RESILIENCE OF TROPICAL ECOSYSTEMS – FUTURE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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LEARNING BEGINS WHEN GAMING STOPS. ROLE PLAYING GAMES AND COMMUNITY WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT IN THE COLOMBIAN AMAZON

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In the Amazon Basin most indigenous communities base part of their sustenance on bushmeat. Overharvesting, together with habitat loss, poses serious threats to biodiversity, as well as to the people who depend on bushmeat for food and income.

At the request of the communities of the TICOYA Indigenous Reserve (Colombia) we are developing integrated models of community-based wildlife management that incorporate feedback loops between population dynamics, hunting patterns and strategies.

We first explored the possibility of using role-playing games as tools to define and build these models with hunters and other stakeholders. The games are used to assess the impacts of their action and to investigate alternative scenarios while promoting collective learning.

Using a simple reed management game (ReHab) as support, we organized two workshops on the concept of sustainable management of natural resources. Despite its simplicity and abstraction, ReHab allows exploring these concepts and involving the stakeholders in the research process, through experiential learning. In the first session, hunters and community members of Ticoya went through a phase a slow depletion of the resource, and increasing inequalities. When given time to negotiate and prompted with information, they managed to secure agreements and adjust harvest levels, achieving a measure of sustainability.

The same game was then used with students and academics in the nearby city of Leticia. Despite being aware of the trends, and having time for discussion, the players failed to improve their results. This suggests that information and communication are not sufficient to resolve trade-offs between conservation and development. The comparison of the two sessions opens avenues to define collective management strategies in the TICOYA Indigenous Reserve and suggests the need to develop a standardized protocol for additional sessions to generate a locally meaningful and evidence-based definition of management.