

The role of multi-stakeholder forums in subnational jurisdictions










The Ecological-Economic Zoning Commission

Acre, Brazil

Key messages

- The ecological-economic zoning (ZEE, *zoneamento ecológico-econômico*) process in Acre emerged in the context of a successful grassroots movement supported by the state government.
- The multi-stakeholder forum (MSF) organizers and most participants from diverse sectors sympathized with a forest-based sustainable development model, which facilitated collaboration and balanced power relations among participants. This led to a high perception of equity in the MSF's processes and outcomes.
- Stakeholders expressed concerns about the implementation of the MSF's outcome and its limited impact on the ground, suggesting that a high perception of equity does not guarantee a high perception of the outcome's effectiveness, which can also be influenced by external institutions and contextual factors such as financial allocation, political will and market forces.
- In Acre, carrying out a ZEE process using an MSF together with other types of governance mechanisms particularly aimed at reaching the general population and respecting Indigenous peoples' autonomy appeared to improve the equity and effectiveness of the ZEE process as a whole.

MSF at a glance


Participants	     
Organizers	
Year started	1999 (phase 1), 2003 (phase 2), 2017 (phase 3)
Funding	 
Forum Type	Knowledge sharing and decision making
Outcome	Coordination, recommendations and legally binding

 Government

 NGO

 Private Sector

 Academia

 Indigenous Peoples

 Local Communities

Summary

Territorial planning in Brazil was originally promoted by the military government in the 1970s and 1980s. This happened first through the 'Radambrasil' project to map the Amazon region's natural resources (e.g. soil, geology and vegetation) and later through laws created in response to national and international concerns about deforestation caused by development and infrastructure projects in the Amazon. However, it was not until the late 1980s and early 2000s – after Brazil transitioned from a military government to a democracy – that Brazilian institutions promoted participatory mechanisms (e.g. in the constitution of 1988) and the creation of multi-stakeholder commissions for its ZEE processes. These changes were part of a global trend in which scholars and practitioners proposed that participatory territorial planning could solve environmental problems and land conflicts by facilitating dialogue among stakeholders and mediating competing interests.

In the Brazilian state of Acre (Figure 1), the objectives, design, processes and outcomes of the ZEE process and its commission, although aligned with Brazilian legislation and global demands, are intrinsically linked to Acre's emblematic history. In the 1970s and 1980s, Indigenous peoples and extractive populations¹ faced threats due to deforestation and land invasions, caused by development projects in the Brazilian Amazon. In alliance with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the Catholic Church, these populations engaged in globally renowned grassroots movements, which led to the creation of several Indigenous Lands and Conservation Units. Subsequently, Jorge Viana – who was affiliated with Brazil's Workers' Party and who had a strong discourse in favor of, and close ties with, social-environmental causes and movements – was elected as the governor of Acre in 1999. This newly elected government consolidated a social-environmental alliance with civil society and several actors from the production sector to move toward a forest-based sustainable development model for Acre, which they named *florestania*, a neologism meaning 'forest citizenship'. It was Viana's administration that initiated Acre's ZEE commission (ZEEC) in 1999. The Workers' Party was repeatedly re-elected in Acre, governing the state until 2018. At the time of the study, approximately 90% of Acre's territory remained as standing forests, and 50% was legally protected through conservation units and Indigenous lands.

To explore the potential of MSFs in land-use planning contexts, we studied the ZEEC of Acre, focusing on the second of three phases, when the ZEE map was completed (phase 1: 1999–2000; phase 2: 2003–2007; and phase 3: 2017–ongoing). **This MSF was set up to put an end to past land-use conflicts, acknowledge the demands raised by Acre's grassroots movements, include actors considered by the state government as historically marginalized (Indigenous peoples, extractive populations and small rural producers) and bring diverse actors together to participatorily build *florestania*.** Organized by Acre's Secretariat of Environment (SEMA) and in coordination with Acre's Secretariat of Planning, this MSF included approximately 35 participants – most of whom were also a part of the Acre social-environmental alliance network – from several government agencies, public

research institutions, NGOs, the private sector, extractive populations, rural worker unions and Indigenous peoples.

For this research, in-depth interviews were carried out with 22 MSF participants and 16 nonparticipants, 5 MSF organizers and 6 key context informants from different sectors with knowledge and firsthand experience of land use and land-use changes in Acre. This research focused on the second phase of Acre's zoning process. The study aims to:

1. identify the processes and outcomes that influence the MSF's effectiveness in achieving sustainable land use
2. examine how the MSF addresses issues of power and inequity in decision-making processes.

How effective was this MSF?

A ZEE commission is not the highest decision-making body in a state-level ZEE process; rather, state and federal government authorities must give final approval of its outcome, the ZEE map, before it can be recognized as legally binding. During phase 2 of the MSF, its direct objective and outcome was achieved: Acre's ZEE map, which was meant to organize land use in Acre to promote sustainable development, was approved on 12 December 2006 in a joint meeting with Acre's ZEEC and the state's three official state-level MSFs. On the following day, it was officially approved by Acre's legislative assembly, and thus the ZEE was passed into law (state law 1.904). It was then officially approved in 2007 by the newly elected governor of Acre and the national ZEE commission, and by the National Council of Environment and the President of Brazil in 2008. The MSF succeeded in generating and approving Acre's ZEE map, as acknowledged by 100% of the interviewees.

Moreover, all MSF organizers and more than 80% of the interviewed participants viewed the commission as very effective in bringing diverse land-use actors together to dialogue and participate in decision- and policy making. More than 70% of the MSF participants expressed that the MSF promoted technical and other types of knowledge sharing and learning. Only one interviewee, from the private agribusiness sector, argued that the MSF should only include participants with technical knowledge. Also, while 40% of participants highlighted the challenge of negotiating different interests, all the MSF organizers and approximately 60% of its participants expressed that the MSF worked toward reaching a consensus between different sectors and building a shared development model based on the common good. This common good was understood as sustainability, along with the consideration of technical criteria, which was arguably facilitated by the fact that most MSF participants were also a part of Acre's social-environmental network and thus shared similar values.

Most organizers and participants considered Acre's ZEE map —the MSF outcome— to be effective. According to interviewees, it was used mainly by governmental agencies, such as Acre's SEMA, the Secretariat of Extractivism/Family Agriculture and the Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock, as well as by NGOs to guide land-use decisions or projects; one respondent from the private sector reported having used the ZEE map to evaluate timber and industry projects.

¹ A term used in Brazil to refer to populations whose livelihoods depend on the extraction of non-timber forest products, such as rubber and brazil nut.

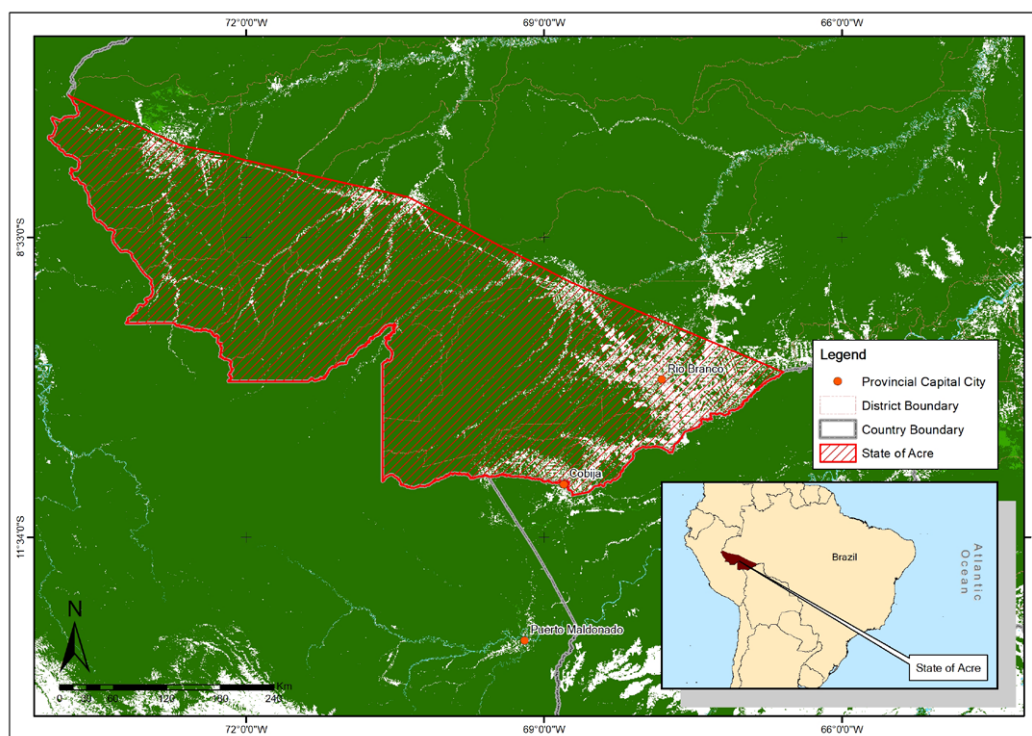


Figure 1. Location of study area: the State of Acre

Respondents explained that actors from the government and NGOs use the ZEE map mainly to decide on the feasibility of certain projects and/or activities, such as the extraction of brazil nut and other forest products.

However, all organizers, participants and nonparticipants agreed that the ZEE map and database are not used to a wide extent by land-use actors to guide their decisions, especially not by local-level actors, such as farmers and Indigenous communities. Most participants considered the ZEE map to be more of a guiding tool than a legally binding instrument that actors are bound to follow. Therefore, they considered its implementation to largely depend on political will and financial allocation, which are subject to change. Also, the vast majority of the MSF participants, both governmental and nongovernmental, expressed concerns about the discontinuity of the commission after the ZEE map elaboration phase was concluded and about the lack of a monitoring body and evaluation system to follow its implementation.

Interviews also suggested that the on-the-ground impact of the ZEE map has been partial. Close to 60% of the MSF participants viewed the ZEE map's environmental benefits, such as helping to maintain Acre's forests, as significant. In this regard, it is important to note that Acre's ZEE map promoted the already existing systems of land uses and institutions, which were hitherto linked with *florestania*. The remaining 40% expressed that if the ZEE map did not fully bring environmental benefits, it was mainly due to challenges in its implementation. More than half of the MSF participants stated that the ZEE map contributed to recognizing populations' land rights. Approximately 45% of the MSF participants, mainly from the productive sector, also viewed the benefits of the ZEE map to the economy, production sector and investments as partial: some argued that the ZEE map had limited power over markets and funding, or that it had given these aspects limited attention.

Was this MSF able to address inequity?

All MSF organizers and roughly 95% of its participants perceived that the MSF – to a greater or lesser extent – balanced power relations, mainly because all types of actors could take part in the decision-making process. The MSF product, the ZEE map, was considered to be “very equitable” by 85% of respondents, including organizers, participants and nonparticipants such as small-scale farmers, Indigenous peoples and extractive populations, because it harmonizes different sectors' interests and seeks the common good. According to three organizers and 45% of the participants, the MSF and its outcome were particularly beneficial to populations that had been historically marginalized or excluded from policy-making processes. In this regard, all participants recognized the MSF organizers as individuals that had supported or had been part of Acre's grassroots movements in the 1980s and 1990s and who were well known for having a special focus on sustainability, forest-dependent populations and civil society participation.

About 90% of the participants considered that SEMA and certain government agencies had a particularly high capacity to influence the MSF, mainly given their technical knowledge and their political authority. Nevertheless, all organizers and 90% of the MSF participants thought that civil society participants, such as NGOs, Indigenous peoples and extractive populations, were able to ally with these knowledgeable actors, as well as to have a voice and be able to position themselves, which helped to balance power relations in the MSF. The MSF included female participants from the government, Acre's federation of small-scale farmers and the private sector. Nevertheless, participation was largely dominated by men. Only one organizer and two participants mentioned the empowerment of women as one of the benefits brought about by the MSF.



Equity

90.9%

The MSF was perceived to be equitable or very equitable by 90.9% of its participants.



85.2%

Effectiveness

The MSF was perceived to be effective or very effective by 85.2% of its participants.

The only participant not part of Acre's social-environmental alliance – from the private agribusiness sector – argued that the MSF's (and the overall ZEE process's) equity was limited because it was "more ecological than economical" and driven by ideologies. The other three participants who ranked the MSF's equity as low argued that it is not possible to equally benefit everyone, nor to fully include all actors to participate in the MSF (e.g. ensuring the attendance of participants based in more remote areas of Acre). In order to reach the wider local population and to consult on the ZEE process, however, the MSF was accompanied by public hearings and open events. It was also accompanied by 'ethno-zoning', the zoning of Indigenous lands, as demanded by and carried out by Indigenous peoples themselves. All interviewed organizers and 6 out of the 22 interviewed participants stated that without these activities, the ZEEC would not have achieved such high levels of equity and legitimacy.

Recommendations

- *Recognizing capacity gaps:* For a more effective participation, all MSF participants should have equal understanding of the technical aspects of the MSF. A systematic capacity-building process, with adequate logistical and financial support, would improve the quality of participation for those who require further information to participate effectively, such as small-scale producers, Indigenous peoples and extractive populations.
- *Ensuring monitoring and continuity:* To strengthen the MSF's effectiveness, its on-the-ground implementation for concrete land-use projects, procedures and activities should be monitored and evaluated to support adaptive learning, especially regarding economic benefits for its participants. The MSF should be permanently active, beyond elaborating ZEE products.
- *Providing economic benefits:* Small and large-scale producers perceived the MSF to have brought limited benefits to the economy and the production sector, fueling discontent around Acre's *florestania* model. More attention needs to be given to providing direct socioeconomic benefits to local populations.
- *Exploring mutual needs and interests:* Despite representing diverse sectors, most MSF participants were part of Acre's social-environmental alliance. Greater efforts are needed to better include a wider diversity of values, especially considering the recent (local and national) political context, in which the new administration considers itself to be oriented toward sustainable agribusiness.

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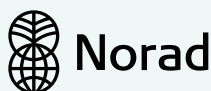
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