Participatory Research and Social-ecological Resilience after Development-induced Displacement and Resettlement by the Jirau Hydroelectric Plant in the Brazilian Amazon

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Abstract

This paper presents results of research on adaptive strategies developed by the community of Nova Mutum Paraná, Rondônia, after a situation of forced displacement due to the construction of the Jirau hydroelectric dam. The theoretical approach included elements of the theory of complex socio-ecological systems, participatory development and the theoretical field of development-forced displacement and resettlement (DFDR). We focused on two risks of impoverishment after displacement according to Michael Cernea’s model of Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) after displacement: loss of access to common property and services, and social disarticulation. Methods for data collection included participant observation, participatory workshops, focus groups and semi-structured interviews with the displaced community before and after the displacement situation. We gathered data about the adaptive strategies related to access to common resources (access to the river) and services (leisure, soccer field), and on the reorganization processes that took place among that community. Preliminary results indicate that, after the resettlement, the community is struggling to rebuild social, cultural and social-ecological spaces, such as the soccer field and the bathing area. Younger people have adapted more easily to the new conditions and the lack of access to the river in the new locality. Part of the resettled population established residence in a new locality closer to the river, in spite of Jirau consortium’s efforts in building a new town. We highlight the role of participatory research in strengthening cohesion among the community, and in enhancing local leadership for negotiation with the Jirau dam consortium. Supporting and strengthening cultural aspects during the displacement process might contribute to enhanced resilience among the community to cope with the social-ecological transformation and economic impacts of geographic resettlement.

Keywords:
Development forced displacement and resettlement; social-ecological impacts of hydroelectric dams, cultural resilience, participatory research, Brazilian Amazon.

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