



A joint workshop of the Global Land Project (GLP) and the research project ‘Transition of Shifting Cultivation at Forest-Agriculture Frontiers’:

Forest-agriculture frontiers: impacts of land-use transitions on livelihoods and environment in the humid tropics

Land use transitions are occurring rapidly in the humid tropics. In many cases areas currently or formerly under shifting cultivation are being transformed into other land uses. Oil palm, coffee, cocoa, rubber and other plantation crops, forest plantations, pasture, permanent annual cropping or forest re-growth (due to expansion of protected areas or abandonment of former agricultural uses), are just some of the land uses that are expanding at the expense of the traditional smallholder practices. Some of these transitions are driven by genuine needs for development of poor regions and countries – others perhaps more by specific economic interests of certain groups, or are related to global markets– but the impact of these transitions on local and regional livelihoods and human well-being, the provision of ecosystem services, biogeochemistry, biodiversity and environment in the broadest sense are not well understood. Moreover, despite the advancement of remote sensing technologies, the scale and pace with which land use transitions take place are not easily studied: the new land use systems are often quite easily recognized, but there is much confusion as to what they replace. This is because shifting cultivation – which formerly occupied most of these areas – is difficult to detect: cleared fields may in some cases appear as agricultural land on national land cover maps, yet fallow land at various successional stages of woody regrowth is often categorized as ‘unclassified’, ‘degraded’ or ‘idle’ land. There are entire regions in some countries, which in land cover maps are identified as ‘degraded forest’ despite the fact that they are essentially agricultural.

The objective of this workshop is to obtain an overview of the past and on-going land use transitions and pathways of change in the coupled human-environmental systems of the humid tropics and to review the consequences these changes have on local livelihoods, the provision of ecosystem services and environment. Are people benefiting from the land use transitions – whether externally imposed or locally decided – occurring in their areas? What are the environmental costs and benefits of converting extensive agricultural areas to intensive farming, plantations or – in some cases – new conservation areas? Many of these issues have become increasingly relevant with the push to include the REDD mechanism in the new climate agreement expected from COP 15 in Copenhagen in December 2009. For this mechanism to work properly and for development efforts in general to be well targeted towards the needs of rural people in forest-agriculture frontiers, better knowledge of the scale and consequences of land use transitions are needed.

The output of the workshop will be a review and methodological paper outlining current knowledge on the topic and the methodological challenges related to filling some of the most pressing knowledge gaps. It will be the aim to submit the paper to a high impact international journal.

The workshop will take place in Vientiane, Lao PDR, 2-3 November 2009. Precise venue to be announced later.

We have already invited a small number of leading experts for which we were able to find funding. However, we can accommodate a few more participants for this workshop:

- If you are interested in participating please send a few lines about your interest in the topic and your background before 15th August to Lars Jorgensen lj@geo.ku.dk
- Please note that we will not be able to provide funding for travel and accommodation and that we might have to make a selection among interested people in case we have too many registrations.