

Brazilian Environmental Management: The Projeto Pólen Initiative

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The Projeto Polén is an initiative developed to encourage local involvement in environmental decision making. This developed out of Brazilian public policy for environmental licensing of oil and gas production activities. The project has been led by a research group from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) which integrates academic knowledge and practice expertise. It is aimed at increasing social participation and control in environmental decision making related to oil and gas production in thirteen municipalities in Rio de Janeiro state. To accomplish its goals, Projeto Pólen initiated long-term capacity building for technicians and teachers from local environmental and educational agencies, and a short-term capacity building workshops for local leaders.

The course contents were related to education for environmental management, Brazilian environmental and oil licensing laws, and the role of civil society in public policy. It included conferences, field work, case studies and group exercises, in addition to support materials. Currently, people are involved in developing sub-projects for 2009-2010 within their local communities.

Initial outcomes of the project have resulted in municipal groups holding meetings and continuing project development. In addition, municipal groups are participating in environmental events, promoting the possibilities of social participation in public environmental management. In some cases, environmental education laws were created in response to the group's work. Continuous evaluation of the Projeto Polén will strengthen Brazilian environmental management and could be a model for licensing other economic activities in Brazil considered risky.

Key words: capacity-building, environmental management, Brazil

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