

Limits of the “Negotiation Platform”: Two Cases on Participatory Municipal Planning on NRM in the Brazilian Amazon



Natural resource management (NRM) is intimately linked to the dynamics of land occupation and resource appropriation by different stakeholder with diverse interests. This is especially true in the “agriculture frontier” zones that are characteristic of much of humid tropical forests. This paper analyzes two action research experiments on participatory municipal planning of natural resource management in the Brazilian Amazon.

A group of researchers who teamed up with local and regional farmers’ organizations found out that when different approaches to participatory planning on NRM at the municipal level were done, different reactions were elicited from the townspeople, consequently affecting the way that natural resources were preserved and managed.

The local action-research team was the Transamazonian Agro-Ecological Laboratory or LAET. Their partners were the local and regional farmers’ organizations under the Mouvement Pour La Survie de la Transamazonienne (MPST, movement for the survival of the Trasamazonian).

The research team, LAET, chose an intervention method based on seeking consensus among the various parties (stakeholders) involved, called the “multi-user negotiation platform.” This is also called the “patrimonial approach” with the underlying hypothesis that participatory planning for municipal development would include issues of land occupation (who are the types of people in the area?) and natural resource



The “participatory approach” seemed appropriate and favorable because municipal planning was promoted by local stakeholders, particularly the farmers’ organizations.

Participatory planning experiments focused on natural resource management were established successively in two different Transamazonian municipalities: in Uruara (1993-1996) and in Porto de Moz (1996-ongoing). The results are discussed in the following cases.

Case 1. The Use of Multi-Stakeholder Platforms: Municipal Planning of Forest Resource Use in Uruara

Uruara is a municipality along the Transamazonian Road, some 180 km west of Altamira. The area was developed when the Brazilian government opened a road through the Amazon forest, formerly Indian area, in the 1970s. Forest enterprises including sawmill operation are major sources of income in Uruara.



Problem/Situation

Initial interviews among the local farmers and researches conducted by LAET showed that among the problems that the local folk were facing, the one the farmers greatly feared, was the massive arrival of sawmills exploiting both public and private forests in an anarchical and uncontrolled manner. LAET also discovered that figures on the volume of wood extracted and the profits made by the *madeireiros* or foresters were twice the official figures.

Approach Used

LAET’s research results were presented in municipal conferences. Its initial report on problems was presented in a “municipal conference for alternative economic projects”. Its more in-depth study on the forest sector was presented at the March 1995 Municipal Conference on “the forest and wood”. These conferences were attended by foresters, representatives of farmers’ associations and communities, local and national authorities, and some political figures of the state of Para.

Results

Research results created varied reactions from the diverse stakeholders. For the local people, the results guided them in coming up with innovative proposals for better resource management. Some proposals truly seemed able to benefit all while others were acceptable to all groups but only under certain conditions. This proved that it was possible to find an acceptable common ground despite strong opposition among different social groups.

The *madeireiros*, however, strongly criticized LAET's report on the considerable margins earned by forest enterprises.

Public officials and political figures used the conferences to push for their own political agenda. Representatives from various public offices took this opportunity to draw public attention to Uruara and justify its preferential treatment by government authorities. Uruara was the first in the area to be given a new line of credit for farming; a new settlement project for landless farmers was also launched. In reality, however, the decision to give Uruara priority had been made even before the first conference. It was part of an agreement between the governor of the state, the curate, and other local political figures, to win a new city hall in the Transamazonian region through a regional alliance between two political parties. Uruara was to be the center of this alliance. In the end, however, the governor's candidates were not elected despite the considerable economic support of sawmill owners.



Little by little, LAET was pushed out of the Uruara planning process as it was regarded as “bothersome”, especially after the forestry seminar. The innovative proposals presented by the local people were also forgotten by the local government and the State. In fact, for the conference initiators, the conference's purpose was not really to apply these proposals but to draw public funding of any sort. The local technicians working for the Government agencies (particularly the extension services and regional development agencies) and the outside researchers invited for their expertise --far from bringing neutral knowledge that could be made available to local stakeholders - -also participated in function of their own interests and strategies, including politics. This is why the local elite pushed aside LAET at the crucial point when proposals were to be transformed into projects or training for farmers.

Lessons

It is not enough to simply analyze the strategies of various stakeholders vis-à-vis their interests in the resources; one must also take into account their larger

strategies, in this case, the field of national politics. The “strategic stakeholders” may give greater importance to hoped-for political benefits than they do to possible economic benefits (from, for example, a new wood optimization technology).

The participatory municipal planning process in Uruara bogged down because of:

- ❑ Failure of LAET to recognize and analyze the political context and forces working in the area, as well as the strategies of the different stakeholders.
- ❑ Unrealistic belief that discussions among the different participants could be held in an equal footing and that they could produce proposals for the good of all.
- ❑ Failure of Government to act as referee and to guarantee all the agreements are reached.

The Platform Method of Multiple Stakeholder Negotiation

The platform method of multiple stakeholder negotiation was tested in the context of municipal participatory planning. The research confirmed the potential of participatory research as a tool that facilitates a discussion by a community on its future. PAR also helps in making the local stakeholders more conscious of the probable long-term consequences of present activities and practices. Through PAR, innovative proposals were formulated (establishing local control of fishing, creating community forests reserves, and encouraging local wood processing with low-impact technologies). The cooperation between researchers and farmers’ representatives was particularly efficient when the farmers’ representatives assumed the facilitation role.

The process was not successful when the government represented only the interests of a small but powerful minority. For example, in Uruará, the local elite manipulated the planning process to their own advantage and against the interests of the majority of the small farmers. Therefore, the multiple stakeholder platform method was not applicable in the context of the frontier. The existence of “state of law” (passing of democratically enacted state and local laws and their reliable enforcement) and democratic ethics are necessary for its efficiency.

In the absence of state of law, the participatory research should concentrate first on reinforcing the weaker categories of the population and on analyzing political power relationships in the local communities and regions. This tactic may prove especially desirable where both the national government and the local poor majorities have common interests in better natural resource management and land use. By establishing such a coalition, the capacity of the local elite to block action would be diminished.

Development of Sustainable Farming Systems

Classical methods of research-development and the farming system approach were also used in order to encourage the development of sustainable farming systems. One of the outputs of this activity was a demonstration on the development of traditional commercial perennial crops of the region (cocoa, coffee, pepper) as the most efficient way to intensify agriculture in a sustainable way. The combinations of perennial and annual crops, however, were not economically sustainable.

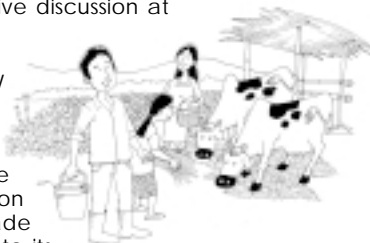
Based on existing technologies and farmers’ conditions, LAET can now formulate models of sustainable farming systems in the region. These models could be important tools to orient future agricultural research and extension as well as appropriate policies especially on land reform and credit for the region.

The Platform Method of Multiple Stakeholder Negotiation ...continued

Partnership with Farmers' Organizations

The farmers' organizations were interested in sustainable development and better management of natural resources at the regional level. It effectively disseminated information in the cases in which both the farmers' organization and the farmers had common interests in the proposed innovation. Such organizations also played an important role in representing the farmers in other instances such as negotiation with the State, which permitted advances in specific fields, including natural resource management. Moreover, the organizations were an important part of collective discussion at the municipal and regional level.

However, the farmers' organizations also had many other priorities and objectives. As a result, they effectively pressured the research team. The pressure resulted from the demands of individual farmers and organizations whose interests were contrary to these demands. The farmers' organization facilitated the research in most cases, but also made research difficult or blocked it when it was contrary to its interests.



The establishment of a common strategy was not achieved. It was impossible to conclude that the choice of the farmers' organizations is the most appropriate for PAR on natural resource management in the frontier context. Researchers cannot expect that representatives of farmers' organizations will necessarily state clearly their own priorities and expose their strategies at the beginning of the cooperation. The researchers, too, can be blamed for a lack of transparency. They never explained their professional objectives to the farmers nor their need for scientific recognition.

Adapted from:
Carl F. Jordan and Christian Castellonet
Email: cfjordan@arches.uga.edu

Case 2. A Negotiation Platform that Empowers the Dominant Majority: Zoning and Participatory Municipal Planning in Porto de Moz

The area around Porto de Moz is more characteristic of the occupation of the Amazon since the 16th century. Most of the Porto de Moz population – *cabaclos*– have been on the riverbanks for several generations. Until the 1960s, hunting and gathering were the principal economic activity; since then, wood extraction has grown important.

Cabaclos refers to the mixed-race population (Indians – Africans “imported” to the region during the slave era, and Europeans) who generally live along the riverbanks.

Problem/Situation

Since the forest and the river were important sources of livelihood, the Porto de Moz municipio (municipality) requested help from LAET to organize a conference on “the future of wood and fishing”. The people already had three seminars prior to this and they decided they needed technical and financial support for a more ambitious event.

A rapid assessment of the natural resource situation showed the following problems:

- ❑ Rampant logging such that the forest could be depleted in 10-15 years.
- ❑ No alternative source of income for traditional people.
- ❑ Forest companies, unscrupulous people and speculators were claiming large tracts of land in the forests leaving little land left for the traditional inhabitants. There was pressure on the local people to sell their lands to the forest companies at a very low price.



Approach Used

Because of the Uruara experience (Case 1), LAET decided to use a different participatory planning strategy. Working closely with MPST, they decided to dialogue first with local organizations to strengthen them. Once these groups had finalized and consolidated their objectives and strategies, they would negotiate with other local stakeholders and government.

LAET held a seminar on the results of its rapid assessment. This was attended by grassroots communities, representatives from other municipalities, local technicians and a representative of the Secretary of State and the Environment. After the results were presented, participants were split into small groups to discuss issues and come up with proposals. The technicians and researchers were grouped separately. The local organizations and the communities prepared a list of proposals that the communities would do.

Results

After the conference, a committee for natural resource management planning was formed that was made up of representatives of local organizations. This committee set priorities, prepared a program of action and monitored the local implementation of the action plans. They called on LAET and MPST only when needed.

Among the important results of the committee were:

- ❑ rapid multiplication of many community-established rules limiting fishing in the rivers and real control of professional fishing in their areas;
- ❑ support of the federal environment agency (IBAMA);
- ❑ discussions on establishing “community forest reserves” in four communities;

- ❑ organization of an “environmental awareness-raising” program by local organizations which included presenting environmental laws and the proper authorities to contact in case of conflicts;
- ❑ creation of a protected area in the flood area around a seasonal lake named “Lago du Urubu”; and
- ❑ support gained from the Para land office (ITERPA) in giving the Porto de Moz farmers union, access to its records.

Lessons

This experience tested a new method of participatory research for natural resource management. Unlike the “multi-user negotiation approach”, priority was given to the majority of small rural producers and their organizations. Establishing a “negotiation platform” can only be done after these groups have been strengthened and have acquired a clearer idea of their own interests and their NRM strategies.

Conclusions

Several conclusions may be drawn from the two cases described.

- ❑ To efficiently support participatory planning of natural resource use, one must be able to analyze and understand the strategies and interests of the various groups. One should also be aware of dissimulation tactics, systematic distortion of information and local power or political relationships.
- ❑ Traditional inhabitants of the Amazon (*ribeirinhos*) and the small migrant farmers (*colonos*) can have real interest in preserving and managing natural resources especially fishing and forests, if they can earn regular additional income from them and if the government is ready to delegate land or natural resource management for what had until then been considered as “free and not owned”.
- ❑ In the context of the Brazilian “frontier”, direct use of “platform” negotiation methods and discussion among all parties is not realistic. These methods presuppose government support and an efficient legal system to guarantee that any consensual agreements reached are respected. The Uruara experience underscores the need to empower the dominated majority before entering negotiations with other stakeholders.
- ❑ Participatory action-research can effectively contribute to empowerment and provide new solutions for better local NRM. This new approach may be particularly useful in situations where the national government and the majority of the local populations share an interest in improving NRM and the local elite has opposing interests.

The “multi-stakeholder platform” method was used with limited success in the first. In the second, priority was given to the empowerment of the weaker and more numerous stakeholders (the small farmers and traditional populations) with more encouraging results. Analysis of the two cases leads to the conclusion that the platform approach is not adapted to situations where the state is absent or weak.

References

- Barton, T., G. Borrini-Feyerabend, A. de Scherbini and P. Warren. 1998. *Nous et Nos Ressources. Recherche-Action Participative sur la Dynamique Demographique et L'environnement Local: Comment Appuyer les Communautés Rurales*. UICN. Gland.
- Bertrand, A. and J. Weber. 1995. *Vers Une Politique Nationale de Gestion Des Ressources a Madagascar*. 5th IASCP Conference: Bodo, Norway, 24-28 May 1995.
- Castellanet, C. and C.F. Jordan. 2002. *Participatory Action-Research in Natural Resource Management. A Critique of the Method Based on Five Years' Experience in the Transamazonica Region of Brazil*. Taylor and Francis, New York.
- Fals-Borda, O. and M.A. Rahman. 1991. *Action and Knowledge. Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action-Research*. Apex Press, New York.
- Liu, M. 1997. *Fondements et Pratiques de la Recherche-Action*. L'Harmattan, Paris. 351 p.
- Mello, R., C. Rocha and M. Dos Santos. 1998. *Um Aporte Metodológico a Pesquisa-acao Como Menismo Potencializador da Reulacao do Uso Dos Recursos Florestais. o Caso das Comunidades Ribeirinhas do Baixo Rio Xingu. Brasil*. (Paper presented at the Bordeaux seminar, Regards, Sept. 1998).
- Ollagnon, H. 1989. *Une Approche Patrimoniale du Milieu Naturel, In Dur Rural a L'environnement*, M. Jolivet (ed.). Ed. INRA, Paris.
- Rocha C., C. Castellanet and R. Mello. 1996. *Diagnostico Rapido Participativo do Municipio de Porto de Moz - Recursos Naturais*. (polycop.) 34 p. + annexes. LAET, Altamira, Dec. 1996.
- Roling, N. 1994. *Creating Human Platforms to Manage Natural Resources: First Results from a Research Program*, In: Seminar International RSADR. CIRAD, Montpellier, p. 391-395.
- Salgado, I. and C. Castellanet. 1997. *Recherche Participative et Planification Locale Pour L'utilisation Des Ressources Forestieres. Le Cas Du Municípe d'Uruara En Amazonie Bresillienne. Communication au Seminaire du NEAF a Maraba*, March 1997, Universite federale du Para, Belem.
- Sawyer, D. 1990. *The Future of Deforestation in Amazonia: A Socioeconomical and Political Analysis*. pp. 265-274. In: Anderson, A.B. (ed.) *Alternatives to Deforestation*. Columbia Un. Pres. New York.

Contributed by:

**Christian Castellanet, Iliana Salgado and
Carla Rocha**

Email: castellanet@gret.org