



Land Governance in an Interconnected World

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
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THE EFFECTS OF MIGRATION ON PROPERTY RIGHTS AND LIVELIHOODS ON FOREST FRONTIERS IN THE PERUVIAN AMAZON

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Abstract

Migrant settlements on forest frontiers in the Peruvian Amazon have produced complex mosaics of property rights, as well as varying degrees of insecurity and conflict that hamper economic development and resource conservation. Migration is a common strategy used by residents to adapt to environmental and economic change, however, policy makers in Peru lack detailed information about current migration patterns, or how shifts in settlement patterns are a response to economic incentives and governmental investments in infrastructure and services. In addition, planners have limited information on how changes in property claims effect land use or patterns of deforestation.

The rural settlement patterns produced by migration flows in the region typically result from the spontaneous occupation of forestlands as residents initially stake out informal claims, then petition government agencies to formalize their land holdings. Land titling initiatives address the needs of some residents but other families struggle to justify their claims or find their land rights are contested. Greater understanding of how property claims are established and the resulting patterns of property rights that result from migration flows could improve development and conservation planning in the region and enhance the well-being of rural populations on these frontiers by improving government support and services. Peru's Amazon region has periodically attracted dramatic influxes of people seeking land and economic opportunities or fleeing violent conflict. Recently, these patterns have drawn the attention of policy makers that flag migration and migratory agriculture as crucial drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. However, the lack of information about current migration processes and their effects on forest access have inhibited effective policy responses to perceived threats to the region's forests. As the Peruvian government designs and begins to implement national and regional programs to address climate change and to encourage forest restoration, it is crucial that the dynamics driving land use change on the ground are understood and taken into account by relevant agencies.

This paper draws on recent research in the Ucayali and Huánuco regions in the Peruvian Amazon conducted to understand variation in household migration patterns, property claims and the influence of these factors on livelihood and forest. For the study, we identified three multi-village landscapes exhibiting varied gradients of access, forest cover and agricultural conversion. We selected twelve non-indigenous rural communities and used multiple methods to gather information on community composition, government services, household characteristics, migration histories, livelihoods and forest use. Key informants in regional and district governments assisted our team to identify suitable sites for this research and initial meetings with community leaders confirmed willingness to participate in the initiative.

To begin data collection in each community, we first conducted focus group interviews with community leaders to understand community history, organization and perceptions of change in migration and impacts of migration. We disaggregated these focus groups by gender allowing us to conduct 24 interviews in total. Subsequently, we drew a systematic stratified sample of households from the twelve communities for structured interviews with household heads to gather information on migration



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histories, livelihoods strategies and property rights claims. These interviews focused particularly on the nature of property rights, differentiating between informal claims, occupation authorizations, imperfect titles and registered land titles. We allowed informants to use multiple categories to accurately capture their perceptions of the mosaic character of their individual property claims. Additionally we used ethnographic interviews to understand better the process of land occupation in project sites and the evolution of the resulting complex patterns of property rights.

In general, migrants and native households managed forests or trees within their livelihoods portfolios. However, a key challenge to forest based strategies was the interpretation of land policy by local technicians who tended to exclude forests from rural properties. Despite efforts to formalize property rights, residents complained of mismatches between their land claims to forestlands and the titled areas they actually received. Results suggest a promising focus of policy reform would be the development of mechanisms to recognize forest management systems scaled to smallholder need. Spontaneous settlement in Peru's Amazon has amounted to a grassroots agrarian reform with limited state oversight, control or planning as landless people occupy areas of state forestland or forestlands allocated to others but not used. Subsequent efforts to formalize holdings through land titling initiatives have provided more security to rural families but historic changes in land policy have resulted in a variety of property types with differing legal legitimacy. The mismatch between formal categories and processes has meant that informal claims persist side-by-side with formally titled lands. The lack of institutional support from the government has meant that advances in formalization have been undercut as land transactions, such as the sale or inheritance, take place but are not registered with the state. Finally, misconceptions that land ownership requires the demonstration of use have encouraged greater deforestation as land claimants attempt to increase the strength of their claims and the property rights security of their holdings.

Key Words: Peru, forest, migration, Amazon