

Integrating Forest Ecology Research with Capacity-Building among Local University Students and Participatory Research in Floodplain Communities of the Lower Amazon

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Many graduate students collaborating with local people and institutions strive to incorporate knowledge exchange and capacity building into the research process while achieving academic goals. I present two aspects of my research in which knowledge exchange and capacity building are integrated into a community-based study on regeneration of floodplain forest in the Lower Amazon. In communities, I used a participatory approach to integrate residents and students into ecological studies on floodplain forest regeneration. Integrating the principles of participation in the design and installation stages of the research was a major challenge; active participation was feasible only at later stages, such as interpretation and dissemination of results and project evaluation. Exchange of knowledge regarding seedling planting and regeneration occurred largely at the individual scale, particularly among those interested in forest management. Results and participatory evaluation of the community-based tree planting experiment may become useful at the community scale for decision-making regarding floodplain forest management for communal fishing. Thesis and internship orientation for local university students were successful ways to build capacity among future biologists and potential mediators of management and conservation in the region. Opportunities for students in the research project were facilitated by a larger, collective effort for capacity-building at the university. Knowledge exchange in communities and capacity building among university students required flexibility, time, skill-building, and creative problem-solving. However, benefits included the integration of local knowledge into the research, locally relevant information on tree planting and natural forest regeneration, and training of local students in ecological and participatory research.

Keywords: capacity-building, community-based resource management, tree planting, várzea

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