

Integrating Training, Research and Social Learning for the Collaborative Management of Complex Socio-Ecological Systems in the Brazilian Amazon

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This paper describes our experience with developing a training, research and social learning process to address the challenge of reconciling conservation and development through the collaborative management of natural resources involving an array of disciplinary fields, stakeholders and institutional arrangements. We are combining theories and methods from complex socio-ecological systems, social learning and research-action for the collaborative management of frontier regions in the Amazon. A first training course was held in 2009, in partnership with Brazilian Universities, NGOs and government, which triggered the development of a two-year graduate course integrated with a complementary set of research projects. The participants of the course and research activities represent a diversity of institutional backgrounds, areas of expertise and professional experience in the Amazon region. This group is in turn collaborating with a diversity of local stakeholders representing government, civil society and landowners of different types (indigenous peoples, ranchers, small holders and loggers) in the Municipality of Cotriguaçu in Northwestern Mato Grosso State. We are working with these actors to development scenarios of current and future land-use practices and their impact on the biophysical and socio-economic landscape at multiple scales. Through dialogue with different sectors of the local community, the models and scenarios we are developing will inform management and policy decisions for the region, including the development of Mato Grosso state's pilot REDD project. The theoretical and methodological framework applied in the training and research activities is also being replicated in other Brazilian universities and research projects throughout the Amazonian region.