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1/ Biodiversity and governance: managing the megadiversity of the Amazon

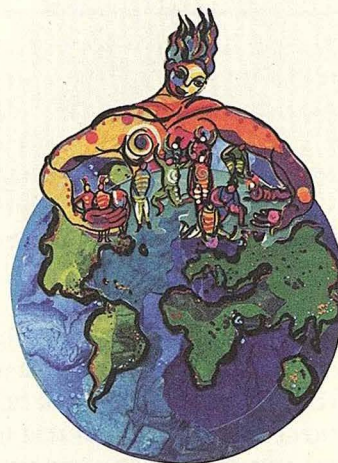
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nature, communities & biodiversity

The term "megadiversity" refers to the exceptionally high biodiversity found in twelve countries which between them account for 70% of the planet's biodiversity. Five of these countries are in the Amazon. An international team including CIRAD scientists is working under the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organisation to set up a regional protected areas programme. The purpose is to assist the region's decision makers towards their goal of managing the Amazon region in all its natural, economic, social and cultural diversity.

After long providing a livelihood for Amerindians, Amazonia is now under threat from colonisation, with vast arcs of deforestation, an advancing agricultural frontier, mining and illegal land occupation. The protected areas are designed to meet ecological criteria and do not always take existing human activity into account: conservation is imposed without negotiating with local people. Although they have increased by more than 30%



in the past ten years, the IUCN calculates that strictly protected areas cover no more than 5% of Amazonia. Their infrastructure is inadequate, one in three suffer land tenure problems and fewer than a quarter have management plans. On average, there is one government officer for every 1000 km² of protected area, with a budget of 0.5\$/km²/yr. There are indigenous communities living in more than half of Amazonia's national parks. Under these conditions, many people think this is an ineffective way to conserve biodiversity and blame the lack of local governance.

Managers of protected areas are now trying to involve local stakeholders in testing various forms of decentralised sharing of responsibility. The new key concepts are institution-building and developing local social capital. This new, pragmatic approach is beginning to bear fruit. Methods are being tested for analysing situations and for participatory mapping. Workshops are held to reconcile the interests of local populations with those of conservation and forest management, in order to arrive at a concerted land management plan. Results are emerging at country level and internationally. One example is the Amazon piedmont biological corridor, made up of a string of nature parks and indigenous territories. This new concept in biodiversity conservation has been given an institutional framework, and this has given the Amazonian debate a bigger place in international debates.



CIRAD's contribution



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Brazil covers 70% of continental Amazonia and plays a leading part in improving the governance of Amazonian biodiversity. Past initiatives depended on foreign funds and the Ministry of the Environment, and received little research support. Economic policy and regional development instruments did not take sufficient account of the environmental aspect. Policy for promoting sustainable development was barely beyond the experimental stage. On the strength of these lessons, the new Ministry for National Integration is coordinating the actions of 13 ministries so that each will take the environmental aspects into account and positive synergies will arise. Brazil now also has a Sustainable Development Plan for Amazonia which recognises its natural, economic, social and cultural diversity. The recent creation of the Juruena national park, a huge area of 30 million hectares between the Mato Grosso and Amazonas, is one of the latest stages in the struggle to protect Amazonian megadiversity.

The clash between conservation and the presence of human communities is gradually losing ground, although the protected areas have not increased enough to improve biodiversity conservation. Not all plant ecology regions are represented; this would require 80 further units covering 68 million hectares. The new National System of Conservation Units (SNUC) also encourages mosaics of protected areas. Throughout continental Amazonia, discussions to find satisfactory methods of joint management are making good progress. Colombia talks of ethnic conservation units. Ecuador's indigenous people refuse to have their lands included in national parks for fear of being dispossessed. It is now recognised that protected areas must be integrated into the local and regional economic fabric and that local communities must be the primary beneficiaries of their environmental services. Throughout Amazonia, there are increasing numbers of participatory experiments to draw the boundaries of new protected areas, work out management plans and draw up contracts for access to resources.

