

**DIALOGUE AND COMMUNICATION TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT IN THE LOGGING INDUSTRY OF THE UPPER PURUS  
RIVER - PERU**

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**INTRODUCTION**

The Upper Purus River basin, in the department of Ucayali in central Peru, is an Amazon rainforest area populated by native communities. Because of its isolation, the region still features rich biodiversity and valuable timber and forest resources. This timber is being exploited at an increasing rate, posing a major threat to natural resources and to the future of the logging industry in the region. This exploitation has recently increased due to the lack of timber in other rainforest areas of the world, international demand for timber, the liberalization of the South American economies and the globalization of markets.

Timber extraction activity in the area represents the main source of income for the local population, both indigenous and settlers. However, the area is prey to a great deal of illegal extraction, wood taken from native people's territories, exploitation of the workforce, a maze of concessions, displacement, migration and limitations to enforce the law. A viable sustainable solution is needed for this emerging industry.

The Peruvian government, through its corresponding implementing agency, the National Institute of Natural Resources INRENA, is trying to promote sustainable use of timber and forest resources in the region. It will carry out extensive research and assess the potential influence of new regulations and land zoning through a process of local

participation and capacity building. This local participation process is seen as a fundamental factor for the overall environmental management of the logging industry in this part of Peru, from the extraction level in the field, through middlemen and traders, to manufacturers and exporters.

An independent contractor provides social and environmental baseline data. The research is conducted with communities through consultation and the promotion of participatory processes that allow the local population to influence the outcome of the project, the design and acceptance of land-zoning, the promotion of agreed management strategies for the logging industry and support for the idea of sustainable development and conservation.

This project will help to demonstrate in a pragmatic way the viability of sustainable natural resource management in the logging industry with the participation of indigenous populations, providing a model for the application of similar strategies in other areas appropriate for rainforest regions.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF PROMOTING PARTICIPATION IN THE RAINFOREST**

The Amazon rainforest of South America, particularly the area bordering the Andes, is rich in biological diversity, making these ecosystems irreplaceable assets. The rich growth and diversity of species implies additional difficulties for forest management. In comparison with temperate forests and the apparent simplicity of plantations, tropical forests often display complex structures, marked variation from one hectare to the next, relatively unpredictable growth rates and uneven age.

In general, the Amazon is subject to different negative influences to its ecosystems such as cattle ranching, logging, mining, agricultural expansion, migration and others that impose diverse impacts on the environment, natural resources and the local people. The degree of

the impacts depends on the region and on the magnitude of the specific events and activities affecting the environment.

Human populations are expanding rapidly, and the exploitation of natural resources and colonization has been and still is strongly supported by indifferent authorities in Latin America. Virgin forests are being wastefully timbered or converted into farmland. Many governments in the tropics view the value of forests in terms of their potential to earn foreign exchange through logging. Most of these governments allow the destruction of this national resource because they have pressing needs for revenues.

Communities who have occupied a forest for generations often base their production system on shifting cultivation with long fallow periods. This situation represented little threat to the forest areas as long as settlement size and population density remained low, but the environmental effects of selective logging and the slash-and-burn practices that follow become increasingly adverse as forest populations grow, fallow periods are reduced, and previously viable production systems become more precarious.

In the case of the upper Purus river in central Peru, the main problem envisioned and currently ongoing lies in the logging sector. The area is inhabited by indigenous populations and the forest and natural environment which is still pristine because of its isolation. The only access to the region is by small airplanes from Pucallpa, the state capital. Due to the depletion of valuable timber resources in other rainforest areas of the Ucayali state, loggers are turning their eyes to the upper Purus river region, where resources are plentiful and where the existence of native communities provides for cheap labor.

The way activities are implemented by the loggers in the area anticipate recurrent impacts suffered in other rainforest areas. Timber harvests invariably alter the habitat, even when relatively few trees are removed. In addition to reducing the density of trees, logging alters the composition of the forest and often lowers species diversity. Misuse of the

forest resources not only generates direct impacts on the environment, - its negative influence brings collateral impacts on natural resources, on the different social sectors affected and on the regional and national economy.

There are no incentives to keep large areas forested unless ways are found to make forests economically profitable without destroying them. An economically efficient forest sector will be a more environmentally benign one as well. Merging conservation and economic development goals and concepts is not easy, but it is necessary for the future survival of natural forests and the welfare of human beings.

Institutional problems account for much of the failure to curb environmental degradation. Weak enforcement of environmental protection measures in logging is a consequence not only of relying on understaffed, underpaid, or bribed forest agencies, but also of placing responsibility for monitoring and control in distant central government rather than in the hands of local groups with the strongest stake in sustainable development of forest resources. Where control for forest exploitation is in the hands of local groups rather than central government, effective measures have been more often taken to protect economic and social values in the forest.

Within the above described context of environmental problems and the complex economic, political and social situations of countries with rainforest areas, it is difficult, although challenging, to promote dialogue and implement actions that request people's involvement and commitment for the long term.

## **THE SOCIAL FACTOR**

Primary tropical forests typically are selectively cut for the most valuable timber species and then abandoned without replanting. When forest lands are dedicated to the sole purpose of maximizing wood production, the benefits of a major public resource are

denied to any constituency other than the timber industry. Forests have multiple constituencies such as loggers, native peoples, ranchers, miners and tourist operators, and management should attempt to balance the objectives of many competing and often contentious interest groups. Correcting conflict and distortions will significantly improve the use and management of forests, but because of the opposition of interest groups, policy changes will be difficult, requiring strong public support and political will by decision makers.

The Amazon rainforest is being exploited and logged by agents who have little or no knowledge of indigenous communities. As a result, native peoples take part in the log extraction process in disadvantaged conditions, not receiving any benefits, suffering displacements, abuses and exploitation. The native communities of the rainforest must make continual adjustments if they are to survive. Over the past years, loss of biological diversity has eroded their material base for survival and loss of their traditional culture has undermined their values and social structures.

Peru's estimated indigenous Amazon lowland population is the highest in the Amazon region, followed by Brazil and Bolivia. They live in small kinship-based groups spread around the forest. With low population densities, they have obtained or lay claim to land tenure systems that are consistent with their management systems. Traditionally they have followed a vision that allows the sustainable use of natural resources. Is within this context that loggers enter rainforest areas that constitute traditional indigenous territories, part of them recognized and protected by law, taking the timber resources without compensating the local population.

Frequently, ambiguous legislation on use of forest resources allows exploitation to proceed without suitable consultations and dialogue with affected native groups. Timber extraction takes place on forest concessions that either border indigenous territories or lie within them. Indigenous organizations complain that neither cultural nor environmental

impact studies are carried out, and that the projects lack mechanisms to compensate those affected.

After being absorbed into monetary economy, indigenous people are often forced into unsustainable use of forest resources, worsening their environmental and economic situation. In many cases they leave farming and natural resource management and go to work as laborers for logging companies, living outside their native communities. They become part of the problem, since apart from contributing to the loss of biological diversity through their new activities, they abandon their traditional way of life and cultural identity. Contact with modern civilization changes values, replacing traditional ones with the aspirations of modern society. In most cases, the native people cannot match these aspirations, given the absence of viable economic options, lack of infrastructure and poor education.

In many cases, the root causes of forest mismanagement lie outside the forest sector itself. These causes are social and economic, and countering them requires institutional and policy changes through programs that regard people as part of the solution rather than, as is traditionally done, as part of the problem. Forestry development policies and programs should explicitly focus on human activities -forest management - instead than focusing on timber, wooden poles and other commodities. Centering discussion on commodities tends to lead to a different thinking process rather than explicitly focusing on the social actors, the people, the institutions and their activities.

The logging industry in the upper Purus region is still in a position to promote sustainability and local participation due to the as yet minor magnitude of its operations, the scarce presence of people and existing unexploited timber resources. To ensure sustainable development, forestry projects must get local people involved at the design stage, as well as during implementation. Projects that promote management must define their objectives with consideration for the needs of those local inhabitants most closely associated with the future of the trees. Forests are unlikely to be managed sustainably

without the direct involvement and participation of the people whose economic and social well-being depends on these resources. The penalty of ignoring social factors is project failure. Participatory schemes need to begin with dialogue and communication and should be based on mutual monitoring and self-enforcing rules. They need to distribute benefits among local people.

It is important to agree on specific rules that the logging industry and local population will use for protection, harvesting and benefit sharing. Clear delineation of strategies and commitments and discussions of benefit sharing are also important. Experience has shown that the opportunity to earn income is a strong incentive for participation and management.

## **DIALOGUE, LOCAL INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION**

The National Institute of Natural Resources INRENA, is currently promoting a project on natural resource management in the upper Purus region with international support from the Global Environmental Facility. The INRENA has recently declared the region a natural protected area and plans to implement a dialogue and consultation process to gauge the potential influence of new regulations and land zoning. Rather than declaring a natural protected area *per se*, the INRENA is most interested in promoting indigenous people's participation in the process of regulation and achievement of sustainable development. The participatory process is seen as a fundamental factor not only for overall environmental management of the project, but as a means to promote long-term local commitment. This can only be achieved through a transparent process of dialogue and communication, which can support local understanding of project objectives and strategies, and guarantee efficient implementation of activities by local people.

The participatory process can mobilize a broad cross-section of local residents to get involved in the development process of the project. This preliminary step, initial

mobilization, is arguably the most important of all because, unless it is done well, it may not be worth while to continue with the rest of the process. If an important decision that will shape a community's future is made by an elite group of insiders or by outside experts, community residents who are left out may not stand for it. The result can be delay, distrust, controversy, litigation, or inaction. In contrast, when decisions are developed by different kinds of people in the community, they are likely to enjoy broad support.

Weak and symbolic efforts to involve the public, which only amount to informing people after decisions have already been made, do not work. An effective way to move toward constructive local participation is through dialogue, communication and collaborative research. One must distinguish the difference between cooperation and collaboration. Cooperation is working together to implement an idea that is already formulated. Collaboration starts much earlier. This involves working together to create the idea in the first place. When people take part in creating an idea, they are more likely to support it, or at least be willing to live with it. Collaboration is an easier, more reliable path to consensus. When community politics becomes more collaborative, it becomes more constructive, less messy, and more comfortable.

Participation builds bridges, enhances communication and creates collaborative relationships in every community endeavor and at every step of the project. Each time bridges are built and used, progress becomes easier; community politics becomes less frustrating. During the process, in the course of discussing research, baseline information, local concerns and potential alternatives, participants often recognize that others, even people they regards as adversaries, value most of the same things. This realization begins to build the trust that is crucial to the success of any project.

## **DIALOGUE, COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION**

The dialogue and communication process will focus on the future consequences of proposed regulations for timber activities in the region, on the design of a land zoning strategy for the Upper Purus river basin and on the categorization of the declared natural protected area. This dialogue and communication process will be implemented throughout the project stages: design of participatory strategies, local problem analysis, baseline data collection, identification and assessment of key issues, and proposed management alternatives for the logging activities.

To promote efficient participation levels along project implementation, a dialogue and communication strategy must be designed at the very beginning of the project. The project requires full participation in the design and the decision-making process to guarantee a smooth flow of activities. The dialogue and communication process enhances people's capabilities through self discovery, the exchange of ideas and organizational strengthening.

After initial dialogues on problem definition and scoping of activities, the project establishes agreed strategies for baseline data collection. It identifies environmental characteristics, the social sectors involved, their economic and cultural characteristics, their relation with the surrounding environment, the existing local and regional institutions and other stakeholders, the timber companies and their procedures, as well as legislative issues.

It is required to analyze the social system the project is dealing with. The identification of the actors involved, their behavior, their objectives and their action space is an important component of the baseline information. The designed baseline analysis for the project will include general information on forestry, biological, hydrological and soil characteristics, and also detailed information on the social characteristics including local organizations, existing networks, economics, natural resources use, relations with logging operations, etc. Dialogue and communication will lead the process of data collection and identification of local perceptions and concerns.

Data collection and research itself for the baseline studies will be done with the local population. They will not only be data providers, translators and logistical support, but will also take part in the diverse research teams that go to the field for ecological survey and social work. This process will help achieve understanding and awareness raising, promoting training and a process of testing and strategic learning for the future sustainability of the logging industry in the region.

At a later stage, when baseline data is available, the project has to engage in evaluating the consequences of current or proposed actions. The baseline analysis has to provide information on past actions, regulations and its impacts. General discussions on the results of the baseline studies will be done with the communities and other interested sectors such as loggers and local authorities. This will help to identify potential impacts and to change project design in consensus. Although dialogue and general consultation is key to the process, team work is also essential. Team work guarantees continuity of the process in the long run through a leaded ongoing participation, allowing for deeper training, coordination, networking, follow-up and focusing responsibility and task assignments.

In order to make public involvement and participation an effective process, dialogue and communication have to acquire an organizational setting. Both have to build social relationships among the different players and consensus on a project structure that eases coordination and exchange. The organizational setting should allow the process of participation, including education, information sharing, negotiation and decision-making. Public involvement in the process allows individuals some opportunity to influence decisions normally decided by higher authorities.

The exploitation of forest resources in the Amazon has recently increased due to the lack of timber in other rainforest areas of the world, the international demand for timber, the liberalization of South American economies and the globalization of markets. The timber

industry in the upper Purus region is incipient, but rapidly growing. It is good timing to introduce management practices that can guarantee sustainability in the long run.

Dialogue, communication and participation make it possible to apply objective criteria to the development process of the local timber industry. The criterion of development has to be expressed in terms of sustainability. The application of a participatory process can help reduce the disturbance of natural forests through the provision of a sounder, long-term basis for timber industrialization.

Governments and industry are increasingly dealing with social and environmental sciences to carry out research, to train their employees in new management techniques and to learn how to handle public protest and public participation. The dialogue and communication process provides a framework for discussions within and between natural and social sciences and a *leit motiv* to involve local people and promote active participation along the project.

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