

A Rapid Assessment of the Effects of Land Tenure Reform on Land Use and Land Cover Change in the *ejidos* of Tzucacab Municipality, Southern Yucatan State, Mexico.

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A greater understanding of the relationship between human institutions and land use practices is a priority for land use and land cover change science. In this context, the cross-scale institutional linkages between national government policies, community-level institutions, and land use merit attention as a priority area for research. The reform of the national agrarian reform law (Article 27) in 1992 made it possible for communally-owned properties established under Mexico's *ejido* system to formalize individual landholdings. This shift was expected to result in the conversion of a significant portion of communally-held lands into private land, thereby transforming incentives and constraints over land and natural resource use.

This paper presents a rapid assessment of the effects of national land tenure reform on community tenure regimes, agricultural land use, and forest cover change in southern Yucatan State, Mexico. Three *ejidos* demonstrating divergent pathways of forest cover change were used as case studies to determine their tenure regimes and land use practices. We hypothesized that *ejidos* designating a greater percentage of land towards individual landholdings would display higher levels of agricultural expansion and, in turn, forest conversion.

Our findings confirmed a positive relationship between deforestation and the transition to individual tenure and suggest that forest loss was related to increased cattle ranching, while other agricultural land uses were reduced or maintained. However, such impact is linked to the influence of production subsidy programs. In addition, insights about the mechanism through which forest cover has been maintained under communal tenure regime were gained.

Keywords: land tenure, land use changes, conservation, policy effects.

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