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WINS Seminar

Date of presentation:
08.12.2016, IRI THESys, Friedrichstraße 191, 10117 Berlin, Room 4088

Title of presentation: The feasibility of shifting diets towards just food systems and global sustainability

Abstract

A dietary shift towards reduced meat consumption is an efficient strategy for countering biodiversity loss and climate change in regions (developed and transition countries) where consumption is already at a very high level or is rapidly expanding (such as China). Biodiversity is being degraded and lost to a considerable extent, with 70 % of the world's deforestation a result of stripping in order to grow animal feed. Furthermore, about 14.5 % of the world's anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) are calculated to be the result of (mainly industrial) livestock farming. In the presentation the focus is on the feasibility of reducing meat consumption in developed and transition countries, as this would—among other positive effects—reduce the global loss of biodiversity, the need for unsustainable agricultural practices and GHG emissions. This presentation discusses the barriers, opportunities and steps that need to be taken in order to encourage the consumption of less meat, based on an interdisciplinary and multifactor approach. The evidence is gathered from a systematic meta-analysis of factors (including personal, sociocultural and external factors) that influence individual meat-eating behaviour. The most relevant factors that influence behaviour appear to be emotions and cognitive dissonance (between knowledge, conflicting values and actual behaviour) and sociocultural factors (e.g. social norms or social identity). For different factors and groups of people, different strategies are appropriate. For example, for men and older people deploying the health argument or arguing for flexitarianism (reduced meat consumption) may prove the most promising approaches, while providing emotional messages or promoting new social norms is recommended in order to address barriers such as cognitive dissonance.

Short bio

Susanne Stoll-Kleemann is Professor and Chair of Sustainability Science and Applied Geography at the University of Greifswald with previous positions at Humboldt University of Berlin, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich with research on biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, sustainable land management and sustainable consumption behavior. In the focus of her current research are the determinants for shifting unsustainable individual consumption behaviour towards more sufficiency in the light of a hard-to-change neoliberal growth-driven world.