Land grabbing, conflict and agrarian-environmental transformations: perspectives from East and Southeast Asia

An international academic conference
5-6 June 2015, Chiang Mai University

Conference Paper No. 24

Land Acquisitions in Northeastern Cambodia: Space and Time matters

Christophe Gironde and Amaury Peeters

May 2015

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University of Amsterdam WOTRO/AISSR Project on Land Investments (Indonesia/Philippines)
Université de Montréal – REINVENTERRA (Asia) Project
Mekong Research Group, University of Sydney (AMRC)
University of Wisconsin-Madison

With funding support from:

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Published by:

BRICS Initiatives for Critical Agrarian Studies (BICAS)
Email: bricsagrarianstudies@gmail.com
Websites: www.plaas.org.za/bicas | www.iss.nl/bicas

MOSAIC Research Project
Website: www.iss.nl/mosaic

Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI)
Email: landpolitics@gmail.com
Website: www.iss.nl/ldpi

RCSD Chiang Mai University
Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University Chiang Mai 50200 THAILAND
Tel. 66-53-943595/6 | Fax. 66-53-893279
Email : rcsd@cmu.ac.th | Website : http://rcsd.soc.cmu.ac.th

Transnational Institute
PO Box 14656, 1001 LD Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Tel: +31 20 662 66 08 | Fax: +31 20 675 71 76
E-mail: tni@tni.org | Website: www.tni.org

May 2015

Published with financial support from Ford Foundation, Transnational Institute, NWO and DFID.

Abstract

Over the last decade, the highlands of Ratanakiri province in northeastern Cambodia have witnessed massive land acquisitions and profound land use changes, mostly from forest covers to rubber plantation, which has contributed to rapidly and profoundly transform the livelihoods of smallholders relying primarily on family-based farming. Based on village- and households-level case studies in two districts of the province, this paper analyses this process and its mid-term consequences on local livelihoods.

We first look at who has acquired land, where, how and at what pace. The whole range of stakeholders – large-scale companies but also medium-scale ones, in-migrant households, and indigenous populations who also engaged into land acquisitions – is taken into account. The location and timing of acquisitions shows that the numbers of hectares at stake do not say much on the magnitude of assets lost and the consequences for local populations. Land transactions are not always immediately synonymous with the occupation of land; and it takes time for companies to plant thousands of acres they have acquired.

Second, we analyse the mid-term - over 5-7 years - transformations of livelihoods, including households' responses to new constraints and opportunities, and attempts to resist land acquisitions. The economic environment, in which local populations have to reorganize their livelihoods, has drastically changed. New opportunities have arisen with crop booms, stronger urban-rural interconnections and market development, but only few people can take advantage of these as they lack capacity to operate on the market. Indigenous families are increasingly in search of non-farming and off-farm activities, but this transition is hampered by the arrival of in-migrants who seize the majority of the new opportunities in trade, services and jobs.

Third, social differentiation among families is analysed with respect to land assets, economic activities and capacity to engage into rubber. A typology of livelihood transformation shows that for the majority of the population, farming-based livelihoods do not provide anymore enough to meet family needs. Recent land assets changes show that social differentiation is increasing both between native and non-native, and among the different social groups.

Insofar, populations have been left with some land, but areas planted with rubber trees are increasing, companies and family-entrepreneurs continue to try to expand their land holdings, and the flow of in-migrants is continuing. As space left to families is consequently shrinking, and because they are unlikely to diversify enough their livelihood systems with non-farming occupations or salary work, the majority of indigenous populations seem concerned in livelihoods that are not anymore sustainable if they only are local.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Swiss Network for International Studies in Geneva for funding the research project, their Cambodian research colleagues and in particular Suon Seng and Chay Keartha from the CENTDOR, who joined us in the field and facilitated it; the local interpretors; Marie-Solène Pham and Soop-Mai Tang for their contributions; Julie Jeannet and Kheav Darith who supervised the survey; Amri Pitoyo Priyadi and Katia Alejandra Covarrubias who contribute to process some of the quantitative data, and Paroma Ghose for language editing.

Introduction

One of the key features of the current wave of large-scale land acquisitions is its 'unprecedented' scale and pace (White, 2010) and the rapidity of the procedures through which large tracts of land were leased. Between 2005 and 2013 in Cambodia, the total area under the regime of economic land concession has tripled, growing from 33 concessions and 750,000 ha, to more than 240 concessions representing over 2,2 million ha (Peeters, 2015[1]). Many thousands of ha were distributed in a matter of weeks (Neef and al., 2013) and former users suddenly lost access to large tracts of land they previously farmed, or on which they made their livelihoods by collecting forest product, hunting, or fishing. Conversely, there is increasing evidence that some of these deals do not result in effective production units (see Woertz, 2012; Brautigam, 2013 for China), as they are contested on the ground, or investors do not develop their proclaimed plans, and so on. Alternatively, it may take time for the new landholders to mobilize productive capital and organize their business. Thus, acquisition is not always a synonym of immediate occupation, nor of plantation / cultivation, and former users may be able to continue using the lands despite changes in the lease.

The factors of space and time have not been much considered in analyses of large-scale land acquisitions and their consequences on the livelihood of local populations. This paper intends to highlight how, where, when, and by whom, land acquisitions occurred on the ground, how populations were affected (or not), and how they could or not respond[2]. Using the case studies of three villages in Ratanakiri in northeastern Cambodia, the analysis aims to contribute to the discussion on the processes of large-scale land acquisitions by adding the dimensions of time and space. The spatial locations of the land concerned, combined with the proximity of other stakeholders within the same territory, provides possibilities of explanation. The paper also aims to go beyond the analysis of the short-term impacts - dispossession, loss, etc. - by analysing how populations have had to transform their livelihoods over a period of 5 to 7 years. Here we hope to nuance the debate on agrarian transition by examining where these communities stand in the transition induced by large-scale land acquisitions. Finally, the paper intends to go beyond the 'winner vs. loser' framework by exploring the social differentiation that has occurred within communities.

The paper is organized into five sections. The first provides a brief review of the land issue in Cambodia, its agricultural development strategy, and the fate of indigenous populations; it then goes on to present the analytical framework and methodology. In the following section, we describe, sequence, and map the processes of land acquisitions by various actors in the three selected villages and examine how local populations could or could not respond in the short-term. The third and fourth sections analyse the transformation of livelihoods over a period of 5 to 7 years, and the socio-economic differentiation among families. Finally, we relate the empirical results back to the literature and discuss the agrarian transition and social differentiation that have arisen in relation to the space, localization, and timing of land acquisitions.

Research background, analytical framework and methodology

Land policy, development and indigenous populations in Cambodia

Since decollectivization, Cambodia has witnessed a scramble for land, with the first, significant land acquisitions being undertaken by high-ranking members of the State apparatus, and 'entrepreneurial

[1] Own dataset build in 2013 from different existing and crosschecked ELCs databases in Cambodia

[2] This paper builds on analysis developed in two forthcoming papers involving the two authors and comparing Cambodia and Laos (Messerli, Schoenweger, Peeters, Nanhthavong and Heinimann, 2015; Gironde and Senties, 2015).

groups' close to them (Hugues, 2003). This has led to a situation wherein all land became 'occupied in the 1990s' (Guillou, 2006: 311), a process in which neo-patrimonial practices and abusive power relations have been the rule (Un and So, 2011) in a 'lawless environment' (Ironside, 2009). Land acquisitions have further intensified as the government has made export-oriented cash crop agriculture pivotal to its development strategy, and has leased vast areas of land to domestic and foreign companies to invest in large-scale agricultural production. Ratanakiri province has been coveted since the French colonial time (Boucheret, 2014) for its rich red soils and relative abundance of land (i.e. low population density in comparison to the lowlands), and, in particular, for its large forest areas which were deemed 'unused'. In this province, the current dynamics of land acquisitions have been fostered by Vietnam in particular, which received large amounts of land as 'Economic Land Concessions' (ELC) to expand its rubber belt. Land leases to Vietnam have been operated in the framework of the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Triangle, a border junction area cooperation initiative, which institutionalized unbalanced power relations and the dominance of Vietnam (Fortunel, 2014). Land leases to Vietnamese State-owned and Army companies can be seen as part of a broader deal whereby Vietnam, in exchange for land, provides support to the increasingly contested Hun Sen political regime.

Predictions made over the last decade are not optimistic about the security of land tenure for indigenous populations. Those who are optimistic point to the fact that the land rights of indigenous populations are better protected than previously, particularly owing to collective and communitarian land titles, through the 2001 Land Law and 2002 Forest Law (Nuy, 2010). Simbolon (2002: 24) challenges this perception by suggesting that although customary rights were recognized by the 2001 Land Law, they remain under the discretionary power of the State, which can acquire land by pre-emption. Many authors state that, in fact, very few indigenous peoples could comply with complex and sometimes costly procedures required of them (Luco, 2006; So, 2009). The first three communal land titles were indeed received by indigenous communities in Ratanakiri (2011) and Mondulkiri (2012) after a two years long process and about 10 years after the recognition of the right to collective land ownership for indigenous peoples in 2001 Land Law[3] (UN press release). In May 2013, the sixth and the seventh communal land titles were handed out to 2 Banong communities in Mondulkiri.[4]

The majority remained on the land without registration, whether with an individual title (Luco, 2008) or with an "official communal land title » (Bues, 2011: 12).[5] Moreover, there is evidence that land titling may not be a barrier to land concessions, as the territories for land titling were not those where land concessions were granted (Dwyer, 2013). Under these conditions, it is unlikely that indigenous populations could have their say on economic land concessions (LICADHO, 2005; Mengin, 2007; Un and So, 2011: 289), which are ultimately established regardless of any eventual community land rights record (Men, 2011). According to Bourdier, the threats for indigenous populations are in continuation with a policy of "segregation and exclusion" of ethnic minorities, who are not even informed of the plans of the decision-makers (Bourdier, 2009a) and who do not have access to formal justice systems as there is no institution or service to whom they could address their claims (Backstrom et al., 2007).

The rubber sector has revived from the mid-1990s once former State plantations were privatized (Fortunel, 2014). Rubber is attractive for smallholders 'due to its fewer (agricultural) inputs, long economic life and high market demand' (CDRI, 2009: 13). Economic analysts view rubber as the best option for conversion from crop production, i.e. the 'largest benefit to farmers' when compared to other trees (Hansen and Top, 2006). Other studies draw attention to the fact that rubber plantations

[3] UN OHCHR Cambodia press release, 20/12/2011
[4] Cambodia Daily, May 27th 2013
[5] With the exception of two government-initiated pilot-villages in the case of Ratanakiri province (Bues, 2011, 12).

'require huge investment in both financial and technical resources' (Yem et al, 2011), and that small producers might not be paid adequately for their rubber because of asymmetric information flows and traders power position (Gironde et Fortunel, 2014). Another concern about rubber is its weak competitiveness within the sub-region because of lower per-hectare rubber yield, and relatively high costs of electricity and petroleum (CDRI, 2009, Saing, 2009).

There are, as of yet, very few studies on how Cambodian smallholders perform when engaged in rubber production, largely because family plantations are a fairly recent phenomenon. It is unrepresentative to draw conclusions from the project implemented by the Agence Française de Développement in the 2000s, as families were strongly supported (in investment, technical advice, etc.) by the project itself (Delarue, 2009). Previous experiences in Southeast Asia have shown that smallholders can grow rubber successfully when they enjoy secure land tenure, as was the case in neighbouring Vietnam (Sikor, 2012), and also when they receive public support (Fox and Castella, 2013; Gouyon, 2005). Together with access to technology (Delarue, 2011; Sikor, 2012), the learning process is crucial, as illustrated by the cases of farmers in northern Thailand and northern Laos (Sturgeon, 2012).

Whereas unbalanced power relations between Khmer and indigenous populations is a major topic of study (Bourdier, 2009), there is not much knowledge on social differentiation within indigenous communities. Past Southeast Asian experiences show that in contexts where territorial expansion has included massive migration programs, "the prevailing historical trends has been the retreat of ethnic minorities who have everywhere given away, moved back, or been settled and integrated into mainstream societies" (De Koninckx, 2003). In such circumstances, the already vulnerable groups such as smallholders and indigenous people, which often lack appropriate titling over the lands on which they live and farm, are at great risk of having their livelihoods eroded (Guerin et al. 2003).

Analytical framework and research methodology

This paper builds on analysis developed in two previous works and material collected within the framework of a research project involving the two authors.[6] The first is an attempt to link the 'spatio-temporal patterns' of land acquisitions to 'recurrent or archetypal processes of implementation of land deals from concession granting to the final allocation of land' (Messerli, Schoenweger, Peeters and Heinimann, 2015). The second is an attempt to link the on-the-ground implementation of land acquisitions, including small areas acquired by in-migrant families, to the transformation of livelihoods in a medium-term perspective (Gironde and Senties, 2015). This paper crosses the above two works, i.e. it analyses to what extent the spatio-temporal patterns and processes of implementation shape uneven transformations of livelihoods.

We therefore focus on processes and trajectories for both the implementation -from land deal-making to land cultivation- and the transformation of livelihoods -from immediate land loss to responses and adaptations in the medium-term. The research adopts an actor-oriented approach (Long, 2001) and takes into account the various actors at stake and analyses the room for manoeuvre and strategies to respond to the different 'powers' that institutions and populations may hold (Hall, Hirsch, Li, 2011) and which contribute to land transactions. The research uses the sustainable rural livelihoods framework (Chambers and Conway, 1991; Scoones, 1998) and the concept of livelihood trajectories (de Haan and Zoomers, 2005) to analyse the transformation of livelihoods induced by land acquisitions over a period of 5 to 7 years. The analysis of social differentiation among households pays special attention to change in access to land, the cropping system, the capacity to engage into rubber,

[6] http://www.snis.ch/project_large-scale-land-acquisitions-southeast-asia-rural-transformations-between-global-agendas

and the importance of off-farm activities. Our research borrows from ethnographic work and field research in northeastern Cambodia (White, 1996; Fox and al, 2008; Bourdier, 2009; Baird, 2011) for the baseline, and agrarian transition literature (De Koninck, 2004; Rigg, Salamanca, Parnell, 2013; De Koninck, Rigg and Vandergeest, 2012).

With the aim of theorizing close to the ground, (O'Brien, 2006), our analysis relies extensively on field research, which spanned four 10 day-long missions between 2012 and 2013. These were focussed within two communes in particular - Loum Choar and Malik - located in O'Yadav et Andoung Meas districts respectively, within the larger Ratanakiri province. Additional data were provided by student researchers who spent a total of 6 months in the communes[7]. Field research and analysis involved Cambodian researchers who preferred not to have their names on printed material, as the land-grabbing issue continues to be a 'sensitive' one in Cambodia.[8]

Research sites were identified through a scoping study in three communes of three districts in Ratanakiri province (Pham, 2012). The communes of Loum Choar and Malik were selected based on the presence of various types of investors and processes of land acquisitions reported by district and communal authorities, including economic land concessions companies, private companies, individual plantations, and in-migrants.

Data collection was undertaken through several different means, including semi-structured interviews with households[9], local authorities, and company representatives; participatory observation, mostly in the land plots of the interviewees (including large-scale companies); and a questionnaire-based survey, with a sample of 240 households (24 per cent of the population of seven surveyed villages in the two communes) in August 2013. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the main residence of each household or on-site at their *chamkar.*[10] In accordance with the sustainable livelihood analytical framework, interviews focused on the context and the processes through which households were affected by land acquisitions with the objective to answer the following questions. To what extent did land acquisitions change population's access to land, technology and know-how, farming inputs, financial capital? How have populations responded to the increasing pressure on land and how have they transformed their economic activities? What are the outcomes of this transformation with respect to land asset, cropping systems and in particular engagement into rubber? We also walked with interviewees to the family' farmed fields, to gather an understanding of the surrounding -plots used by other households, and the large areas leased, purchased, rented, occupied, and grabbed by outsiders. Interviews were completed with a series of land plot measurements, using GPS based tracking software on a smart phone. These measurements were found to be crucial not only to further obtain more accurate figures of the interviewees, but also to add spatial attributes to their land assets. It allowed us to geolocate households' land and, their proximity to, or distance from, concessions and other new landholdings. This was helpful to map the land holdings of the different stakeholders around the studied villages.

Interviews and the questionnaire surveys were carried out in Khmer and/or Jarai or Tampun languages by Khmer research colleagues or with the assistance of interpreters who speak Jarai and Tampun. Responses were immediately translated into English. Interpreters are native from the province and are working for local civil society organizations or development projects. Interviewees

[7] Marie-Solène Pham and Soop-Mai Tang, students in Master in Asian Studies at the IHEID, Geneva.

[8] We take this opportunity to acknowledge their crucial role in access to the field and their precious contribution for the analysis of realities that would have been much more difficult to capture without them.

[9] In Tampun societies, one household usually includes several families. These families share the same pot under the same roof even after the children get married and have themselves children. A single house includes therefore several families and gets bigger as the family members increases. The term "family" is therefore preferred to the concept of household.

[10] Main land plot that could be located far from the village and where many families have a small house or a shelter to stay overnight during work peak's periods.

are kept anonymous and direct quotes of respondents are not literal citations but were translated from the original statement made in local indigenous language or in Khmer.

Land acquisitions, crop booms and migration in Ratanakiri

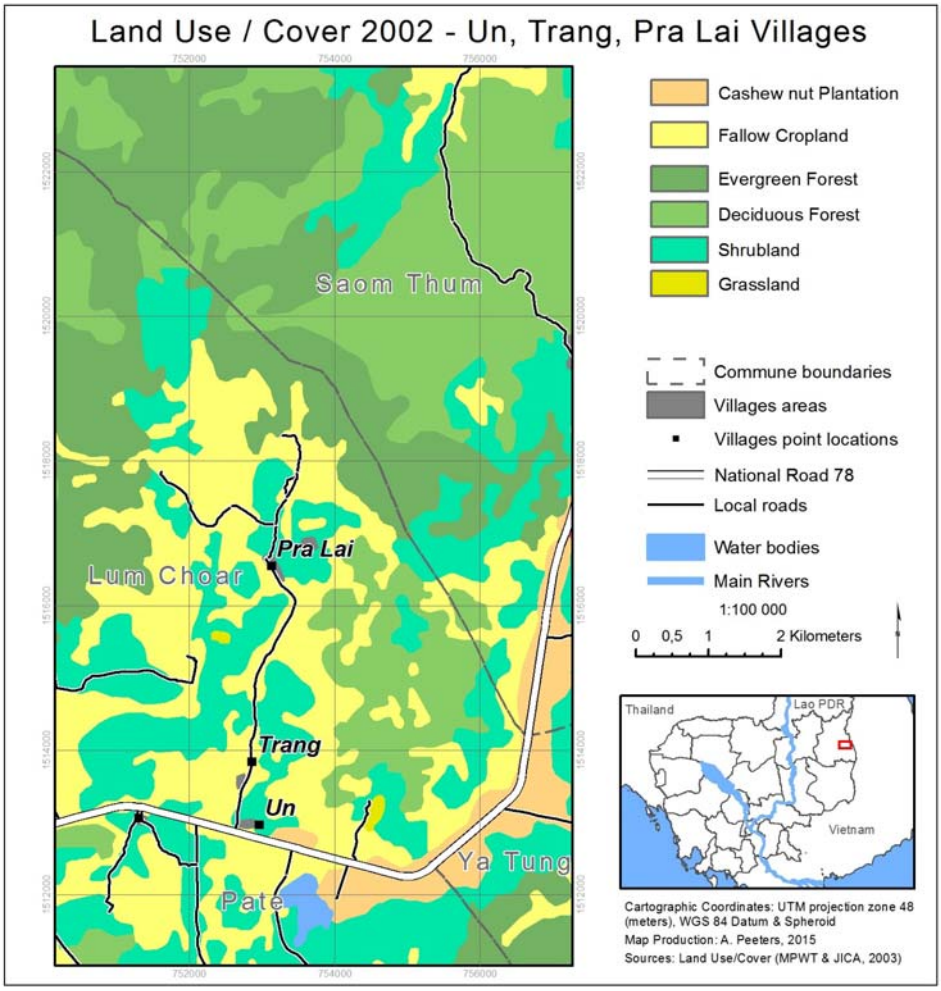
The time of plenty

Until the mid-1990s, the study area across O'Yadav and Andoung Maes districts in Ratanakiri was characterized by the abundance of land in relation to its population. Livelihoods relied on farming and the access to forest and water areas where indigenous populations used to hunt, fish and collect various natural resources from the wild. Villages could be displaced according to populations' needs in relation to the degree of exhaustion of natural resources. Access to land was governed by customary land tenure, which consisted in oral recognition by the community of farming use-rights.

This 'time of plenty' was, however, not one of stability. The social organization of these communities was disrupted in the period before the Red-Khmer took power, and lasted long past the Vietnamese intervention. Indigenous populations were forced to turn to Red Khmer ideas, among others, to grow paddy rice in the low-lands. They were 'influenced, 'manipulated', and while some became involved in a military struggle, others fled from the turmoil by moving huge distances, often deeper into forested areas (Thibault, 2009). Nevertheless, the interviews did not make elucidate the extent to which this turmoil actually altered and impacted the livelihoods of the people. Moreover, during the post-war transition, the province witnessed extensive logging perpetuated by Vietnamese military and a clique of powerful Cambodian individuals linked to the government, the military forces, and so on (Padwe, 2011).

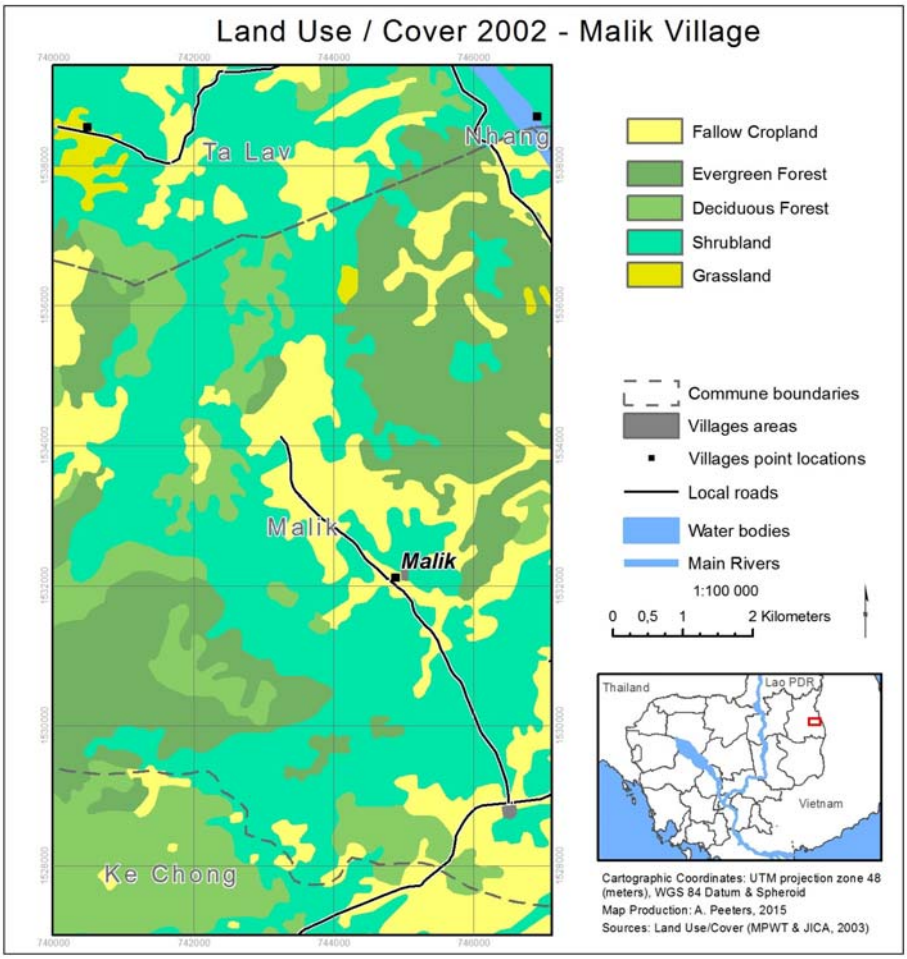
In Loum Choar and Malik, customary land tenure was still the rule within indigenous communities in the mid-1990s: families had to either inform or ask their village chief, or, more simply, agree with their neighbours on the demarcation of plots to be farmed. The testimonies gathered from peoples native to Loum Choar and Malik indicate that there was no restriction in access to land, because there was plenty, which corroborates findings from other research in the area. Fox and al. (2009, 316-7) suggest that each person had access to approximately 11 hectares in a neighbouring commune (15 km distant) in the late 1980s. In his study of Phum Pachorn, a village located 20 km west from our study area, Bourdier (2012) indicates that until the beginning of the 2000s there was still enough land for all families and for shifting cultivation with ten years long fallow. Food crops – mostly rice and vegetables– were dominant in a rotational cropping system including 10-15 years fallow after 2-3 years of use of the same plot. Rain-fed crops were eventually completed by paddy rice in low lands in case of a bad rice harvest (White, 1996). Fruit trees, husbandry, fishing, hunting, and the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) in villages in the surrounding areas completed resources gathered from cultivation. Non-farming activities were minimal. Resources from the forest could complement food diet in case of a shortage in rice, and populations could eventually engage in the trade of agricultural products with lowlanders if the need arose (Guérin, quote by Padwe, 2011: 126). Cash crops, mostly soya and cashew nut, (see Padwe, 2011), were progressively developed from the 1990s.

The following map shows the land use and cover around Un, Trang, and Pra Lai villages in 2002 (Map 1). Most of the area is covered by forests and most of the croplands are found relatively close to the villages. Some rubber plantations were present in the province, but not yet in this area at the time.



Map 1: Land use/cover in 2002 around the villages of Un, Trang and Pra Lai

The following map shows the land use and cover around Malik village in 2002 (Map 2). Forests and shrubland are the dominant features in 2002, mixed with several areas of cropland both close to and far from Malik village. No big plantations of cashew nut or rubber are present in this area.



Map 2: Land use/cover in 2002 around the village of Malik

There has been very little research into the social differentiation within communities for the period before the introduction of cash crops. Existing research suggest that social differentiation was low with respect to farming land and access to forest areas, which provided the core of the community resources. All families had equal access to land and equal rights of use as well as access to forest resources. Families could be distinguished by their possession of cattle, buffaloes, and prestigious handicraft goods (White, 1996). In his study of a village located 40 km east from our area of study, Padwe (2011, 135) does not exclude the idea of inequality that springs from ancient hierarchies differentiating elites, from commoners, slaves, and debt-bondmen. Logging at post-war time has certainly benefited some specific groups who engaged into this business, but there is no study on the social differentiation it may have created. The issue of inequality is associated with the development of cashew nut trees, which triggers of a process of ownership of land and simultaneously opens new avenues of enrichment and differentiation as it provides cash money.

Public policies prior to the land rush and rubber boom

The dynamics of land acquisitions in Ratanakiri occurred in a context wherein the government developed its administration in remote areas and set up a 'Khmerization' policy, settling Khmer ethnic populations in ethnic minority areas. Between 1998 and 2008, the population annual growth rate for Ratanakiri was 4.65 percent, 3 times the national rate (1.65 percent)[11]. Civil servants were brought to

[11] Ministry of Planning, National Census, 2008.

the province, followed by numerous relatives who knew they could easily and cheaply get access to arable land. In parallel, the government reorganized rural settlement with the aim to settle populations closer to communal administration and public services such as schools and health centres. New villages were established beside roads, remote village populations were displaced, and inhabitants were assigned new land areas for farming in case their former lands were too far.

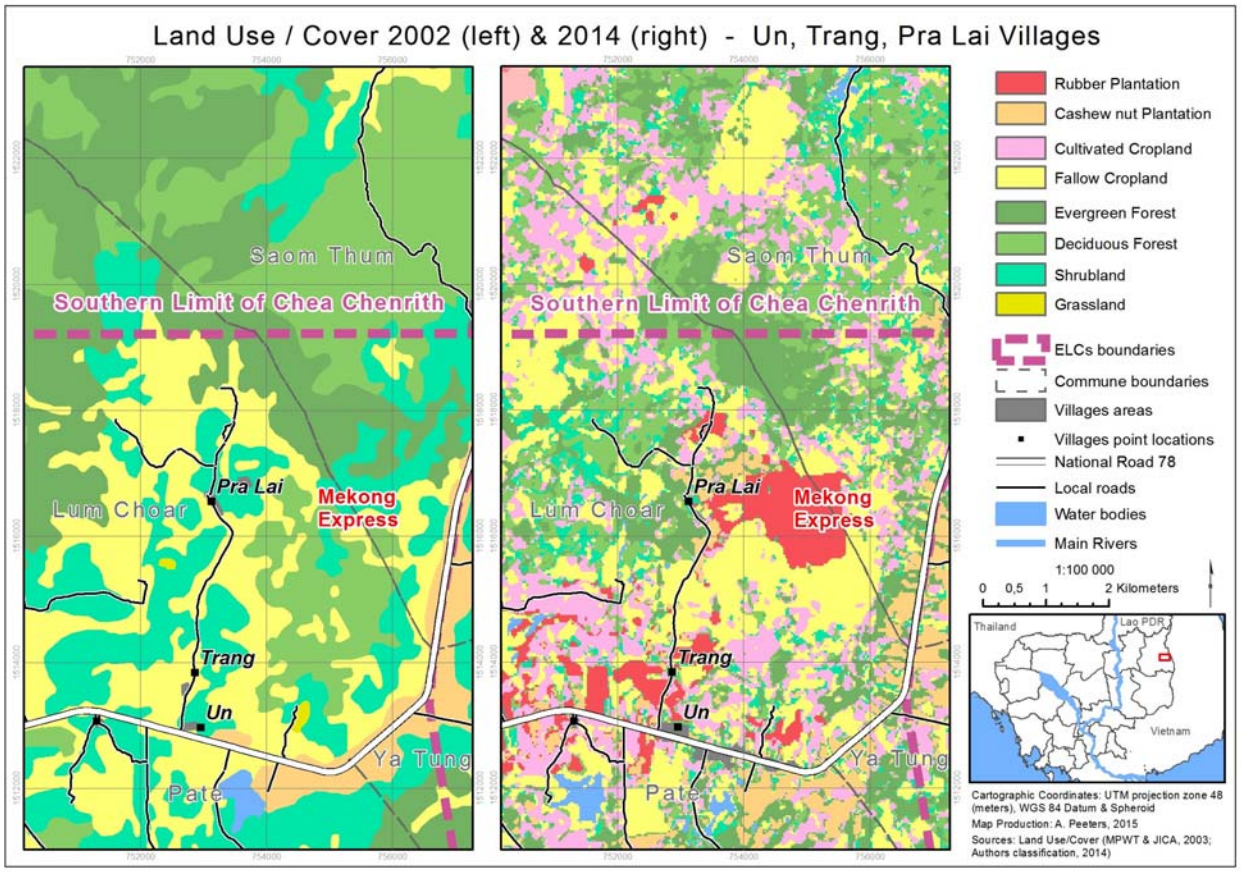
Land acquisitions in the province have been mostly driven by cashew nut (Ruohomäki, 2004; Padwe, 2011) then rubber plantations. In the early 2000s, a series of government initiatives and development projects –model-farms, planting schemes, trainings, etc.– were set up to promote rubber. Until those years, rubber was not well known, with the exception of an old plantation in the outskirts of Banlung (Fortunel, 2014). At that time, indigenous populations invested primarily in cashew nut (Ruohomäki, 2004). It was the sharp increase of the rubber price in 2005 which triggered an unprecedented change in land cover and land use (Fox et al., 2009). The rubber boom started with Khmer entrepreneurs (up to several hundred hectares holdings) and local medium-rank officers and their relatives (up to a few dozen hectares). Rubber then attracted numerous in-migrants and became attractive for well-off indigenous families. The first Economic Land Concession contracts were then signed; their number steadily increased from 2009 on. Ratanakiri provincial Bureau of Agriculture reports a dozen companies with a total of more than 50'000 ha in 2010 (Fortunel, 2014). End of 2012, there were 30 ELCs for a total of approximately 235’000 ha, covering about 20% of the entire province. Cassava also experienced a similar boom in production; this is a variety used to feed husbandry, which cannot be consumed by humans. The demand for cassava comes from China and Vietnam who are in need of feed for their large ‘industrial’ husbandry units. For the peoples of Ratanakiri, cassava is a key source of cash, particularly as a start-up investment for rubber. Cassava is also grown in large rubber plantations, planted in-between young rubber trees between two and three years of age.

Land acquisitions and newcomers

In Pra Lai, Trang and Malik villages (the two first belong to Loum Choar commune; the third one belongs to the eponym commune), land acquisitions and the rubber expansion started between eight and ten years ago.

In Pra Lai village, two main investments affect the access that local populations have to the land: a 5’124 ha Economic Land Concession (ELC) to a Khmer-Vietnamese joint-venture named Chea Chenrith (contract in 2007, revised in 2012) and a Khmer company named Mekong Express that bought 480 hectares of land between 2007 and 2010. The closest border of Chea Chenrith is located approximately 4 km north from the village. Village authority representatives who took us to the area could indicate the boundary of the ELC, but no demarcation mark –fence, pillars or marked trees– could be seen on the ground. The ELC area which is the closest from Pra Lai village encompasses old fallow regrowth forest that has not yet been prepared for rubber trees, and Pra Lai inhabitants have thus far continued farming in these areas. Curiously, we found rubber trees had been planted by villagers on land that, they claimed, was inside Chea Chenrith territory (they can be seen in red on Map 3). These trees –two dozen hectares– belong to 5 well off families, including the chief of the village and his close relatives. The remaining Pra Lai villagers have also continuously cultivated annual crops on this unused portion of the ELC landholding. The situation is greatly different in the case of Mekong Express, which in one to two years of time prepared the land and planted rubber trees.

The comparative analysis of the 2002 and 2014 landscapes in the map below clearly shows the magnitude of the changes that occurred in the environment around the villages of Un, Trang and Pra Lai (Map 3).



Map 3: Land use/cover in 2002 (left) and in 2014 (right)[12] around the villages of Pra Lai, Trang and Un

While it is still possible to distinguish the main demarcations of the landscape in 2014, the forest gave way to large areas of croplands, not just in previously cultivated areas but also in more remote locations which were previously forested. In addition to the pre-existing large area around the road, several plantations of cashew nut are present by 2014 around the villages of Pra Lai. Finally, next to Mekong Express, many small (5-20 ha) rubber plantations belonging to Khmer in-migrants are present both along the main road as well as more remotely, reaching beyond Pra Lai.

In 2012, villagers applied for the measurement of the land plots they farmed, in accordance with the Prime Minister's Directive 01 (May 2012), which stipulated that populations could claim back the land plots that had been granted to ELCs and that they cultivated at that time. During July-August 2012, government officers measured a total of 173 ha of land plots claimed by Pra Lai inhabitants; fallow land plots were not measured and are considered as the property of the company. 72 families from Pra Lai (56%) reported that their land was measured, and that they received a land title that guarantees that they can 'keep' these plots. There were no reports of any attempts made by the villagers to continue farming on Mekong Express landholdings. Aside from the rapid plantation of rubber trees, villagers explained that this acquisition cannot be contested, as part of the land was sold by villagers themselves, another part was sold by the communal authority representatives, and because they feared to contest it as the owner was Khmer. Furthermore, D01 applies only to ELCs, not to

[12] The two land uses/covers presented here were produced following different classification protocols, using different sources of satellite images and different output classes. The various land use/cover classes of both past and present states were matched in order to allow a visual comparison between the situation of 2002 and 2014. Even if it is not a proper land use changes analysis it gives a clear view on the transformations of the environment.

ordinary private companies such as Mekong Express.

The situation differs in Trang where the population was impacted by Mekong Express[13] and Khmer in-migrants. The purchases by Mekong Express are twofold: in 2007/08, the company bought its first land plots directly from the villagers; in a second phase, the company dealt with the local authority and bought communal land. For the second phase, deals were made between the company and populations who cleared land plots, who were paid per cleared hectare, before the purchase. In this way, the company did not meet any objections from the provincial government. At the same time, the village encountered many acquisitions by Khmer in-migrants, who settled first along the main road, in Un and Kate villages, where they opened shops, restaurants, and other businesses. They then progressively bought land plots further from the road, in Trang. The table below shows the territorial expansion of in-migrant families, starting from Kate and Un along the national road, and then developing further into the villages of Trang and Prai Lai.

Table 1 - Distribution of in-migrants in Loum Choar by year of arrival

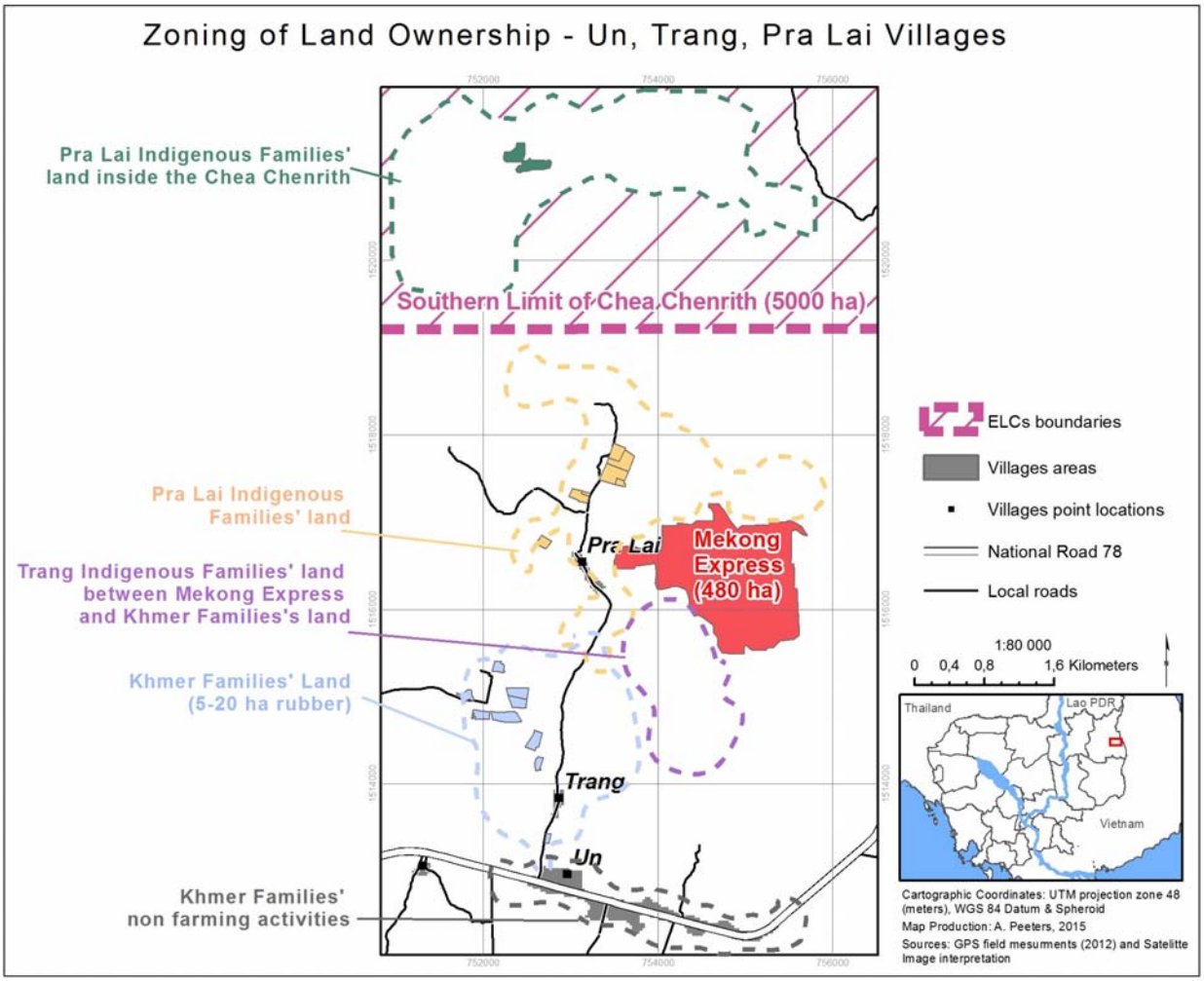
Year of arrival	Loum Choar			
	Kate	Un	Trang	Pra Lai
Before 2000	11%	0	0	0
2001-2005	28%	21%	0	0
2006-2010	50%	36%	25%	40%
2011-2013	11%	43%	75%	60%

Source: SNIS project questionnaire-based survey, August 2013[14].

Trang villagers explained that between 2007 and 2009, they sold part of their land in fallow, assuming that there was enough land left to be clear for the next rotation. They were unaware that at the same time, large tracts of land were in the process of being sold to Mekong Express.

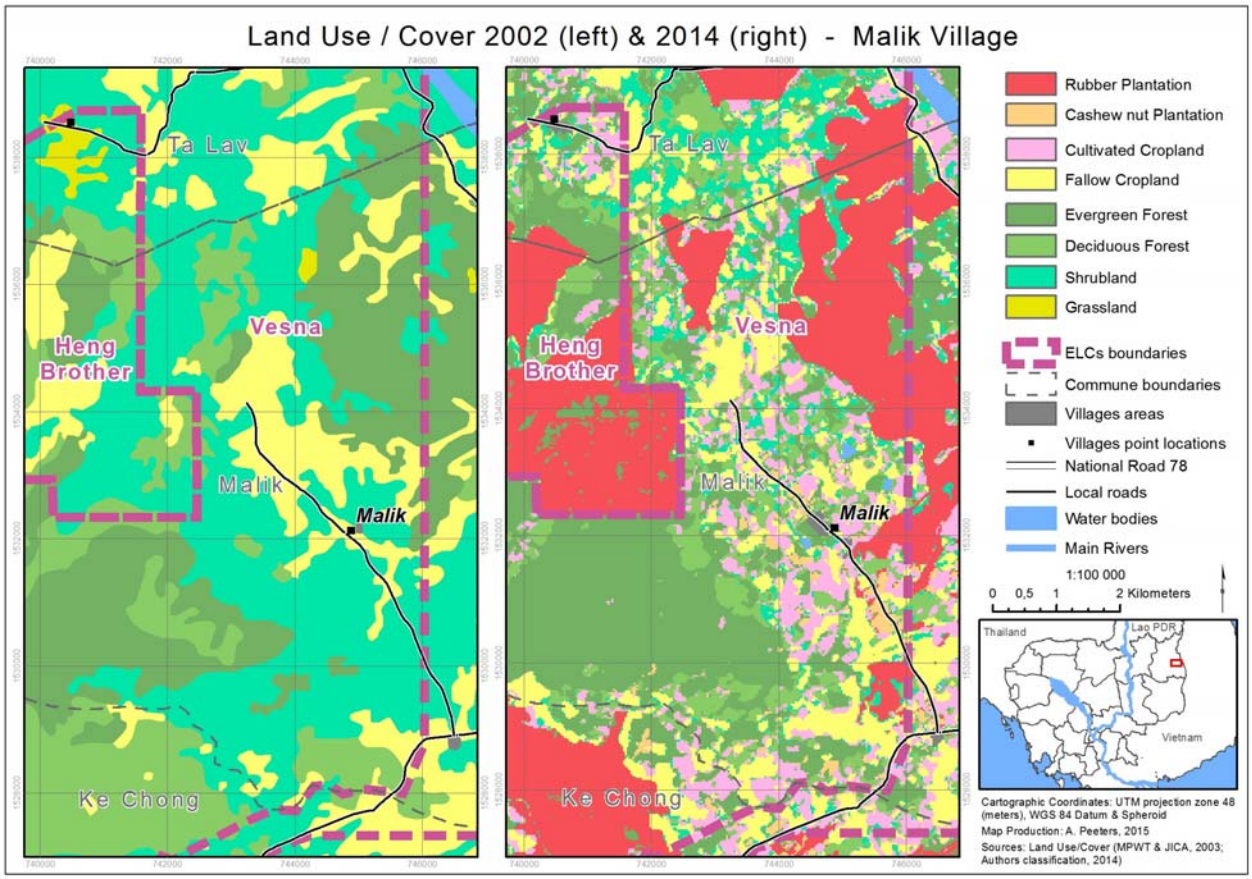
[13] The 480 hectares now property of Mekong Express are spread over the two villages of Pra Lai and Trang; it is not possible to count how much is on each village territory, the demarcation is actually a matter of conflict between the two villages.

[14] All the following tables have the same source of information, i.e. the questionnaire-based survey carried out in August 2013.



Map 4: Zoning of Land Ownership around Un, Trang and Pra Lai villages

As a result, Trang families are left since 2010 with stripes or dots of land caught between the landholdings of the migrants and the hundreds of hectares which are now the property of Mekong Express (Map 4). The process has not ceased: approximately one third of Trang families (31%) reported that they have sold land since 2010, and 40% of the families reported having less land in 2013 than in 2010.



Map 5: Land use/cover in 2002 (left) and in 2014 (right) around the village of Malik

The environment around the third village, Malik, has also undergone important changes (Map 5). The croplands have grown substantially both around Malik and further north. Many cashew nut plantations are also present along the road and the village centre. Finally, the biggest changes concern rubber plantations, which literally 'exploded' in 2014 to cover large areas, mainly through concessions. It should also be noted that several individual plantations are observed in 2014 (Map 5). The concessions involved in the land expansion around Malik is a particular case, with two Vietnamese ELCs - Heng Brother and Vesna Investment – being granted 2361 ha in 2009 and 5'080 ha in 2011 respectively. In addition, numerous Khmer peoples have acquired land plots at the outskirts of the village. The ELCs deprived Malik villagers not only of land they could farm but also from fishing and hunting in particularly rich and abundant areas. Monetary compensations for cultivated plots - USD 150-200 per hectare, based on the cost of labour for clearing - were derisory when compared to the income that could be made from certain crops on those plots. Though the most important distinctive feature in Malik village was the response of its population. At first, the villagers of Malik opposed Heng Brothers when the company started to expand beyond its allotted area. The opposition benefited from the support of local organisations, which helped to put forward the formal claims of the villagers to the provincial government. Although it is not possible to measure the area that was saved, villagers of Malik certainly have stopped the extra-expansion of the company. In parallel, Malik villagers who had the resources (i.e. work force or/and cash to hire workers), rushed to clear land plots at the edge of Heng Brother's landholding to fix these areas as their land. They opened new plots, continuously grew annual crops, and built wooden houses.

We had the opportunity to interview the management staff of a third ELC, Chieng Ly, whose 1'900 ha of land is located on Malik commune. The company encountered organizational challenges and delays, such as securing an adequate budget and appropriate machinery for land clearance, or for

developing rubber nurseries. Chieng Ly development was also challenged by Khmer individuals, as explained by one of its managers, who complained about powerful 'Khmer grabbers' that the company was not able to chase away. These contingencies gave villagers time to react and limit dispossession. As with Heng Brothers, they could continue farming, since the company was slow in expanding the planted area. In some areas, the villagers were able to continue farming until 2012; their efforts were rewarded: Malik village has the highest proportion of families (90%) who had some land measured in 2012. The operation is not negligible, as the average area measured as being farmed by families is 4.63 ha, for which they later receive a land certificate.

Thus, within our selected three sites, each has experienced an individual interplay of various dispossession dynamics of uneven magnitude. In Pra Lai, despite the ELC-related, large-scale land loss on paper, the villagers were left with enough land overall to meet their basic needs. In Trang, the entire village lacked enough land to satisfy its basic needs. And Malik was subject to a situation halfway between that of the other two villages. In addition to large- and medium-sized new landholders, one must not neglect in-migrants who represented about a third of the local population in 2013; 20.7 per cent in Loum Choar, and 35.6% in Malik commune. The percentage reached about half in Lorm village (in Malik commune) where the increasing number of immigrants has led to indigenous populations moving away from migrant clusters (Tang, 2014: 30-31).

Table 2 - Percentage of Khmer families in total population by village in 2013

	Loum Choar				Malik		
	Kate	Un	Trang	Pra Lai	Malik	Lorm	Kahal
Khmer	28.6%	27.8%	13.2%	9.3%	15%	47.6%	42.9%

Indigenous populations were unevenly affected by land acquisitions, depending mostly on their workforce to compensate for land loss by clearing other land plots. The families who had enough labour were able to compensate for the land they had lost; others took more time to clear the land, or were able only to clear less land. Differentiation further increased as those who could clear land were also able to sell the wood. This gave them the financial capital to pay workers for further clearing. Furthermore, in a context where State control on forest clearing and 'illegal' logging was intensifying, the families who had political and social capital could clear land and sell wood, whereas ordinary families were forbidden from so-doing and were at risk of having their wood confiscated. Another factor of differentiation has been the connection of the local population with the newcomers. New opportunities for access to productive capital arose with the arrival of new landholders, companies and in-migrants. Communal authority representatives and their relatives, who facilitated their settlement, were the first to get access to the 'start-up package' for rubber, i.e. good quality rubber seedlings, fertilizers and technical advice for planting. At the same time, the majority of the indigenous population could at best find jobs to clear the land of the new holders. In sum, land acquisitions opened new avenues of social differentiation among indigenous populations.

Change in livelihoods

In this section, we analyse the major changes in livelihoods since the mid-2000s in relation to the various processes of land acquisition presented above. We focus on land areas and land use intensification, on farming systems with particular attention to the capacity to engage in rubber plantation, and off-farm activities. The data we use are from both the semi-structured interviews carried out in 2012-2013 and the questionnaire-based survey carried out in August 2013.

Land asset reduction and land use intensification

The foremost difference in current livelihood systems is in the small areas families hold for farming, as compared to the time where there was no limitation in access to land other than the working force needed to clear it. According to the 2013 survey, for all villages in the two communes, almost two thirds of the families (64 per cent) have less than 5 ha of land to farm, which is deemed the minimum area to meet basic needs (with the current ordinary cropping system including mostly cassava and soya, rice together with vegetables). The median land area per family is 3.9 ha and the mean is 5 ha. This is roughly about half the area that the average family used to farm before the acceleration of land acquisitions a decade ago. The limitation in land availability for farming is uneven among the three villages as well as within each village among families as shown in table 1. Land loss is more acute in Trang village, where half of the families have less than 2 ha, whereas in Pra Lai and Malik villages, this proportion stands at 9.4 and 4.8 per cent, respectively. One fifth -18.7 per cent- of Trang families reported being landless, against 6.2 and 2.4 per cent respectively in the two other villages. From our qualitative interviews, we did not find any indication that land area was less abundant in Trang than in Pra Lai nor Malik prior to the land acquisitions analysed above. The difference is explained mostly by the location of the village, as Mekong Express is expanding on Trang village area and because Khmer migrants have purchased land, whereas they have not reached Pra Lai so far.

Table 3 – Available land area per family in 2013 (in ha) in each village

	Landless	0.1 to 1.9	2 to 3.9	4 to 5.9	6 to 7.9	8 to 9.9	> 10 ha	Total
Pra Lai								
% of families	6.2%	3.1%	18.7%	25%	6.2%	12.5%	28.1%	100%
Cumul. %		9.4%	28.1%	53.1%	59.4%	71.9%	100%	
Trang								
% of families	18.7%	31.2%	31.2%	0%	0%	6.2%	12.5%	100%
Cumul. %		50%	81.2%	81.2%	81.2%	87.5%	100%	
Malik								
% of families	2.4%	2.4%	17.1	36.6%	19.5%	7.3%	14.6%	100%
Cumul. %		4.8%	21.9%	58.5%	78.5%	85.4%	100%	

Family land assets also vary greatly depending on nativity. When crossing the landless and the year of arrival, one can see that two-thirds of the landless (66.7 %) are migrants who settled there over the last two years (2011-2013). At the other extreme, a small share of recent migrants, who arrived after 2006, have purchased land holdings larger than 10 ha (table 4).

Table 4 – Available land area per family and by time of settlement
(3 villages, in 2013, in ha)

Year of arrival	Landless	0.1 to 1.9	2 to 3.9	4 to 5.9	6 to 7.9	8 to 9.9	> 10 ha
Native	16.7%	71.4%	83.3%	95.6%	80%	100%	88.2%
2006-2010	16.7%	14.3%	11.1%	4.3%	20%	0	0
2011-2013	66.7%	14.3%	5.6%	0	0	0	11.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

One third (33.3 %) of the migrants are landless; and almost half of them (46.6 %) have less than 2 ha of land (next table). In comparison, there are only 1.4 percent landless among the native families and only 6.8 per cent of the native have less than 2 ha of land. Most of the migrants make their living first from salaried jobs on rubber plantations, and then as harvesters for the cassava produced by indigenous families who sell their standing crops. These earnings, combined with savings they bring and/or loans tied to mortgaged land at their place of origin, provide the financial capital for the purchase of a first hectare of land, a process that may take sometimes, as well as finding a land plot for sale.

Table 5 – Available land area per family for native and non-native (3 villages, in 2013, in ha)

3 villages	Landless	0.1 to 1.9	2 to 3.9	4 to 5.9	6 to 7.9	8 to 9.9	> 10 ha	Total
% Native	1.4%	6.8%	20.3%	29.7%	10.8%	10.8%	20.3%	100%
Cumul. %		8.2%	28.5%	58.2%	69%	79.8%	100%	
% Non-native	33.3%	13.3%	20%	6.7%	13.3%	0	13.3%	100%
Cumul. %		46.6%	66.6%	73.3%	86.6%	86.6%	100%	

The reduction of the land that indigenous populations can access, has led first to an intensification of land use, typically farming the same plot more times and reducing fallow duration, until rice yield significantly declines. Land use intensification results also from the increasing need for liquid money. Traditional 10-15 years-long fallows no longer exist; fallow land is at risk. 70 per cent of the respondents reported that they did not have any area in fallow at the time that they were interviewed (table 6).

Table 6 – Fallow land crossed with land area (3 villages, in 2013)

	Total	Landless	0.1 to 1.9	2 to 3.9	4 to 5.9	6 to 7.9	8 to 9.9	> 10 ha
No fallow	70%	100%	83.3%	72.2%	65.2%	80%	62.5%	52.9%
Fallow land	30%	0	16.7%	27.8%	34.8%	20%	37.5%	47.1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

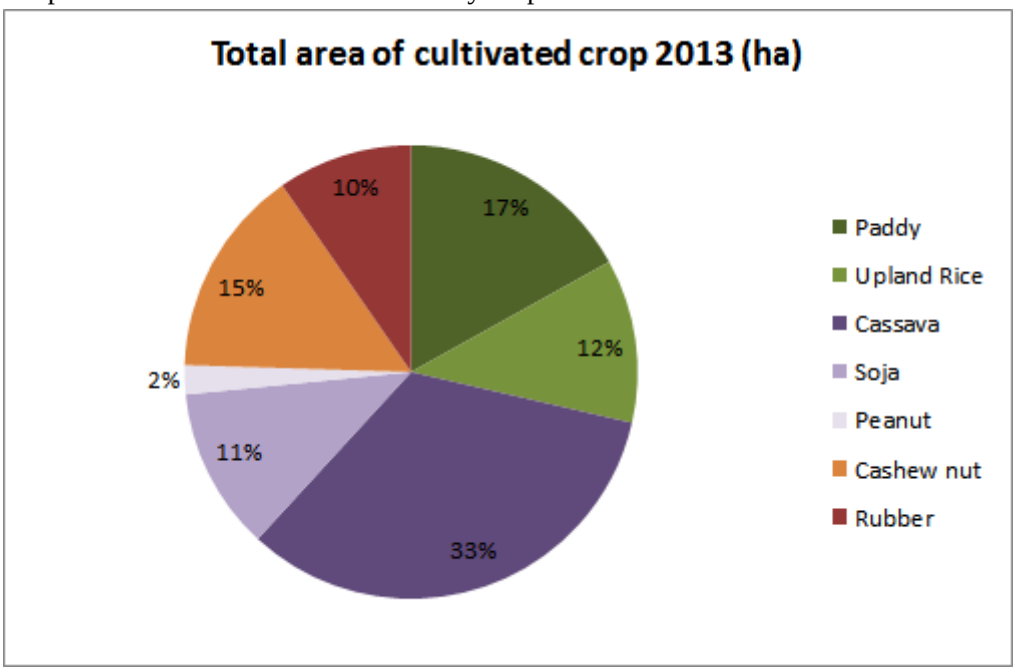
Land use intensification is also related to the fact that families tend to include an increasing number of people to feed, as there is no available land left for the youth to open new fields.

Furthermore, farming what is left of the land is not always profitable: in Trang, we found several cases where near-landless families explained they had not been able to farm the entire area to which they had access because of soil exhaustion. They also explained that they may renounce their right to farm their land because the output is less than what they can expect from off-farm activities, although job opportunities are rather random.

Farming system

Change in farming systems is characterized by stagnation and relative disinterest for cashew nut and cattle, the boom of cassava, a re-investment into paddy rice for those who have access to low-wet-land, and the effort to try to engage into rubber. The graph below shows the distribution of the various plants farmed by the families in the two communes as reported for the year 2013.

Graph 1 - Distribution of farmed land by crop in 2013



Source: SNIS project questionnaire-based survey, August 2013.

If we consider the proportion of families who grow a given plant/tree (table 7), one can see that cassava is the most widespread crop with 82 percent of the families who reported growing cassava in 2013, followed by paddy in the lowlands (56 percent of families), a proportion that is higher than the one for rain fed rice (43 percent of families). The cassava boom occurs in place of rainfed rice for the majority of families.

Table 7 - Percentage of families growing various plants in 2013

	Cassava	Paddy (low wet land)	Cashew nut	Rain fed rice	Soya	Rubber	Peanut
% of families	82%	56%	46%	43%	37%	15%	6%

Cashew nut, which, for a decade, was the cornerstone of a transition towards cash crops, has

become less attractive: Vietnamese traders who were the main buyers, eventually began to purchase less cashew nuts in favour of cassava. The cashew nut price has consequently decreased from 2012 and people have stopped expanding their plantations. Those who have the financial capital, replace cashew nut trees by rubber trees. Nevertheless, the cashew crop remains an important source of cash with 46% of all families still maintaining cashew nut trees, and the crop representing 15% of the total farmed area.

Table 8 - Distribution of families by areas planted with cashew nut trees, and output value (US$)

	0 to 0.5 ha	0.6 to 0.9	1 to 1.9	2 to 3.9	4 to 5.9	6 to 7.9 ha	Total
% of families	17%	3%	49%	25%	5%	0	100.0%
Output value in $	0 to 900 $	40 to 100 $	100 to 400 $	600-2000 $	2000 to 3000 $	max 4500 $	Average 477 $ ha

Overall, the number and importance of cattle are diminishing, with 7 out of 10 households owning only a single buffalo, and a proportion of 8 out of 10 without any cows at all. This is explained by several factors including the overall reduction of space for the animals to graze without supervision, and the fear of families that their animals would damage the neighbouring company rubber plantations and the consequences that this would entail, either as imposed fines, or mandatory death for the obstructive animals. Moreover, the required time to reach the grazing area and monitor their animals is often too far to allow them to access with ease. They further explain that part of their herd was sold as they were in need for cash.

Fifty-six per cent of the households grow paddy in low-wet land, the highest proportion of families engaged in one crop after cassava. Indigenous populations explain they have re-invested in the flooded lowland, which had been rather neglected as they invested in cash crops. Lowland has the advantage of not being sought by external investors as soils are too wet to plant rubber.

Paddy rice cultivation in low-wet (flooded part of the year) was imposed to villagers at the time of the Red-Khmer regime; lowlands were then rather neglected, peoples returned to their former farming practice and crops in rainfed fields *–chamkar-* and even more as they started to plant cashew nut trees. One can observe nowadays a re-investment into lowlands, which are not lusted as they are not suited to tree plantations. In 2013, 56 per cent of the families grew paddy rice in low wet land.

Table 9 - Distribution of families by areas planted with paddy in low land

	0 to 0.5 ha	0.6 to 0.9	1 to 1.9	2 to 3.9	4 to 5.9	Total
% of families	12%	3%	55%	26%	4%	100.0%

43 per cent of the families grew rain fed rice in 2013 (Table 10).

Table 10 - Distribution of families by areas planted with rain fed rice

	0 to 0.5 ha	0.6 to 0.9	1 to 1.9	2 to 3.9	4 to 5.9	6 to 7.9	> 8 ha	Total
% of families	27%	0	59%	10%	0	3%	1%	100%

The foremost change in the cropping system has been the increasing share of farmed land dedicated to cassava, and to a lesser extent, soya bean, partly in place of rice and associated vegetables. Cassava is grown by 82 per cent of all households, with a mean area of 1.98 ha per household, whereas soya is grown by 37 per cent of all households. Cassava has become the cornerstone of farming systems as it provides the main income in a context of increasing needs for cash; cassava is also the main source of savings for capital expenditures (housing, transportation) and eventual investment into rubber.

Table 11 - Distribution of families by areas farmed with cassava, and output value (US$)

	0.1 to 1.9	2 to 3.9	4 to 5.9	6 to 7.9	8 to 9.9	10 and more	Total
% of families	54%	34%	9%	2%	1%	0	100.0%
Output value in $	0 to 900 $	950 to 2400 $	2500 to 4000 $	4800- 6000 $	6000 $	max 6500 $	average 544 $ / ha

Soya bean is cultivated by just over one third of the families (37 per cent) with 59 % farming areas between 1 and 1.9 ha.

Table 12 - Distribution of families by areas planted with soya and output value

	0 to 0.5 ha	0.6 to 0.9	1 to 1.9	2 to 3.9	4 to 5.9	6 to 7.9	Total
% of families	21%	21%	25%	27%	3	2%	100.0%
Output value in $	consumption only		max 70	70 - 500 $	550 - 2000 $	3700 - 4000 $	

Families have made efforts to engage in rubber production, although only 15 per cent reported having rubber trees (for all three villages). The highest proportion of families who have engaged in rubber is found in Pra Lai village (37.5 per cent) (table 13). This can be linked to the relationship that Pra Lai village, particularly the chief of the commune (a villager from Pra Lai) and his relatives -chief of the village, siblings and in-laws- has developed with the Mekong Express management staff as well as with Khmer migrants who hold rubber plantations. Both the company and the Khmer have provided Pra Lai elite with know-how and inputs, such as good quality seedlings, and therefore have boosted their self-confidence in engaging in rubber production.

Table 13 - Proportion of families who have rubber trees (3 villages, in 2013)

	Families having rubber	Families without rubber	Total
3 villages	15.3%	84.6%	100%
Pra Lai	37.5%	62.5%	100%
Trang	18.7%	81.3%	100%
Malik	7.3%	92.7%	100%

From our interviews in Trang village, it is obvious that Trang families, including the chief of the village, have not had the same social experiences with either Mekong Express management or the Khmer as their Pra Lai counterparts. Indeed, all the families who have invested in rubber in Trang (18.7 per cent) are Khmer families. Because of the magnitude of land loss and land sales and the low level of financial capital, rubber is beyond the reach of Trang indigenous families.

The table below shows the distribution of families by areas of rubber.

Table 14 - Rubber area per family (in ha)

	0.1 to 1.9	2 to 3.9	4 to 5.9	6 to 7.9	8 to 9.9	10 and more	Total
number of families	12	14	8	1	0	2	37
% of families	32.4%	37.8%	21.6%	2.7%	0	5.4%	100.0%
Cumulated %		70.2%	91.8%	94.5%	94.5%	100%	

Non-farming and off-farm activities

Given the reduction in available land and the increasing needs of a monetized economy, the majority of local families are more and more in search of alternative economic activities. Yet, only 8.7 percent have reported having a regular salary job. New landholdings initially created jobs: indigenous peoples were contracted by the new landholders for the clearing of a given area, usually paid per hectare of cleared land. They also found opportunities to work during the first years after the trees were planted to take care of the young plantations; during the first two-three years, they could also, in some cases, grow soya or cassava in between the rubber trees (after that initial period, inter-cropping hampers tree growth and is not accepted by rubber owners). Following this early stage, rubber plantations needed less workers, mechanization developed, and companies increasingly hired workers with skills that indigenous peoples did not have. In parallel, the number of in-migrants increased and indigenous peoples were found by companies to be ‘much less interesting’. Khmer owners and managers explained that they much preferred to hire Khmer workers because indigenous populations were less skilled or lacked the specific skills required. Further, companies also explained that indigenous populations were less ‘committed’, i.e. that they would work for a couple of days when ‘available’, but continued to give priority to their own farming activities. Khmer in-migrants, on the other hand, would come to work full time and for a longer duration. In sum, land acquisitions and the rubber boom offered job opportunities to local residents during the early stages, but then mainly created jobs and benefits for more (seemingly) flexible migrant populations. Thus, job opportunities for indigenous populations may actually be diminishing in comparison to the increasing number of opportunities available to in-migrants.

Table 15 - Percentage of families reporting working off-farm

	No	Rarely	Regularly
For rubber companies	97%	2%	1%
For indigenous families	55%	42%	3%
For in-migrant families	42%	53%	4%

The overall process of rural development has certainly created petty opportunities in local trade, agricultural product transformation (cassava), and service linked to the development of transportation (reparation of vehicles, restaurants, etc.). Yet, almost all of these opportunities are seized by in-migrants. 11 percent of households reported having non-farming occupations of their own, and they are almost exclusively non-native households.

Table 16 - Percentage of people reporting non-farming activities

	Regularly	Rarely	No
Retail shop	10%	1%	88%
Trading goods outside	3%	5%	92%
Services	7%	6%	86%

Out-migration has thus far not been an option for the inhabitants of Trang, Pra Lai or Malik: only 3.7 per cent of families reported having one member resident outside the commune, and 4.1 per cent reported that they received remittances. The places of birth and current residence indicate that there is no migration even within districts. The only movement we found was the traditional commuting of young households, whereby husbands went back and forth between their village of origin and the one of their spouse to spend a few years living with their in laws. Thus, the networks of the indigenous population are limited to their commune, neighbouring communes, or, at best, their neighbouring district. Their social network does not allow them to envisage moving beyond their local boundaries to urban areas in search for jobs.

The situation is likely to change given that the current sources of income ‘at home’ meet fewer and fewer of the needs that are on the rise. Where indigenous peoples, particularly youth, are unsure of how to organize their out-migration, a few cases were reported where Vietnamese recruiters approached indigenous youth to recruit them to work in Vietnam. Given the short distance to the border, it would be unsurprising if this kind of recruitment of indigenous workers from Ratanakiri were to continue, particularly as they fill jobs and accept salaries that their Vietnamese peers, even ethnic minorities from the other side of the border, do not accept.[15]

Social differentiation

In this section we address social differentiation among families by crossing land assets with cropping systems, drawing a typology of livelihood transformation, and looking at recent changes in land assets (2010-2013). When looking at the distribution of total farmed land by crops (table 17) in 2013, one can see the emergence, over a period of 5 to 7 years, of a group of families well-endowed in land (more than 8 hectares in total) for which rubber has reached up to 15% of the total cultivated area. For this group, if we add cashew nut, trees comprise over a third of their land. These families have progressively been expanding their rubber plantation area into the land currently cultivated with cassava and soya. In contrast, for the families who hold less than 6 hectares, the need and the search for short-term cash have led them to develop cassava, and to a lesser extent soya, which represents up to two-thirds of their farmed land. Trees, meanwhile, count for around 10%, being confined

[15] In Vietnam, the delocalization of recruitment began a decade ago, when peoples from northern Vietnam ethnic minorities were hired to come to work in Central Vietnam, as they accepted lower salary than Central Vietnam peoples (even local ethnic minority) did not accept.

exclusively to the cashew variety. The share of rice varies little among the groups, comprising around 30% of the total cultivated area.

Table 17- Distribution of farmed land by crop[16]

	Family by total land asset				
Crop	0.1 to 1.9	2 to 3.9	4 to 5.9	6 to 7.9	8 and more
Rubber	0%	0.6%	1.4%	7.5%	12.7%
Cashew nut	5.6%	12.5%	21.4%	19.4%	21.0%
Soya	34.1%	15.9%	6.7%	8.4%	11.2%
Cassava	38.1%	41.6%	30.7%	31.4%	30.1%
Rainfed rice	16.7%	11.1%	14.4%	10.5%	9.3%
Paddy rice	5.6%	16.8%	23.1%	22.0%	14.6%
Peanut	0.0%	1.5%	2.3%	0.8%	1.1%

Differences in output and income are likely to witness a substantial increase, as those who were the first to plant rubber will begin to tap their trees, whereas the majority of families are likely to experience a reduction of their yield of cassava and rice because of the overuse of the land.

Five groups of families can be distinguished when considering how they were affected by, and could respond to, land acquisitions and how they transformed their economic activities over the last 5 to 7 years. This pays particular attention to whether they could engage in rubber production or if they had to turn to off-farm-occupations, two features that did not exist before the mid-2000s.

A first group, which includes village elites and their close relatives, could easily compensate any loss by getting access to other land thanks to their power in their villages. They increased the land they farmed over the same period, in particular for developing rubber plantations of their own on areas that range from 6 to 10 ha. This group, which accounts for 4 per cent of the sample, also includes some of the earliest in-migrants.

A second group, comprised almost exclusively of migrants, is living from the non-farm activities developed in relation to land acquisitions, crop booms and the overall process of rural development and growing interconnectedness with the outside. This group, which represents 7 percent of the sample, includes shop-owners, traders, and families who provide services such as transport, catering, reparation, brokerage, workers' recruitment, and money lending.

They are outsiders to the places where they have initiated their businesses, and are mostly early comers to Ratanakiri. Some of them invested in rubber at the time when land was still cheap, and they now possess plantations similar in size to those of the first group.

A third group includes families which derive the core of their resources from farming for their own, with an increasing share of land dedicated to cash crops, cassava, and soya. In this group, which accounts for 12 per cent of the total in Ratanakiri, households have managed to engage in rubber production. Nevertheless, this occurred with a delay as the households had, at first, to save enough for the start-up capital. Another reason for this delay is that the households were not connected to the rubber companies as the two previous groups had been. Connections to the rubber companies enabled

[16] Note: Table prepared by Katia Covarrubias (IHEID, Geneva)

these groups to be among the first to get access to seedlings and to technical advice. What distinguishes the third group from the previous two is that they do not need to work off-farm or only occasionally.

Livelihoods of the fourth group are marked by the insufficiency of farming activities and the search for salaried work to meet their needs. These families, which count for almost half (49%) of the sample, could not clear land to compensate for what they lost access to. Their income from cassava and soya is not enough to engage in rubber production. This group has thus far managed to keep some land as a basis for earning a basic living, but given the limited area and its overuse, off-farm activities are likely to become the core of their activities. Nevertheless, in-migrant workers continue to compete with them for employment opportunities.

A last group consists of rural workers, mostly recent in-migrants, who are still landless, and a few indigenous families who have become landless. For the indigenous families, such a situation relates to severe cases of dispossession, where households sold too much of their land at an early stage. This is what we found to be the case in Trang village. There were cases where farming had lost its comparative advantage due to soil exhaustion or crops that yielded less money than what could have been derived from off-farm jobs. Thus, the sale of labour became the new viable means of generating an income. In this group, which represents 28 percent of the sample, some families had no choice but to turn to 'desperate' sales of their remaining land assets. The dynamics of change are the opposite for in-migrants that are among those likely to buy these lands.

When considering recent changes in land assets, one can see that differentiation is increasing between native and non-native, as well as among the different social groups. Among native families, 40 percent reported having less land in 2013 than in 2010, whereas the equivalent figure for the non-native population is only 10.7 percent in this case. The non-native population also perform much better in terms of land accumulation: 28.6% of them reported having more land in 2013 whereas the native population reported only 5.5% in this case.

Table 18 - Change in land asset over 2010-2013, native vs. non-native

	Native	Non-native	Native and non-native
Less land	40%	10.7%	32.6%
Same land	54.5%	60.7%	56.1%
More land	5.5%	28.6%	11.3%
	100%	100%	100%

Change in land assets over the period between 2010 and 2013 shows a polarization: among the families who reported having less land, 70% belong to the groups of families with less than 6 ha, whereas among the families who reported having more land, 50% belong to the groups of families with more than 6 ha.

Table 19 - Change in land asset over 2010-2013, per total land area group

	0.1 to 1.9 ha	2 to 3.9 ha	4 to 5.9 ha	6 to 7.9 ha	8 and more	Total
Less Land	5.6%	37.5%	26.4%	9.7%	20.8%	100.0%
Same land	16.1%	29.0%	21.0%	12.9%	21.0%	100.0%
More Land	8.0%	20.0%	24.0%	16.0%	32.0%	100.0%

The changes in land assets held by families show the changes in the dynamics of land

acquisitions. There have not been large-scale land deals since 2010, the last recorded one being the second purchase of land by Mekong Express in 2009); 11,8 % of families reported having lost access to land because of a company over the 2010-2013 period. In contrast, land transaction among families continued: 31% of families reported that they sold land over the same period. Among the families who reported selling land over the 3 years, two-thirds (or 64%) of them belong to the category who hold between 2 and 6 hectares, meaning that these have reduced their land assets to, or below, the minimum of the land area that is deemed needed to cover their basic needs.

Finally, differentiation regarding change in land assets can be assessed by looking at the Prime Minister's Directive 01 (May 2012) and the measurement of land plots that families could claim they had lost if they were located within the boundaries of ELC. The measure is not negligible, as was evident on the ground at the time of measurement (during July and August 2012 in Loum Choar and Malik communes). In Pra Lai, 56 per cent of the families surveyed in 2013 reported that they had land plots being measured; for Malik village, the proportion is 90 per cent. In contrast, none of Trang families reported land measurement, as the land was sold to non-ELC companies, individuals, or to migrant families. Yet, the D01 land measurement operation contributed also to the dynamics of differentiation, as the table below demonstrates. The measured land of the 15% bottom population represent 3.9% of the total measured area, whereas the land of the 20% top population represent 45% of the total measured area.

Table 20 – Measured areas and distribution by family groups

Measured area	0 to 1.9 ha	2 - 3.9 ha	4 - 5.9 ha	> 6 ha	Total
Distribution of families	15.2%	39.2%	25.3%	20.3%	100%
Share of total measured land	3.9%	23.1%	27.8%	45.3%	100%
Average measured area per family	1.2 ha	2.7 ha	5.1 ha	10.3 ha	4.6 ha

Discussion

The interest in the current wave of land acquisitions has been stimulated by their immense scale and, consequently, the substantial impacts that these may entail. Yet, in Ratanakiri the largest land acquisitions were not even the most severe. This is due to a combination of factors. First, the areas overseen by Chea Chenrith and Heng Brothers are further away from the land used by the villagers than they are from those plots purchased by the in-migrants. The case of Mekong Express is a in-between one, smaller in size than Economic Land Concessions but located closer to the lands used by Trang and Pra Lai villagers. Second, part of the land leased to Chea Chenrith and to Heng Brothers was within areas where villagers would hunt and collect natural resources, whereas that sold to in-migrants was already set aside for farming or as fallow land. In this regard also, Mekong Express was slightly apart, as part of it was cropped and fallows, and part of it was communal land covered with forest. Third, the pace of development of the two ELCs left some time and space for former users to continue farming part of the area they were leased, whereas in-migrants immediately used the land they bought. Mekong Express started to clear, prepare, and plant its areas as soon as they were purchased. The company even began to clear part of the land prior to the actual purchase through informal contracts with the local population, who were paid per hectare of cleared land.

The difference in the time it takes from acquisition to effective use and plantation relates not only

to the difference in size, but also to the productive capital that is available to the new landholders. Not all the ELCs have had sufficient capital to develop their plantations as quickly as Mekong Express was able to do. In addition to the space, time, and capital factors, the origin of the new landholders was also found to be important. Local populations dared to respond and even contest foreign-held ELCs, as illustrated by the plantation of rubber trees inside Chea Chenrith by families of Pra Lai, and public demonstrations were held against Heng Brothers in Malik. In contrast, local populations expressed a fear of Khmer owners, whom, they claim, are often high-ranked officials from the government and various 'forces' (army, police, etc.) and who are often seen as individuals with unlimited power.

Focusing on the dimensions of space and time, our intention was to analyse where Pra Lai, Trang, and Malik stand with regard to the agrarian transition induced by the acceleration of land acquisitions from the mid-2000s. It is important to recall that a transition was already underway prior to the acceleration, marked by the introduction of cash crops and the arrival of in-migrants, among others. This transition was also driven by public policies that made the land of indigenous populations an open target and thus paved the way for the acceleration of land acquisitions. On one hand, land deals were established very quickly, and indigenous populations even contributed to the land rush by selling part of their ('plentiful') land, without the knowledge that large-scale land deals were being made simultaneously without their consent. On the other hand, land occupation was slower than land deals figures suggest. Space and time lapse provided the opportunity for some local populations to react by clearing land before the arrival of the newcomers, and eventually by planting trees in an attempt to mark their right to use these lands. In other cases, land deals were synonymous with immediate use and the planting of trees. Occupation even preceded land deals in some cases and local inhabitants found short-term opportunities, at best, to work for the new landholders as to clear the land. On other occasions, the local population lost more than the areas that were dealt, because rubber plantations hampered other activities, typically the rearing of cattle, or because some of the areas they farmed were suddenly distanced and divided from their residences by large rubber plantations through which they were denied passage. Overall, inquiries at a family-level show that the majority of indigenous populations must go further from their village to find farmland than previously, the increasing distance and time being overcome by the use of motorcycles.

Collective resistance against Economic Land Concessions may certainly have strengthened community cohesion, but the internal dynamics of land redistribution within communities have also contributed to its dislocation. Land acquisitions have generated confusion around the conditions tied to the remaining land: to whom it belongs or by who it can be used, if it is under the management of the government or the villagers, if it is prone to being sold, etc. Powerful and well-endowed families have opportunistically engaged in the land rush by clearing land that became de facto their property. Some, typically commune authority representatives, have also engaged in land deals with outsiders to whom they sold communal land areas. Further, they became involved in land deals with ordinary families, buying land from those who once were in search or need of short-term cash and were ultimately forced into making 'desperate sales'.

Distrust among villagers has increased, as some eventually have engaged in land deals with outsiders that have adversely affected the entire population. Community cohesion is also altered as new economic and social alliances have emerged. Notably, the local elite have become acquainted with rubber companies and individuals; they have developed partnerships and become middlemen for outside traders, collecting agricultural products and wood on their behalf.

As the time of plentiful land has come to an end, the duration of fallow was reduced. Villagers have accelerated a transformation in their farming system, which had begun with the earlier introduction of soya and cashew nut as cash crops. Cassava has become the cornerstone of the cropping system, with the great advantage of providing substantial cash per area farmed, as compared to other crops. The reduction of fallow duration and the cassava boom reflects a process of land use

intensification, with an increase of the land use coefficient. Families have increased labour intensity in their fields, as they have less land and not many non-farm or off-farm opportunities. Cassava and soya provide higher output per hectare in cash than rice and associated vegetables. However, producers do not reap all of the value of their output since they sell cassava while still in the farm fields to Khmer families who then harvest and sell dry cassava on the market. Finally, this cropping system is unlikely to be sustainable, since repeated planting of cassava crops exhausts soil fertility.

Families are increasingly in search of non-farming and off-farm activities, but this transition is hampered by the arrival of in-migrants who seize the majority of the new opportunities in trade, services and jobs. The increasing share of non-farming activities as against farming ones is visible at the village level, as illustrated by the number of newly opened shops, and the development of transport services. However, this is not the case for most indigenous families, making allowance for a few exceptions. Similarly, off-farm activities have seen a large increase with the advent of salaried jobs on rubber plantations. Job creation for indigenous populations has been cyclical: they are more likely to find opportunities at the early stages - such as helping to clear the forest and shrublands that were to be planted - and they were less likely to get jobs at the time of tree plantation, which might have provided an opportunity for the workers to farm other crops in-between the young trees. Job opportunities decreased as in-migration increased, because employers much preferred Khmer in-migrants to indigenous peoples, and because companies became partly mechanized. The likelihood of gaining salaried work in plantations then further decreased for indigenous populations as companies started to tap the trees for rubber, work that requires certain skills, which many Khmer have, but indigenous populations do not.

Indigenous populations certainly benefit the increasing interconnectedness with the outside, in terms of access to agricultural inputs and tools, medicine, consumption goods, etc. But interconnectedness benefit more the outsiders: indigenous populations do not have much of comparative advantage vis-à-vis traders, brokers, money lenders, recruiters, etc. All these new actors know better to operate on markets. Producers sell their harvests mostly at home, because they do not know how to sell outside their village where sales price are higher.

Populations can go to buy food and other goods on outside markets, but many also buy in the village to peddlers who come to sell them meet, fish, etc. Villagers used to produce or collect by themselves these items, which they must now pay for.

Although new aspirations to move away from agriculture and from the village begin to develop, the majority of the indigenous populations are confined within the boundaries of their villages and have not had the capacity to develop pluri-local livelihoods. These contradictory processes create tensions within families, typically among parents complaining about boys who ‘steal from them’, children who are reluctant to farm together with their parents and prefer to search for salaried work ‘for themselves’. These facts may reflect the premise of a ‘dis-embedding of households and families’ (Rigg and al, 2012), although its magnitude remains small as there are not that many opportunities for those who are willing to go their own way.

There have been no new large-scale land deals over the period 2010-2013, and some land lost to ELCs was returned to Pra Lai and Malik villagers in compliance with the Directive 01 in 2012. However, the areas effectively occupied and planted by companies are expanding, and the space that remained temporarily accessible to families is shrinking. Aside from this, individual land sales have not come to an end; for ordinary families these sales no longer reflect short-term cash strategies, but a process of dis-accumulation instead.

Conclusion

This paper has used the spatial unit of the village and its surrounding environment as scale of

observation of the various processes of land acquisitions. In addition to semi-structured and questionnaire-based interviews, land plots measurements were found to be very useful to complement or confirm information collected during interviews but also to geolocate household plots and to assess their proximity to other stakeholders, information back information to the analysis.

We have shown that acquisitions as they occur on the ground can substantially differ from what land deals indicate on paper. An adequate account of land loss and its consequences on people must take into account time lapse between signature of the deals and effective use of the land by the new holders. In the same way, we have shown that the opportunities associated with land acquisitions, e.g. land sales, logging, jobs, etc., are uneven over time. Land acquisitions opened 'windows' of short term opportunities, which then closed.

Beyond numbers, the spatio-temporal patterns of land deals implementation shaped the transformation of livelihoods. Differences across spaces, and the timing of implementation led us to focus on the type of investors, their respective plans and productive capital, their reproductive spaces, and the power relations between them and indigenous populations. The differences among villages were found to be key elements to show that different types of investors have triggered off uneven consequences on local livelihoods.

We have then analysed where Pra Lai, Trang and Malik stand in the agrarian transition induced by land acquisitions, rubber and cassava crop booms and the related opening of village economy. Overall, indigenous populations were left with some land in 2013, because there was plenty of it, and as importantly because they could find space and time to react to the wave of land acquisitions. Yet, the planted areas are increasing, companies and as well as family-entrepreneurs continue to try to expand their land holdings, and the flow of in-migrants is not about to stop. As space left to families is consequently shrinking, and because they are unlikely to diversify enough their livelihood systems with non-farming occupations or salary work, the majority of indigenous populations seem cornered in livelihoods that are not anymore sustainable if they are only local.

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About the Author

Christophe Gironde is a political economist, currently working as a lecturer at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) in Geneva. He received his Ph.D. in Development Studies from the University of Geneva. His main research fields are agrarian change and human development, with a focus on Vietnam and more recently on Cambodia.
Email: christophe.gironde@graduateinstitute.ch

Amaury Peeters is a bioengineer specialised in land use planning. He holds a PhD in Agricultural Sciences from the Université catholique de Louvain (UCL). His research interests concern rural development issues combining cartographic and socioeconomic approaches. He has extensive field work experience in both rural Cambodia and Vietnam. Based in Cambodia, his recent research activities at the Graduate Institute of Geneva include the spatial analysis of large-scale land acquisitions and the socioeconomic consequences of the related agrarian transformations on farmers.
Email: amaury.peeters@graduateinstitute.ch