Effects of land use change on soil chemical and biological properties in Teapa, Tabasco (SE-Mexico)

Karina Peña¹, Violette Geißen², Esperanza Huerta²
¹ University of Bonn, Germany, kpena@gmx.de, ² El Colegio de la Frontera Sur Unidad Villahermosa, Tabasco, Mexico

Introduction
Increasing populations in tropical countries lead to severe land use changes. Intensive agroindustrial activities as in banana plantations of Tabasco required the clearing of tropical forests and the intensive application of fertilizers to assure high yields. High market competition in the last years lead farmers to intercrop timber species within the plantations for additional income.

We studied the effect of land use change on soil chemical properties and biological characteristics in three typical ecosystems of Tabasco, SE Mexico.

Materials and Methods

Study area:
- Floodplain of the Teapa River in SE Mexico (Fig. 1)
- Climate: tropical warm and humid
- Mean annual rainfall and temperature: 3440mm, 26°C
- Soils: Fluvisols and Gleysols

Sites (each with two repetitions):
- Banana plantations (B)
- Agroforestry systems (AF)
- Succession forests (SF)

Management in B and AF: open ditch draining system, 200 kg ha⁻¹ y⁻¹ NPK, and fungicides (100 kg ha⁻¹ y⁻¹ Mancozeb)

Experimental design and Treatments:
- Study carried out from Nov. 2005-Feb. 2006
- Randomized experimental design, 10 replications per site
- Soil properties (0-30 cm): pH, soil organic matter (SOM), Ntot C/N, Pₐ₅₀, Kₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑₑᵉ

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Biological properties

Earthworms (Fig. 3)
- Total 10 species: 4 native, 6 exotic
- Succession forests: >80% native
- Managed systems: 60-96% exotic
- Variation not statistically significant due to aggregative distribution of the earthworms

Litter decomposition (Fig. 4)
- Remaining litter after 8 weeks: 8-20% B. integerrima and 24-40% M. acuminata
- Half-life time: B. integerrima 1.8-3.1, M. acuminata 4.1-5.8
- C/N ratio decline with exposition time
- No significant differences within the same litter in the study sites

Conclusions
- Soil fertility was not affected negatively by the intensive management practices in the region.
- Native earthworm fauna was susceptible to land use changes and/or management practices.
- Decomposition was not directly affected by land use, but by the microclimate within the plots.