

LOCAL – NATIONAL

A) Local management of the Amazonian floodplain

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In the last 20 years, different initiatives have experimented with natural resource management in Latin America. As part of the democratisation process, some governments have supported participatory management systems where different stakeholders have been involved in the policy-making process. The management of the Amazonian floodplain is a case in point. In the past decade, the Brazilian government has been working together with NGOs and the local population to define policies for sustainable use of the Amazonian floodplain system. To date, few accomplishments have illustrated the importance of this process. However, the limited rights given to the local population to manage the floodplain resources have been a key factor in the limited success of this co-management system.

To solve this structural problem, the federal government recently decided to implement the Agro-extractive Settlement Project (PAE) in the floodplain. The PAE was designed to preserve traditional livelihoods based on the sustainable management of local resources. According to this model, all land remains the property of the federal government but local residents are conceded rights of use. The PAE recognizes both individual and collective rights to resources within the settlement territory. PAE resource use is based on a Utilization Plan prepared by PAE residents in collaboration with a federal agency. A household's right to live in the PAE depends on compliance with the Utilization Plan.

What in principle could represent a major advance in the co-management process in the region is now at risk due to the way the project has been carried out. In a few months, the federal agency in charge of the implementation of the PAEs has transformed virtually all the major floodplain systems in the Lower Amazon. Thirty-eight PAEs have been created over approximately 750,000 hectares in eight municipalities with a total population of 63,000 people. Lack of communication, poor information networks, and lack of discussion between the parts involved have added to the confusion created during this land demarcation process. An NGO was recently invited to carry out a complementary programme of participatory research to support the local organizational development and to help them to elaborate the Utilization Plan.

This research will focus on the institutional arrangement of the PAEs and the process of its implementation in the floodplain. Further, the responses of different actors to the new management system and the ecological outcome will be addressed. The project will initially focus on six case studies including three municipalities. Other case studies will be added in later stages. The project will be carried out with collaborators in Brazil. The expected product of this research will be published in an edited volume and in scientific magazines.