

The Institutional Perspective of Conservation in Amazonia: the FORTIS Program in Southern Amazonas State, Brazil.

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Brazilian policies to decrease Amazonian deforestation have normally focused on fiscal matters, territorial control, creation of protected areas and adoption of sustainable natural resource management. The institutional weaknesses of Amazonian society are rarely considered during the development of official programs and policies for conservation; this may be the forgotten link in Amazonian conservation.

In 2004, the International Institute for Education of Brazil selected the southern part of Amazonas State, a region considered to be a new frontier of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon, to pilot test an innovative approach to institutional strengthening for conservation.

Institutional mapping was undertaken, followed in 2007 by the design of an Institutional Strengthening Program with the participation from local forums and committees (*public spaces*) from six municipalities. The resulting program was named Institutional Strengthening in Southern Amazonas (FORTIS) and has been supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The FORTIS approach has three goals: 1) strengthen local organization capacity through adaptive training; 2) strengthen local partnerships and public spaces with wide stakeholder participation; and 3) construct a regional network to influence government conservation policies.

Under the FORTIS approach, local institutional strengthening will positively impact conservation. However, it is a long-term process to create sufficient social capital and trust. The FORTIS approach will be used to standardize future proposals and recommendations for effective institutional agreements and conservation policies in the Brazilian Amazon.

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