

Dynamics in land tenure, local power and the peasant economy: the case of southeast Petén, Guatemala

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Introduction

- ❑ Guatemala historically marked by strong social inequalities and conflicts related to land distribution: GINI-efficient land 0.84
- ❑ Civil war from 1960 to 1996; Peace Accords don't resolve social inequalities
- ❑ In Petén from 1960 on government-induced colonization process: from 26,000 inhabitants to 600,000 today.
- ❑ Land distribution: up to 45 ha for small scale farmers, up to 675 ha for large investors. Regularization process still not finished
- ❑ Today internal migration exceeds migration from other departments

Agricultural production

□ Campesino farmers

- 83% of farms in 2003
- Subsistence economy agriculture
- Main production for sale: maize and black beans
- Average family income through cash crops: about 2600 \$ US/ year

□ Cattle farming

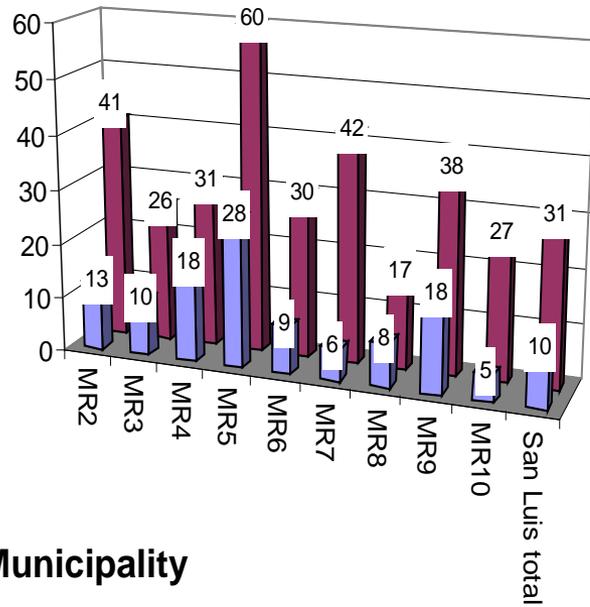
- 17% of farms in 2003
- Extensive production on large extensions (average 1.2 cattle/ha) with very low profit margins
- Often for status reasons or speculation
- Strong inequalities also within livestock sector



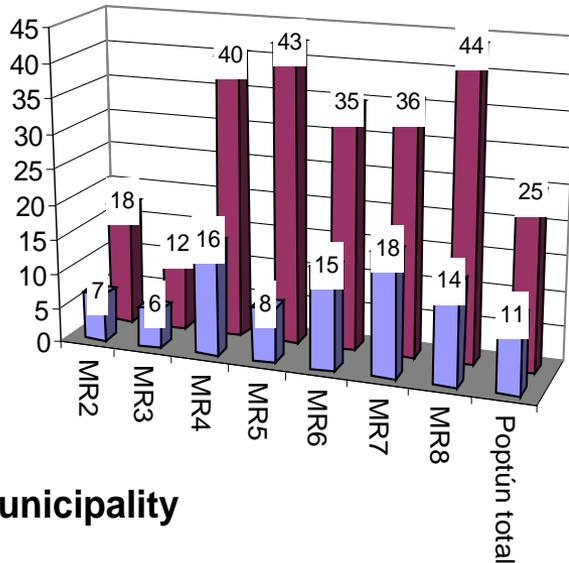
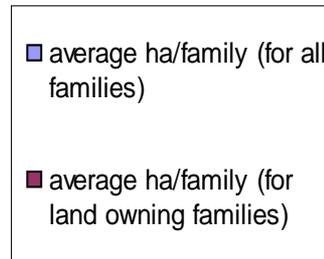
Present land situation

- ❑ Economy highly dependent on agriculture:
 - 47% of mestizo and 72% of indigenous households live primarily from agriculture
- ❑ Only about 35 % of campesino families still hold parcels of their own, 65% don't.
- ❑ Land scarcity. Reasons:
 - natural population growth,
 - migration from other departments
 - displacement of small scale agriculture through cattle farming and large scale plantation farming.

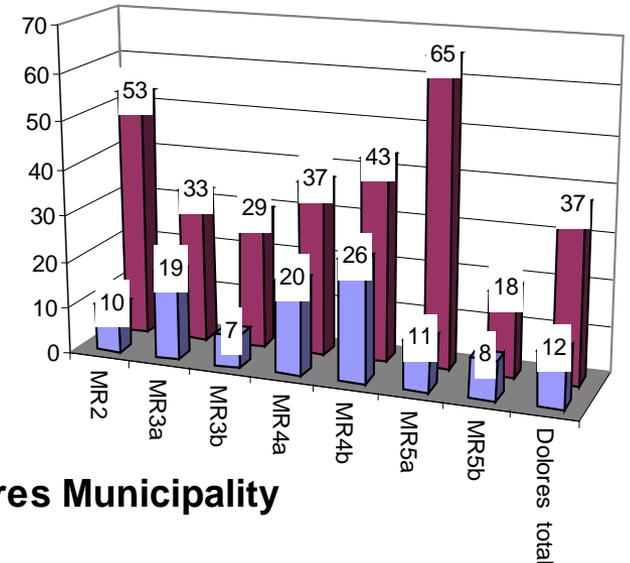
Available land per family in campesino communities, per micro-region of south-eastern Petén



San Luis Municipality



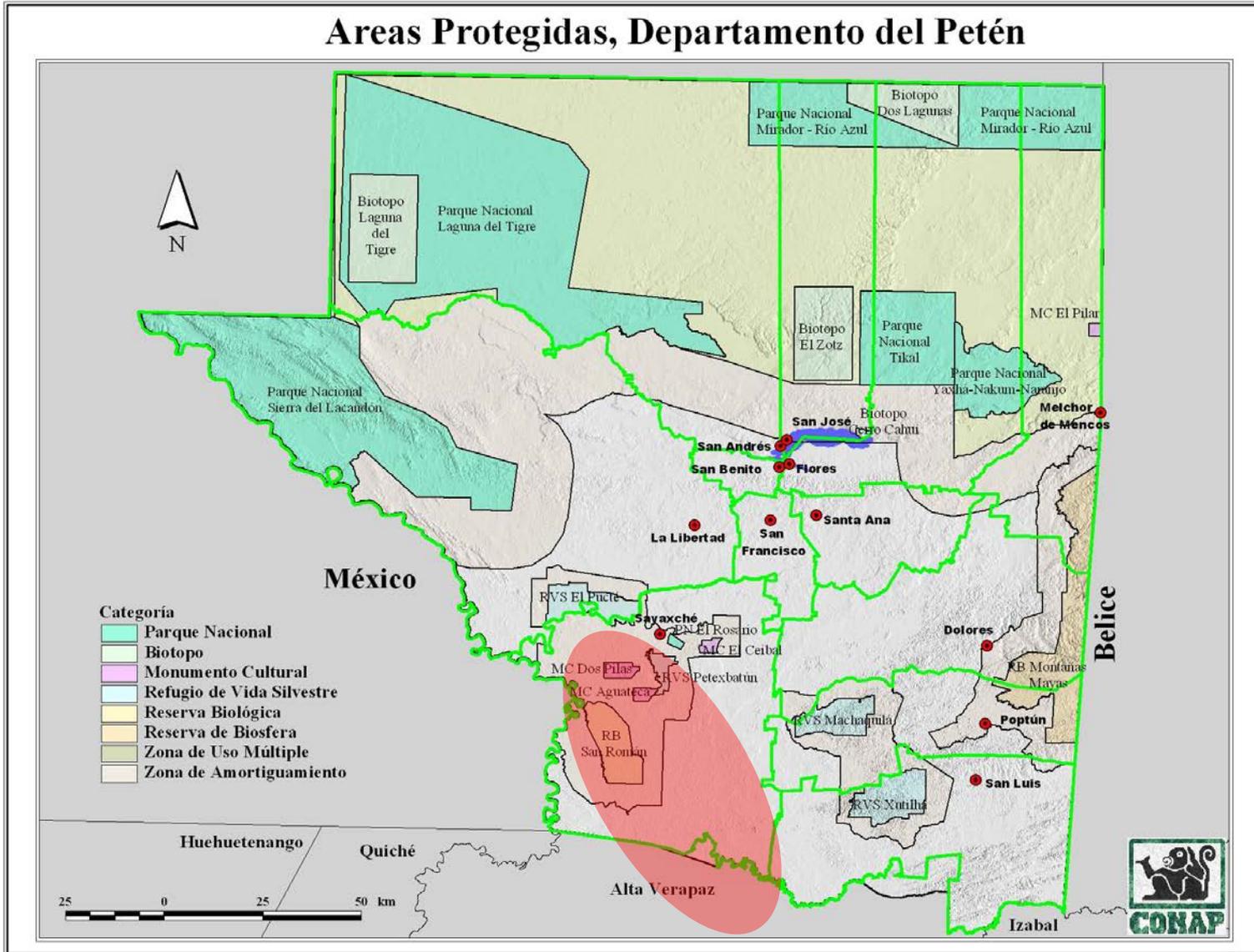
Poptún Municipality



Dolores Municipality

Expansion of oil palm plantations in Petén

Areas Protegidas, Departamento del Petén



From 20,700 ha in productive stage in 2007, to 44,300 ha in 2010. Additional areas apt for oil palm: 37,540 ha

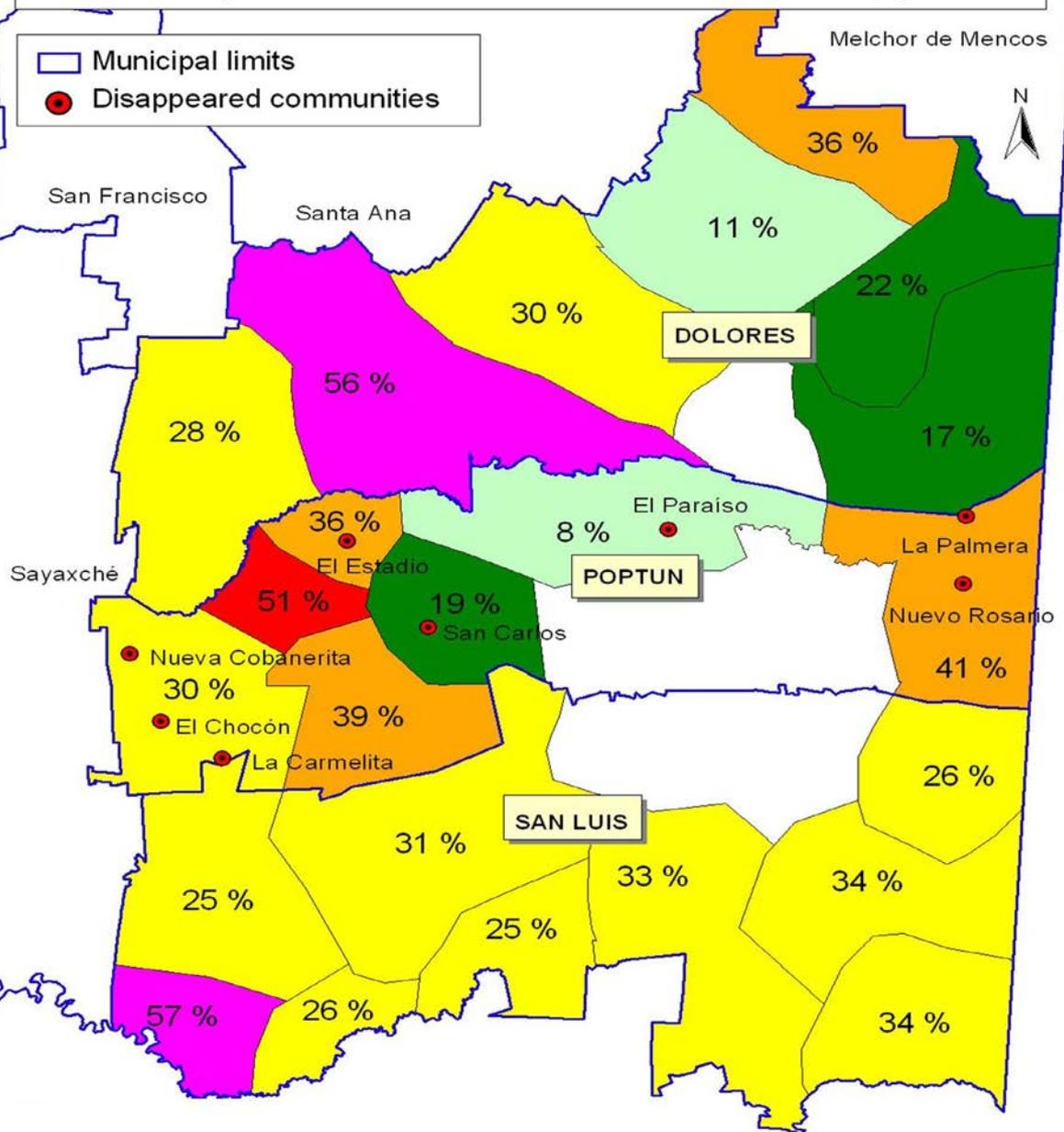


Area of oil palm production



% of campesino families who sold their land, per MR

- Municipal limits
- Disappeared communities



Expansion of cattle farming in south-east Petén:

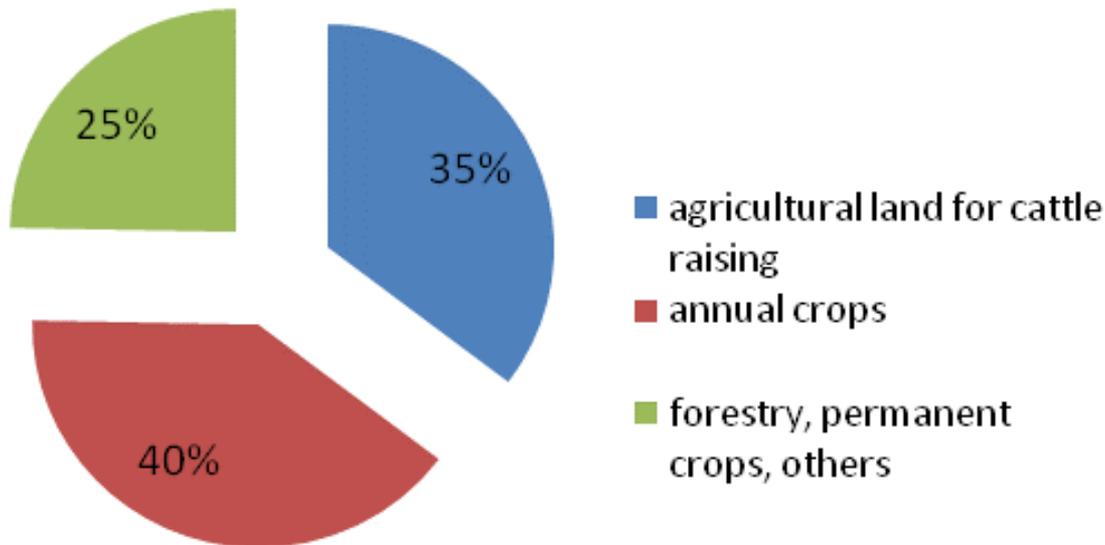
30% of campesino families in area sold their land

- 63,495 ha land lost for small farmers
- 2326 families left landless, or up to 15% of actual rural population.

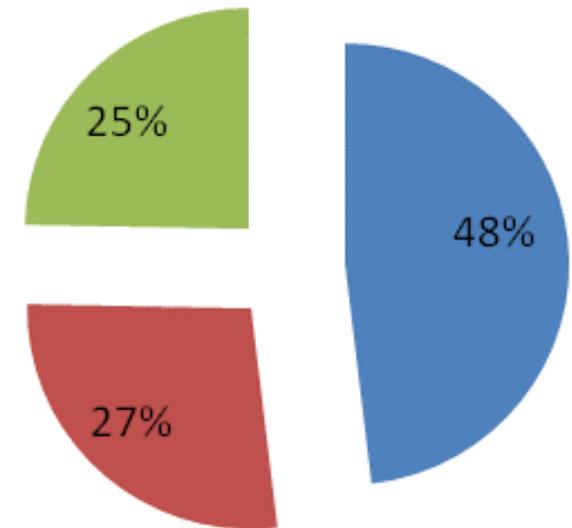
- <15% sold
- 15%-24,9% sold
- 25%-34,9% sold
- 35%-44,9% sold
- 45%-54,9% sold
- >54,9% sold

Change of land use in South-eastern Petén

Distribution of land use in 2003

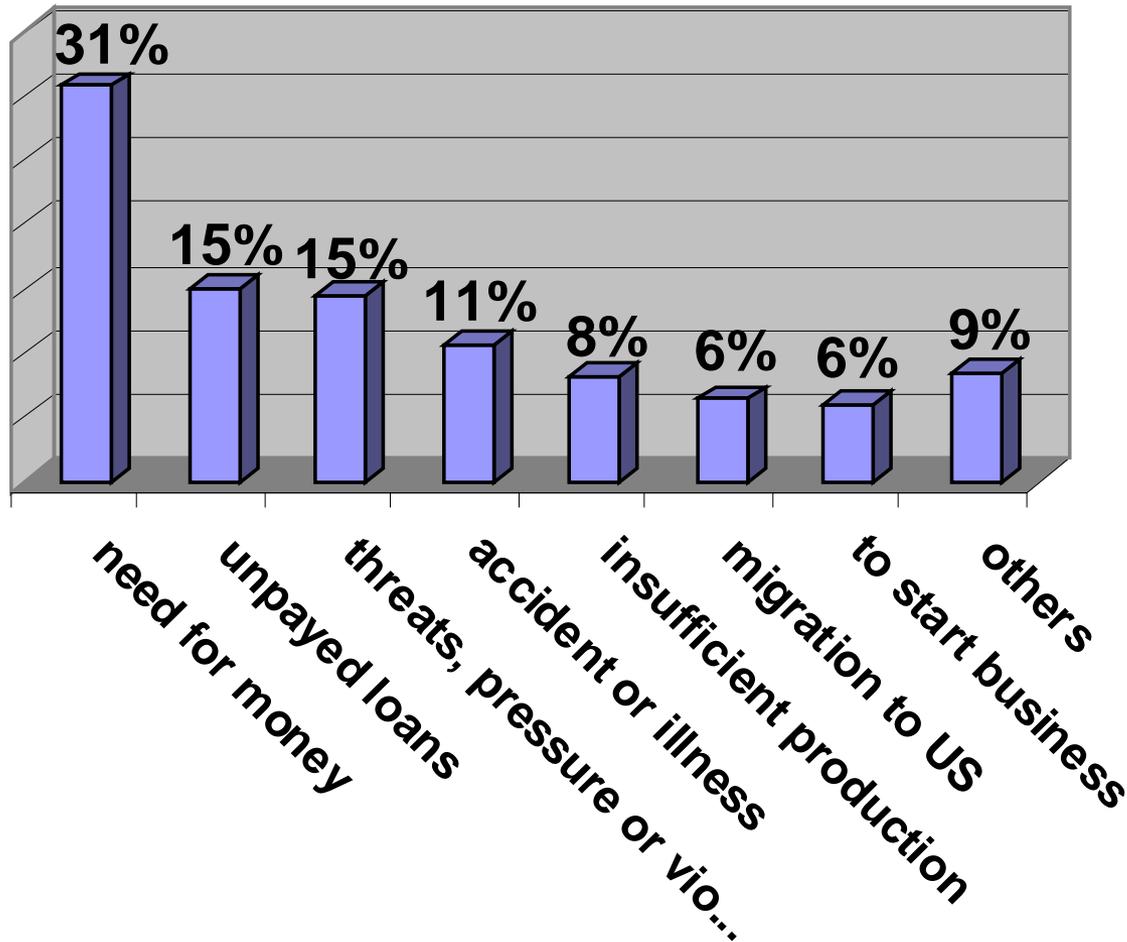


Distribution of land use in 2009



Why do campesino families sell their land?

Reasons for sale



False assumptions about availability of land:

- No more "free" land available
- Land prices have multiplied by factor 10 and more since 1996



End of civil war and improvement of road infrastructure

- Better security situation for transport and investment
- Road access to nearly all villages
- Travel times considerably shortened
- Improvement of investment climate for production, especially for export to other departments

Cadastral process with “market – assisted land reform”

- ❑ Titling and cadastral process creates judicial security for individual properties and incentivates land transactions
- ❑ Existing mechanisms to resolve conflicts about land ownership in regularization process not adapted to strong economical and power disparities, favour rich and powerful
- ❑ World-Bank advocated “land-reform” fails to reach majority of landless farmers and doesn't provide adequate conditions for beneficiaries

Drug-trafficking

- ❑ Drug trafficking related activities create high financial returns in Guatemala, which are re-invested in land for speculation purposes and territorial control.
- ❑ Petén offers ideal conditions because of large extensions, low population density and lack of state control.
- ❑ Narco-ganaderos don't hesitate to threaten with or apply violence to meet their aims.
- ❑ General climate of fear and impunity leaves campesino families without government support in case of threats

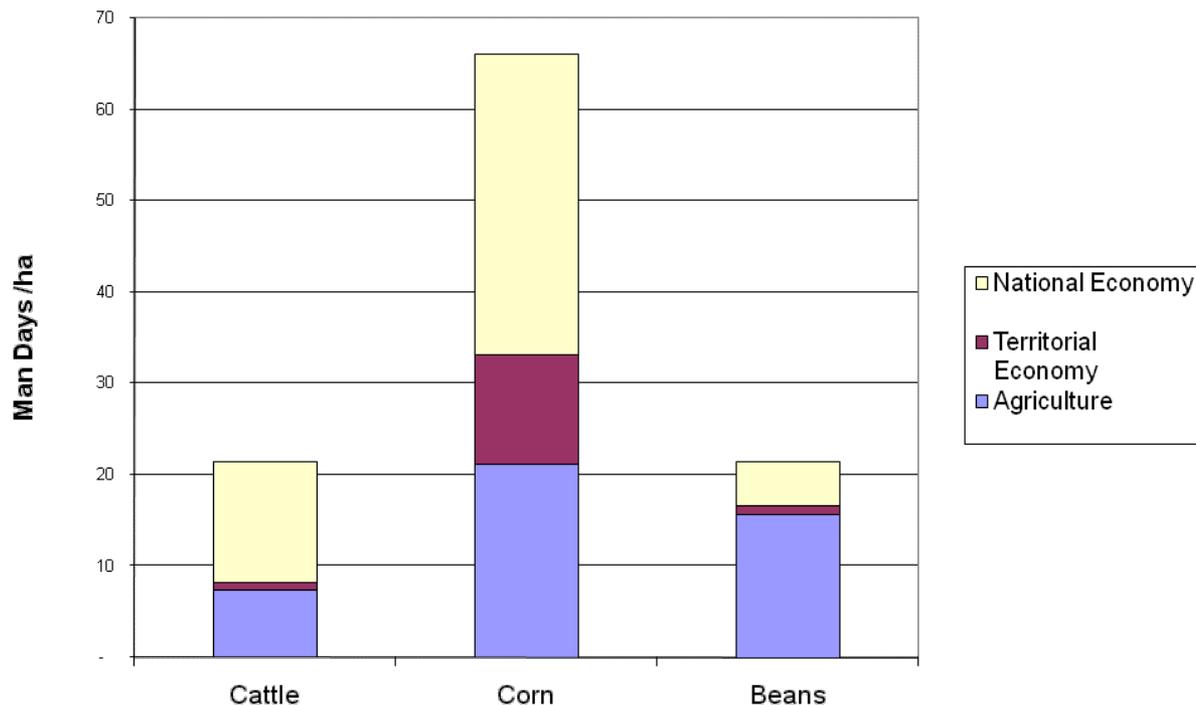
Consequences of land concentration 1

- ❑ Campesino families who sold their land in their majority are not able to buy new parcels, stay landless and with few alternatives to agricultural work
- ❑ Most stay in their communities to rent land from neighbours: land scarcity and intra-communal conflicts
- ❑ Depletion of natural resources like soil, water and forest through overuse
- ❑ Occupation of land in Nature Reserves, rising conflicts and state repression
- ❑ Migration to urban centers in Petén and to country capital



Consequences of land concentration 2

- Growing unskilled and unemployed labour force which cannot be accommodated by labour needs of cattle ranching and plantation farming



Employment generation on regional level (including agricultural production) per ha:

**Corn and bean:
28 man days/ha**

**Cattle Farming:
8 man days/ ha**

The conversion of 63,495 ha of milpa land into pastures in SE Petén lead to a loss of approximately 4000 jobs in agriculture in the last years

Consequences of land concentration 3

□ Food security

Local production (SE Petén) contributes with 38,909 metric tons (mt) of corn and 15,909 mt of beans to consumption at national level.

Loss through conversion: 24 thousand mt of maize, and 4 thousand mt of beans.

□ Regional economy:

Value added/ ha: cattle: \$US 165, corn: \$US 244, beans: \$US 265

Land concentration and conversion of milpa land in pastures create annual losses of \$US 5.5 million for local economy

Recommendations

- ❑ Improvement of structural conditions for small scale farmers (credits, technical assistance adapted to local needs)
- ❑ Support for campesino organisational efforts
- ❑ Training of cattle farmers in more intensive and less area-consuming breeding methods
- ❑ Adaptation of cadastral process to Guatemala's reality and the needs of campesino and indigenous population
- ❑ Implementation of agrarian legislation and courts
- ❑ Government must guarantee security for small farmers against violent and powerful actors

What can be done by international organisations?

- ❑ Pressure on Guatemalan government and congressmen to approve and implement legislation in favour of campesino population
- ❑ Support for human rights and campesino organizations against repression by state and non state actors
- ❑ Support for organisations and institutions in fight against impunity
- ❑ Awareness raising campaigns in consumer countries about social and ecological consequences of Oil Palm and agrofuel monocultures in producing countries



Thank you!



Ziviler Friedensdienst
Civil Peace Service