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**Participatory Solutions of Land Use Conflicts in Protected Area
Management in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest**

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Abstract

Conservation of biodiversity in tropical countries often differs from development interests of local communities. Participatory approaches and tools are increasingly suggested and implemented to solve these conflicts. The use of participation as a solution for conflicts in management of protected areas is new in Brazil. The project “Doces Matas” is an example of international cooperation in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest, one of the most important hotspots in biodiversity conservation worldwide. Three different Brazilian institutions — two governmental (federal and state) and one non governmental organisation (NGO) — as well as the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) are working together to protect the biodiversity in a sustainable and participatory way.

All three Brazilian institutions manage protected areas in the Rio Doce River Basin in the state of Minas Gerais, where few information existed about interests of local stakeholders and occurring conflicts. Therefore, the main objective of this research project is twofold: First to establish an overview showing the existing conflicts and second to document and evaluate the different participatory methods, as well as their contribution to conflict solution. The field work is carried out in collaboration with the Sociology Department of the Federal University of Minas Gerais.

The conflicts registered so far are mostly related to unsustainable land use in the buffer zone, such as burning to clear new areas and use of agrochemicals. The solutions sought by the institutions involve agricultural alternatives, like organic farming and agroforestry as well as environmental education. While the NGO is using methods adapted from the participatory rural appraisal to accompany changes, the two governmental institutions are collaborating with buffer zone organisations in different ways. Changes observed are the decline of fires in the protected areas and in the buffer zone. A higher demand on agricultural alternatives, such as organic farming practices is recognised, along with a raising concern about water quality and quantity in the buffer zones. Since the beginning of the project park staff motivation is higher in all three areas.

Keywords: Biodiversity, buffer zone, conservation, Minas Gerais, participation