

Report on Panel 2: “Social Movements and Chico Mendes’ Legacy for the Sustainable Development of the Amazon”

Twenty-one years after the death of Chico Mendes, what tools must one use to think about social movements in the Amazon? Which concepts and which stories matter? The second panel presentations were united by their interest in three such tools. First, presenters paid careful attention to *the creation of new systems of valuation*. Whether they generate novel forms of land tenure, negotiate payments for environmental wealth, or demand the revalorization of services rather than commodity production in isolated states, social movements, it seems, operate by proposing different techniques for understanding and accounting value. Second, presenters demonstrated *the inseparability of state policy and social movement action*. Indeed, these two categories appeared hardly distinguishable: the conversation about social movement goals immediately shaded into environmental credit planning at the national and international levels, while an analysis of Acre’s state policymaking could not proceed without reference to a vocabulary invented by social movement actors. One of the lasting legacies of the *abertura*, it seems, may be precisely this deep embedding of the social-movement idea inside Brazilian practices of governance. Third, the presentations highlighted a rhetorical shift away from *metaphors of preservation and stasis*, oriented around the maintenance of desired objects, and towards *metaphors of development understood as a change in specifically human capacities*.

With an eye to these broader themes, presenters focused on two specific topics for investigation: Amazonian extractive reserves and Acre’s state government. Maria Alegretti opened the session with a report on research examining exemplary projects inside the 70 Reservas Extrativistas (RESEX) and the 19 Reservas de Desenvolvimento Sustentavel (RES) that cover 24 million hectares in Amazonia, accounting for 9% of the region’s forest. These reserves, founded through years of social movement activism, set aside land for the habitation and use of sustainable small producers. The producers do not own the land, but rather manage it collectively through a usufruct system. Alegretti’s data suggests that the reserves, since their establishment in 1990, have minimized land conflicts, decreased migration to cities, limited deforestation, promoted the development of new social movement leaders, and focused government attention on the attainment of specific environmental goals. But the reserves’

economic future remains unclear. Although social movements have transformed land ownership and generated new legal instruments, they still face a state bureaucracy that maintains a separation between environmental preservation objectives and funding for economic development. In the absence of such development, the generation of young people currently growing up on the reserves may feel little desire to remain in place. Alegretti cited several possible directions for economic development: government-run production, public-private ventures, fully for-profit private efforts, and NGO- or social movement-based partnerships with private firms. These options could get synthesized through the proposal to develop Zonas de Desenvolvimento Extrativista Social (ZDES), geographic areas in which investment would be targeted so as to promote the emergence of value-adding industries *in situ* in the Amazon.

Ane Alencar also presented research on the RESEX and RDS, but focused specifically on the reserves' capacity to prevent deforestation. According to her data, the RESEX and RDS together include roughly 3 billion tons of carbon, which amounts to 6% of the total carbon stock in the Amazon. Since the reserves came into existence, only 1.8% of RDS and RESEX land has been deforested. This rate has, however, recently increased in the RESEX, suggesting the urgency of policy interventions that can create economic alternatives to deforestation on the reserves. The proposed international financing mechanism REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) opens possibilities for such interventions.

Alencar outlined several channels through which the RESEX and RDS act to prevent deforestation. The reserves take land off of the market, thereby neutralizing attempts by speculators to falsify land titles, which can lead to costly legal battles. The reserves, moreover, have been specifically placed so as to block the advance of the agricultural frontier into the Amazon. Finally, the reserves serve as exemplary zones for the development of non-destructive "forest economy" enterprises, which can be emulated elsewhere. REDD funds could strengthen all of these effects. The funds might be delivered as direct payments to forest residents who provide environmental services by maintaining woodlands in their uncut state. Such services, though, would not by themselves generate a sustainable forest economy. REDD funding could also subsidize sustainable production—possibly by supporting infrastructure that improves market integration for local sustainable industries, or by training producers. Finally, REDD funds

could underwrite efforts to guarantee the basic rights of people who live in the Amazon, particularly through education that builds communities' internal capacity to locally co-manage development projects. Alencar concluded by warning that REDD funds should apply to all of the RESEX and RDS areas together. If funding is only delivered to areas determined to be at high risk of deforestation, then perverse incentives will arise: a certain level of deforestation will be *encouraged*, since only residents of partially-deforested areas will qualify for REDD support.

Marianne Schmink summarized the twenty years of social change that have accompanied social movement mobilization in Acre. Acre's movements struggled first for literacy and civil rights, then for land rights, and finally for a broad vision of environmental justice— eventually rallying under the portmanteau word “florestania,” which combines “forest” and “citizenship.” These movements attained formal power with the election of a Partido dos Trabalhadores state government in 1999. This power was used, in part, to encourage the development of an urban infrastructure capable of supporting a sustainable economy. Schmink's survey data demonstrates that housing conditions and consumer goods ownership in Acre's capital has dramatically improved over this period, and people from rural Acre have clustered in the city. Citing Becker, Schmink suggested that such urbanization may help preserve the forest.

Ricardo Paes de Barros followed Schmink's analysis with an assessment of poverty reduction under the “florestania” government. Acre's poverty rate has decreased dramatically, but its rate of inequality, though falling, remains higher than the Brazilian average. Paes de Barros argued that efforts to develop a forest-based economy will not be enough to change this situation. Acre's residents must be able to produce and consume high-quality services inside their own state, particularly in the areas of health, education, and food retail (including supermarkets.) These may require outside subsidies.

Mauro Barbosa de Almeida offered a response that urged participants to examine the persistence of rural-urban inequalities. He also suggested, in the vein of institutional economics, a focus on the efficiency of collective mechanisms for resource management. Speakers from the floor subsequently directed attention to the impact of international relations on development and inequality; the revenues expended by the 70s-era military government on colonization projects – allegedly near \$R100,000 per colonist – as an example of previous government “investment” in

the Amazon; and the different regional origins of immigrants to Acre and Rondonia. Paes de Barros proposed that the border dividing Acre from other states was “senseless” and should be rethought. All four presenters then closed with similar appeals to the significance of *internal revaluation*. Residents of the Amazon have begun – or *must* begin – a process of assessing value differently, on their own internal terms: valuing services over production alone, valuing the forest, valuing the permanence of the next generation in the Amazon.