers live and farm on marginal uplands. At this time, however, there is limited understanding on how marginal upland farmers cope with a decline in soil fertility. This paper discusses the need for a transdisciplinary approach between different researchers and actors when approaching degraded marginal uplands in order to respond to farmer's perceptions and coping mechanisms when addressing soil degradation. The discussion in this paper is based upon an ongoing collaborative research initiative gathering data to understand the coping strategies of upland farmers toward soil degradation. We present data from five marginal upland areas (108 farmers) in Silago, Hinunangan, Hinundayan, San Juan, and St Bernard, Southern Leyte, Philippines to reveal that 70% of farmers perceive soil as the very basis of life. Soil provides for the most basic of human needs such as food and other ecosystem services need to support local society. This paper looks at the multiple farm management practices and strategies used to improve soil quality, the awareness and use of other species (i.e. worms) and both local and technical external knowledge that intersects in management strategies in an ongoing process of working the land. This case study shows how soil science and social science knowledge can be combined to rethink appropriate and sustainable soil management strategies that arise from and can benefit civil agrarian society.



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