PARTICIPATORY BIODIVERSITY ASSESSMENT IN NORTHWEST MATO GROSSO, BRAZIL

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A GEF sponsored project in integrated biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in frontier forests of southern Amazonia began in June 2001 with an interdisciplinary stakeholder workshop on methods of bioregional planning and ecological-economic zoning. The project area covers seven municipalities at the northwestern frontier of Mato Grosso: Juruena, Castanheira, Aripuanã, Juína, Cotriguaçu, Rondolândia e Colzina, that together cover an area of over 108,000 km^2, about 2% of the Brazilian Amazon. The region is only partially disturbed by human occupation, but is seriously threatened due to rapid expansion in agrarian reform settlement and clandestine timber extraction that is usually followed by extensive, degraded pasture

By ensuring stakeholder involvement and by acquiring baseline natural resource information, the project seeks to reduce these pressures through participatory municipal zoning, demonstration of sustainable land uses such as agroforestry and certified low-impact logging, non-timber forest products utilization and development of eco-markets. The GEF portion of the 7-year project (UNDP project no. BRA/00/G31) is US$ 6.5 million. The project is being implemented by the Brazilian NGO Pró-Natura on behalf of the state environmental foundation FEMA, in collaboration with local governments, producers and civil society.

The project began in June 2001 with a biodiversity assessment workshop involving 42 stakeholders, including forestry and agricultural technicians, representatives of local NGOs, small farm associations, timber companies, municipal and state government authorities and staff. At the workshop, the project team compared land use development in the NW Mato Grosso with that of other tropical regions of the world. The team obtained valuable input from stakeholders regarding their current difficulties and expectations from the project.

The participants then took part in a schematic overview of existing land uses in the project region, including partially exploited forest, agroforestry systems, teak reforestation, slash and burn agriculture and pastures. Fieldwork included a demonstration of rapid biodiversity assessment using a standard proforma for data collection and vegetation classification that includes plant functional typologies. The data were collated, stored and analysed using VegClass – a software package recently developed by CIFOR. . When coupled with gradient-based survey design methods, this tool will be used by project field staff and stakeholders to acquire data and to classify and monitor impacts of different land uses adopted in the region over the 7-year project period (and hopefully, afterward...). The regional, georeferenced database developed using these procedures will serve as the basis

for creating a zoning system which will also involve other site characteristics and socio-economic variables.