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Slash and burn versus “agronegócio”. Tales of forest degradation in the maroon area of Vila Bela da SantíssimaTrindade, Mato Grosso, Brazil

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Over the last four decades, deforestation in Brazil occurred systematically in the area known as the “arcof deforestation”, an extensive geographical area located in the interface of the Cerrado and the Amazon biomes.
The deforestation process replaces the forest and the slash and burn agriculture systems by modern intensive agriculture systems targeted at the production of cash crops like cotton, maize or soybeans, and to graze cattle.The so called “agronegócio” system.
The reduction of pristine forest areas where traditional (indigenous, maroons and riverside) population conduct slash and burn agriculture, reduces the recovery time of the abandoned fields after exhaustion by agriculture crops, reason why the return to the same spots for another cycle of slash and burn occurs before the forest recovers completely from the previous cycle. In fact, the frequency of the cycles is increasing with the expansion of farm land and the reduction of available forest.
This work encompasses the reasons, causes and/or motivations of the deforestation trends in the Vila Bela da SantíssimaTrindade, near the Bolivian border of Mato Grosso in Brazil, over a time span of four decades.
The arc of deforestation has passed the region in the 1980’s, leaving yet a large area of pristine forest where the traditional communities kept practicing a slash and burn agriculture system.
Nevertheless, due to the reduction of available area, and specially due to the exposure of traditional communities to the “western civilization culture”, there is an increasing abandonment of the traditional systems and associated culture and knowledge. In this context, the traditional communities may become a deforestation/degradation factor.
To prevent this situation, the GUYAGROFOR project was implemented, to value traditional knowledge, identify bottlenecks in the increase of added value to the local traditional products, and to test methodologies to maintain and if possible improve soil fertility near the small households.
The deforestation/degradation processes and the impacts of the proposed mitigation action are discussed.