

Land, inequality and power in Latin America

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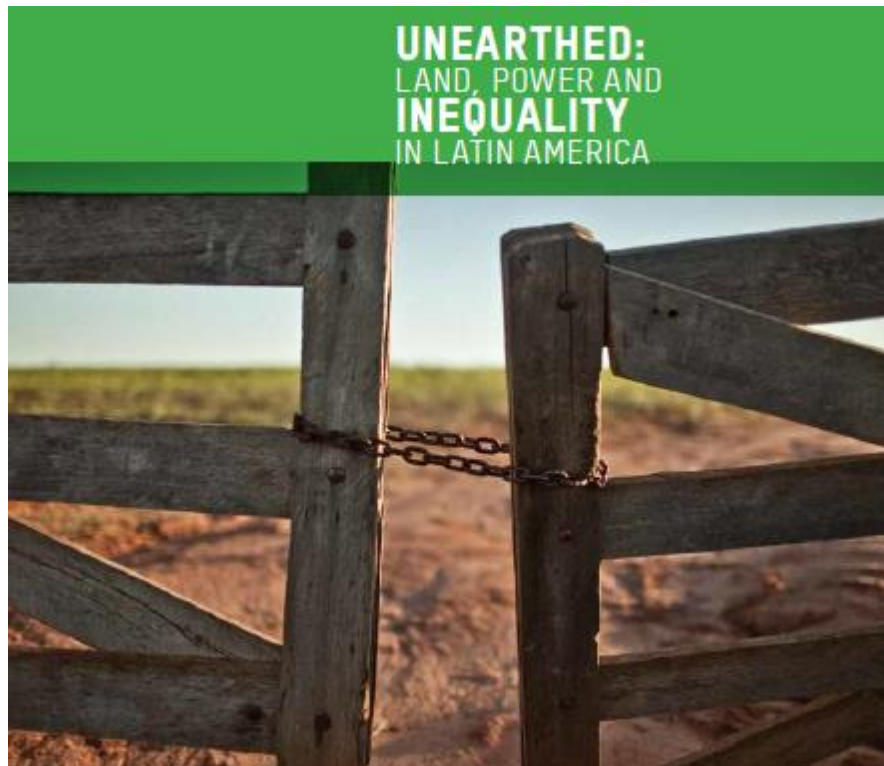
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OXFAM

Land Governance to End Poverty

- To end poverty → reduce inequality
- Core determinant of inequality: land distribution
- Improving land governance ≠ formalizing existing land inequality



**REDUCE
LAND INEQUALITY**

**TO
END POVERTY**

WHY LAND INEQUALITY MATTERS

Land inequality = extreme concentration of access to and control over land + limited distribution of benefits from land use

- **Development**
 - Land inequality is at the core of economic inequality
 - Links between land distribution and economic growth, poverty
- **Conflict**
 - Struggle for land at the root of conflicts and civil wars
 - Access to land is central to peace processes and conflict resolution
- **Democracy**
 - Control over land = economic and political power
 - Land-based power can be used to challenge democratic systems

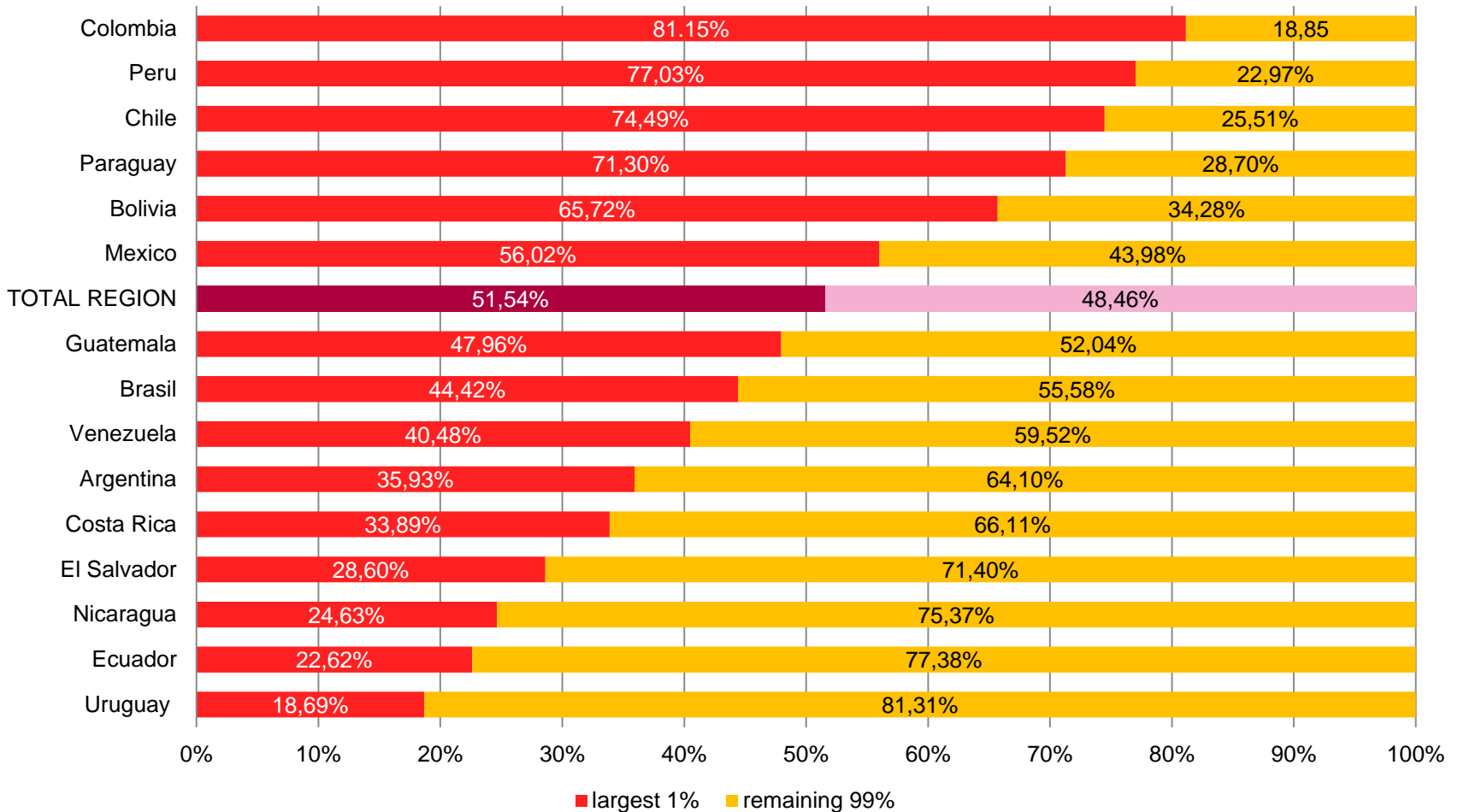


DATA ON LAND CONCENTRATION IN LATIN AMERICA

- Region with most unequal land distribution (Gini)
- Trend toward higher concentration of land
- Inequality is greater at the extremes (Palma)
- 1% of farms control over half of productive land
- 80% of farms control less than 13% of land
- Gender gap: women control 8 to 30% of farms



% OF LAND HELD BY LARGEST 1% OF FARMS IN LATIN AMERICA



% OF LAND HELD BY SMALL FARMS

	Smallholdings					
	Number		Percentage		Average size (ha)	Size
	Agricultural Production Unit (APU)	Area (ha)	APU	Area (ha)		
Country	South America					
Argentina	246,947	23,212,207	83.0%	13.3%	94.0	<500 ha
Bolivia	718,319	2,764,221	83.4%	8.0%	3.8	<20 ha
Brazil	4,448,648	70,691,698	86.0%	21.4%	15.9	<100 ha
Chile	208,424	1,148,822	74.8%	3.9%	5.5	<20 ha
Colombia	2,447,244	4,226,846	84.0%	3.8%	1.7	<10 ha
Ecuador	636,375	1,463,212	75.5%	11.8%	2.3	<10 ha
Paraguay	264,047	1,960,081	91.4%	6.3%	7.4	<50 ha
Peru	1,754,415	2,268,752	79.3%	5.9%	1.3	<5 ha
Uruguay	36,767	3,619,509	82.1%	22.1%	98.4	<500 ha
Venezuela	349,106	3,039,152	82.3%	11.2%	8.7	<50 ha
	Central America					
Costa Rica	62,925	184,881	67.6%	7.7%	2.9	<10 ha
El Salvador	335,020	216,258	85.8%	24.5%	0.6	<2 ha
Guatemala	718,585	609,755	86.5%	16.3%	0.8	<3.5 ha
Honduras	191,138	281,772	70.6%	8.6%	1.5	<5 ha
Nicaragua	185,934	646,036	70.8%	10.7%	3.5	<14 ha
Panama	201,270	272,935	81.8%	10.1%	1.4	<10 ha
South America	11,063,585	99,191,689	82.9%	12.3%	9.0	
Central America	1,694,872	2,211,637	81.0%	11.6%	1.3	
TOTAL	12,758,457	101,403,326	82.7%	12.3%	7.9	

LAND INEQUALITY IN COLOMBIA

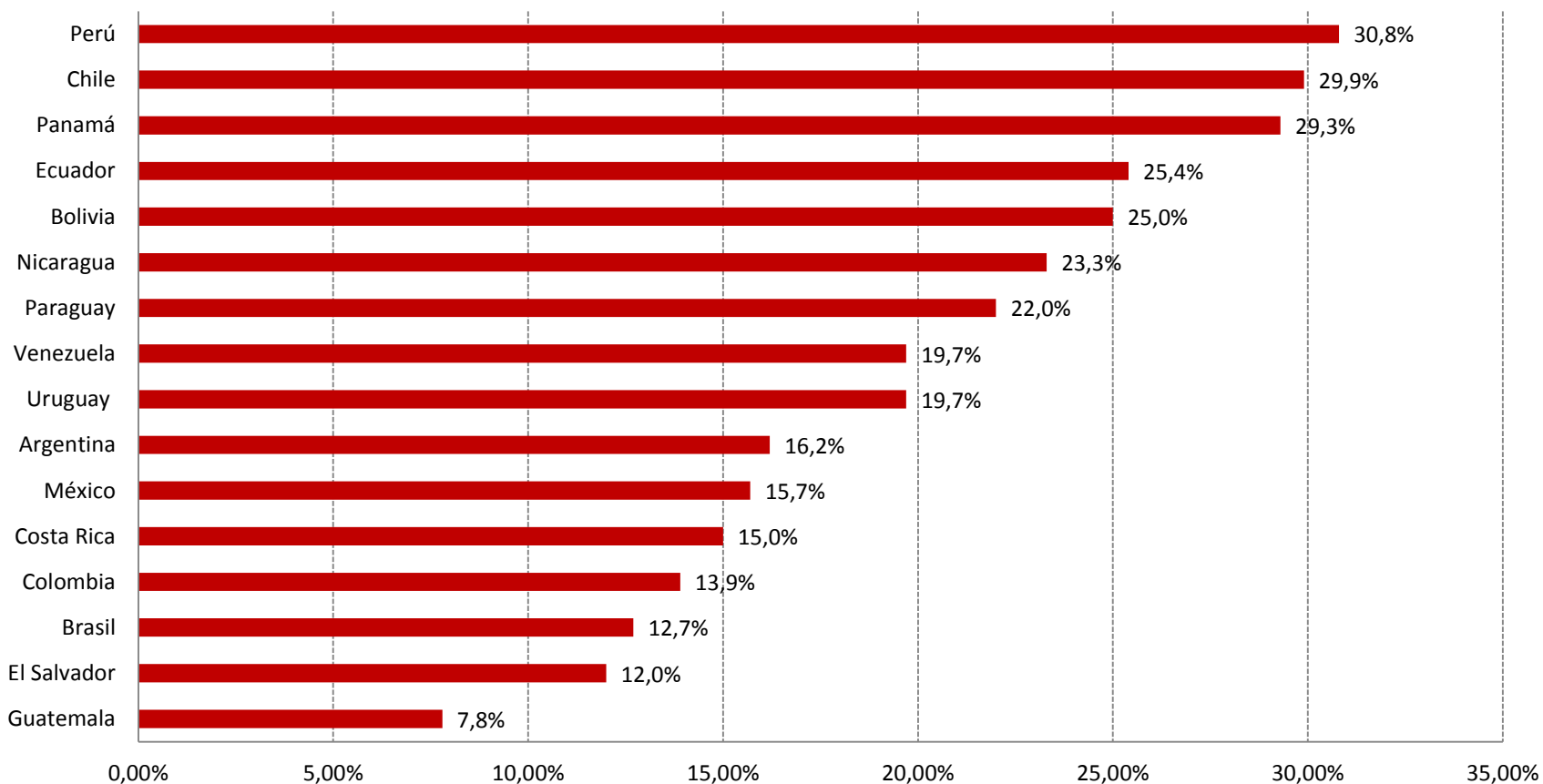
- 0.1% of farms are >2,000 ha = 58.7% of land
- 81% of farms are <10 ha = 4.9% of land
- Nearly 1 million smallholdings have less land than that available on average to a cow

704 HOLDINGS
(49,135 ha on average)
control half the land

2.046.536 HOLDINGS
(17 ha on average)
share the other half



% of Female-Headed Farms in Latin America



DRIVERS OF LAND INEQUALITY: “EXTRACTIVISM”

Extractivism = economic activity based on large-scale extraction and exploitation of land and natural resource wealth

- **Oil, gas and mining concessions:** over half of exports from Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador & Peru are extracted from subsoil
- **Extensive livestock farming** continues to expand in the Chaco, leading to the world’s highest rate of deforestation
- **Flex crops (soy, sugarcane, oil palm)** have expanded at an unprecedented rate across most of the region
- **Forestry plantations** are expanding by over half a million hectares/year, particularly in Brazil, Chile and Mexico

High dependency: commodities make up over 50% of exports

Enclave economies: limited employment, revenue generated

DRIVERS OF LAND INEQUALITY: CONTROL BY THE FEW

Control over land = control over the benefits from land use

- Control over land can take many forms: e.g., ownership, lease, concession, out-grower scheme
- Control over infrastructure for market access enables further control over the benefits from resource extraction
- Dominance of few actors – MNCs, with Latin American corporations comprising 1/3 of land investment
- Land as a financial asset – growing role of international financial actors

Land inequality + growing concentration of control over market infrastructure → more concentration of wealth

DRIVERS OF LAND INEQUALITY: POLITICAL CAPTURE

Political capture = when gov't policymaking caters to specific interests of a privileged few instead of serving the public interest

- Policy reforms often facilitate land concentration rather than broader access or redistribution
- Public policies are biased toward attracting large investment in extractive activities, neglecting investment in family farming
- Extractive activities contribute disproportionately little revenue to the public purse thanks to tax breaks and tax avoidance
- International agreements serve to protect foreign investors, at a potentially high cost to governments and communities



EFFECTS OF LAND INEQUALITY: CONFLICT, HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS

A human rights crisis has taken hold in Latin America

- Relation between expansion of extractivism, and land conflicts and violence against rights defenders
- Women on the frontline, suffer specific forms of violence
- Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples are particularly vulnerable
- Peasant communities, faced with no alternatives to access land, resort to land occupations to demand their rights

All face highly unequal competition over land with powerful groups who reap huge profits from its natural resource wealth



CONCLUSION

Inequality in access to and control over land is extreme and getting worse in Latin America

It is a systemic problem, driven largely by extractivism

We must reduce land inequality and address its drivers in order to reduce poverty and achieve more inclusive, prosperous societies

- A new redistribution of land is needed, to enable broader access to and control over land + the benefits from its use
- Concrete actions are needed to eliminate privileges granted to economic elites and to limit their influence on public policy
- The rights of peoples and communities defending their land and territories must be recognized and upheld; persecution and criminalization of human rights defenders must end

