

*Reassessing forest transition theory: Gender, land tenure insecurity and forest cover change in rural El Salvador*

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Abstract: Rural out-migration, increasing market orientation and forest resource scarcity, according to the forest transition theory, promote the recovery of forests on landscapes in rural areas. However, the drivers and paths in the North American and European case studies, on which the theory was developed, differ in important ways from those drivers and paths observed in case studies conducted in the tropics. The forest transition theory, through a feminist lens, is reassessed by examining the social drivers of forest cover change in a case study in El Salvador. A gender sensitive construction of forest transition theory incorporates the ways in which the social and cultural roles of women interact with migration patterns, land tenure structures, and organizations, such as cooperatives. The results of qualitative research conducted in El Salvador (2005-2007) at the household level and of quantitative research at the regional and national levels demonstrate that ecological processes of forest recovery, through a confluence of factors, have an important, heretofore unrecognized gendered dimension.