RAVA: Amazon Livelihood and Environment Network

http://www.iamazonica.org.br/RAVA

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The Amazon Initiative, in partnership with academic, research and extension institutions, civil society and the association of Amazonian universities (UNAMAZ), has started a research program on socioeconomic studies of livelihoods and environment across 12 sites in 7 Amazonian countries. The Amazon Livelihood and Environment Network-RAVA poses a key question: How forests, agroforestry and agriculture activities contribute to the well-being of Amazonian communities?

Methodology

RAVA uses a systematic, interdisciplinary and collaborative research methodology adapted from PEN (Poverty & Environment Network), a global research program carried out by CIFOR (Center for International Forestry Research). According to PEN research, forests and other natural resources are fundamental for the subsistence of millions of poor people worldwide. Data from the World Bank and FAO also show that forests have an important role to play in achieving the Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty rates by half until 2015.

Each location of the RAVA study is a well-defined territory equivalent to one or more districts, or to an Amazonian river basin that is home to communities that are directly dependent on the forest and its products or on other natural resources.
Figure 1. RAVA research sites.

RAVA step by step

1. In each RAVA site, a small research team typically includes a university professor, a postgraduate student, a researcher or a technician from a local institution.
2. RAVA teams visit households 4-5 times, over a 12-month period. The interviews provide data for socioeconomic studies in the RAVA network.
3. Questionnaires are applied to a random sample of at least 150 residences to assess and to understand their living conditions.
4. RAVA teams apply the questionnaires with support from researchers experienced in their respective fields of study.
5. The teams process the interviews and analyze the results, making cross comparisons.

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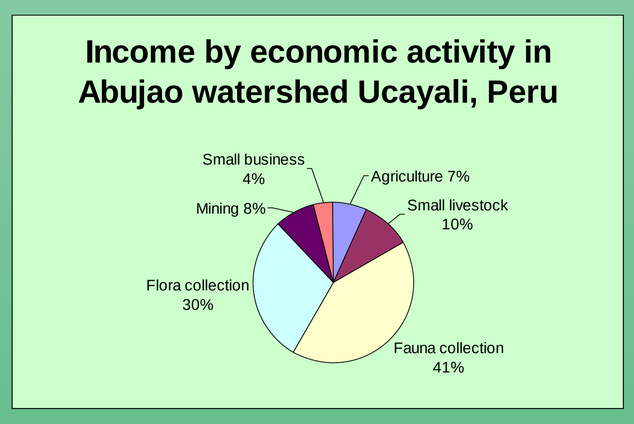
First RAVA activities

The RAVA Methodology Workshop held in July 2007 in Lima, Peru, was the first opportunity to gather more than 20 researchers from several countries, with diverse backgrounds and experience. It was also a unique opportunity for knowledge sharing and discussions about perspectives for future exchanges. Participants agreed on the research protocols and coding to use during the interviews. A key characteristic of RAVA is local capacity building. Both, researchers and students are from the Amazon and familiar with local conditions.

RAVA in Peru

In Peru, RAVA research sites are located in 3 watersheds: Aguaytía, Abujao and Ucayali that are inhabited mainly by colonists and indigenous people. Five institutions are involved in data collection:
- Cocoa producers association - ACATPA
- National Institute for Agricultural Research - INIA
- National University of Ucayali - UNU
- Peruvian Amazon Research Institute - IIAP
- World Agroforestry Centre - ICRAF.

UNU is leading one of the first research teams to begin their field work. This group has an ongoing project in the Abujao watershed which provides a basis for starting RAVA activities. The team has identified some limiting factors for conducting the study, such as:
- scattered geographical distribution of communities,
- distances among villages,
- difficulty in navigation of the Abujao river during summer. There are also social factors that pose a challenge to RAVA, for example, part of the population migrates seasonally to work in the cities.



Preliminary results support the findings of PEN and data of FAO: Direct income coming from forests is more than 70%, while agriculture, small livestock production and mining account for a little more than 25% (Figure on left).

Tangible benefits

One of the RAVA study sites is located in the flooded forest ecosystem of the Ucayali Basin in Peru. Estimated population is 50,000 in 220 indigenous communities. These people have rights to 40% of the forested area (1.9 million hectares), while forest concession holders have rights to 60%. The lack of technological, entrepreneurial and organizational capabilities and resources does not allow these communities to transform forest resources into tangible benefits.

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Top: Children standing on logs that will be transported by river to Pucallpa for processing. Bottom: Induction workshop of UNU's work.

RAVA Red de Estudios de las Condiciones Amazónicas de Vida y Ambiente

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