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FIELD RESEARCH GRANT REPORT
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JURISDICTIONAL REDD+ AND SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTALISM IN ACRE, BRAZILIAN AMAZON
Marcelo Santos Rocha da Silva

With an area of 63,406 mi², approximately the size of Nepal, of which 87% (14 million hectares)¹ are still primary rainforest cover, the Brazilian State of Acre, Southwestern Amazonia, has a high potential for carbon sequestration. More than half of Acre is occupied by protected areas and indigenous territories, zones with high rates of forest cover (97% and 98% respectively). In private lands and rural settlements, those rates are significantly lower (78% and 58%)².

Because of its tradition of forest-based development innovative policies, in 2010 Acre formulated a pioneer jurisdictional REDD+ strategy, considered the most advanced subnational policy for forest carbon sequestration in the world (Fishbein & Lee, 2015, p. 31; Stickler et al, 2018, p. 153), named ISA Carbono. According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), REDD+ is a form of payment for climate-related ecosystem services, which attempts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation through forest conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks. Jurisdictional REDD+ programs differ from private project-based REDD+ programs because the jurisdictional focus calculates ecosystem services for carbon sequestration based on the political territories of national states or sub-national units instead of specific properties or community lands. In this regard, the state is the main payee for those REDD+ derived services and responsible for distributing the benefits among the diverse stakeholders often according to its own criteria. A potential advantage of this state-based mechanism which encompasses larger portions of land is the possibility of managing the occurrence of carbon “leakage,” which means the increase of carbon emissions in one area as a result of emission reduction in another.

The Acre jurisdictional REDD+ program ISA Carbono has also been praised by policy-makers and practitioners for being the first subnational REDD+ program in the world. Most of the scholarly literature and NGOs’ studies about ISA Carbono, however, have not examined its impacts on forest conservation or sustainable development. Many policies in Acre designed in last 20 years to support forest-based development and create economic value for the standing forest found in ISA Carbono a source of supplementary funding. The expansion of agribusiness in the land of rubber tappers where the ISA Carbono project is being implemented, however, raises questions about the feasibility of forest-based livelihoods and new economic paradigms under capitalism.

The overall objective of this research is to analyze the factors that have affected the capacity of ISA Carbono to increase the economic value of both the standing forest and the traditional forest-based

¹ KfW. REDD+ in the State of Acre, Brazil: Rewarding a pioneer in forest protection and sustainable livelihood development. <https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/PDF/Entwicklungsfinanzierung/ThemenNEU/REDD-Early-Movers-Acre-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

² Idem.

livelihoods, since the creation of ISA Carbono in 2010. Three central questions drive this study. **First**, the overarching question that informs theories of REDD+ and payments for ecosystem services (PES): **Has jurisdictional REDD+ in Acre succeeded in reducing local carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation from 2011 to 2018?** Research questions **two** and **three** are more empirical and designed to guide specific research activities:

Research question two: What have been the primary successes and main challenges to implementing ISA Carbono?

Research question three: Under what criteria have financial resources from ISA Carbono been allocated?

Data gathered in the process of answering the aforementioned questions will help test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Jurisdictional REDD+ in Acre has not succeeded in reducing local carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation due to insufficient funding. Local policymakers and international partners had high expectations on carbon markets, which have not been consolidated yet.

Hypothesis 2: Jurisdictional REDD+ in Acre has not succeeded in reducing local carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation due to inefficient strategy. Impact may have been weakened because the distribution of benefits is pulverized or not focusing on projects, sectors or groups with the highest potential of impact on the dynamics of deforestation and conservation.

Selection of the 2011-2018 time period to focus this study is based on the fact that ISA Carbono was created in late 2010 and its governance was deeply altered by the new state government in Acre in early 2019, which means that the impacts of this change may not be clearly observed yet. Moreover, the deforestation data for 2019 may not be available up to the date of this thesis' defense in March 2020.

This is a social science study based on qualitative data, heavily relying on subjects' perspectives, experiences and opinions. Because the methodology involves semi-structured interviews, which leaves room for flexibility in questioning, this study used example questions, or a list or "pool" of pre-determined questions, which were selected and asked to each interviewee according to his/her profile. The reason for this approach is that the research questions demand exploratory methods that are able to capture all relevant information and perspectives from subjects who have different levels of involvement and information regarding the research problem. Example questions to be asked are:

1. What is your name?
2. Which organization, association or community do you represent?
3. What do you know about ISA Carbono?
4. How did you get involved with ISA Carbono? Please explain the role you play in the ISA Carbono Program.
5. Please explain the goals of ISA Carbono.
6. What are the main achievements of the program to date, in your opinion?
7. What challenges have you found working with REDD+ that you did not originally anticipate?
8. What criteria were used to define how the resources should be allocated?
9. What are the bottlenecks, mistakes and gaps of the program that should be addressed?

10. How has the elimination of the State Department of Agroforestry Extension and Family Farming (SEAPROF), the Climate Change Institute (IMC), and the Environmental Services Development Company (CDSA) impacted the future feasibility of ISA Carbono? And, what do you think the prospects for the program are in the future?
11. How has ISA Carbono affected your community?
12. In your opinion, what are the main challenges for forest-based development in Acre? Has the government been able to address those challenges? If yes, how? If no, why?
13. Do you believe in the potential of expansion of the forest carbon market? Why?
14. Why has the Brazilian government opposed to the inclusion of international carbon offsets in the 2016 National REDD+ Strategy? What has been the position of the current administration about this topic?
15. Considering the present scenario, how likely is the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between Acre, California and Chiapas regarding carbon credit trades?
16. Is there anything that you would like to add?

The secondary method was the analysis of policy documents and reports from ISA Carbono to access official information about planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation regarding the program. This information should have addressed the research questions by enlightening what results have been achieved and how resources have been allocated.

The objective of the field research was to fill in the data gaps existing in literature about the jurisdictional REDD+ program in Acre. Activities were partially financed by the Tinker Foundation and carried out from May 23 to June 17 in Acre, Brazil, in the municipalities of Rio Branco (May 23 to June 1, and June 10 to 17) and Xapuri (June 1 to 10). The researcher interviewed 39 people ranging from current and former public officers, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and leadership of rubber tapper associations and indigenous groups. Document analysis, when possible, was also used to clarify and confirm information provided by interviewees.

Reports indeed are not enough and do not inform to what extent the funding provided by the German and British governments has impacted forest conservation in the benefited areas, considering the hypothesis of a non-REDD+ scenario. This assumption of additionality is a key element of the idea of REDD+. Therefore, due to the unavailability of reliable data about ISA Carbono's impacts on forest conservation and carbon sequestration, interviews played a vital role to address the issues regarding distribution of benefits, environmental justice and forest-based development.

My findings have led me to the conclusion that the political moment in Brazil (and in Acre specifically) and its setbacks has potential to jeopardize conservation, forest carbon sequestration and forest-based development beyond any benefits from any climate finance solution. Therefore, my research goal for doctoral studies is to analyze how the political changes (in Acre and Brazil as a whole) will have affected conservation politics, forest-based development policies and forest carbon stock at the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve (CMER) by 2024. I chose CMER because it is still the largest extractive reserve in Acre, one of the first in Brazil, and an emblematic place, where the Chico Mendes' legacy has still a meaning among rubber tapper leaders who knew him, and participated in the "empates" against the outside cattle ranchers in the 1970s and 80s. Protected areas, such as the extractive reserves, are essential for Acre to keep its forest carbon stock and satisfy its ambitions to raise funds from REDD+, and the way they are managed by the Brazilian federal government is a key element for the state-based efforts to conserve the rainforest.

Pictures



Meeting between rubber tappers and journalists from the US, the UK and France at 2 Irmaos Association Center, Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve.



Banana trees planted by the "Florestas Plantadas" program in the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve. The program is financed by the REDD+ Early Movers (REM), partnership between the State of Acre and the Federal Republic of Germany, and its goal is to incentivize the reforestation of degraded areas and the development of forest-friendly economic activities for rubber tapper communities.



Demonstration and practice of rubber tapping with Mr. Julio Barbosa, President of the Dois Irmaos Association (Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve).



Fish tank in the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve, built by the Peixes da Amazonia program (State of Acre) to incentivize the consumption of other sources of animal protein over beef. Cattle raising is currently the main deforestation driver in the reserve.



Collection of açai berry in the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve.



Natural-rubber condom factory in Xapuri, Acre. A state program in partnership with the Brazilian Ministry of Health to incentivize the native rubber economy.

References

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