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“Economizing” carbon emissions by reducing future deforestation to promote sustainability: critical analysis of a local indigenous voluntary REDD+ project

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Abstract

Deforestation rates in the Brazilian Amazon declined from 2004 to 2012, in part due to the implementation of governmental measures and market-tools. However, in contrast to the regional decreasing trend, deforestation progressed inside the protected areas, including indigenous lands. Since 2005, Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) has been seen as a promising option to support implementation of sustainable plans in protected areas and indigenous lands. This paper analyzes the implementation of a voluntary REDD+ project in an indigenous land of 250 000 hectares, focusing on three essential environmental issues: responsibility, accountability and legitimacy. After several years of implementation of the Suruí Forest Carbon Project (SFCP), it is now possible to analyze the establishment of this new “managerial arrangement.” Our results showed that local deforestation is closely linked to cattle-ranching activity, which has a strong productive chain that combines private investments and public support. We showed that the SFCP initially gained in legitimacy, both at the international and local scales but that the drop in the voluntary carbon market and the confusing legal status concerning REDD+ in Brazil undermined the efforts of the SFCP coalition. Discontent from unrealistic expectations regarding the rapidity and magnitude of the SFCP’s financial benefits, combined with disagreements among the four Suruí clans, now pose a threat to the SFCP and to the Suruí’s Fifty-Year Sustainability Plan.