

Report on CENBAM October 2010: Kirsten Silvius, Moore Foundation

One can evaluate this project on two levels:

1. Implementation: what has been achieved against the objectives of the edital and the proposal
2. Strategy:
 - a. Whether the original edital is the best means to achieve the edital's stated objectives
 - b. Whether the activities proposed in the project are the best to achieve the project's stated objectives

Both approaches require a closer understanding of what was originally proposed, and the intention behind the editais, than what I have now. In the meantime I can only give my impressions:

1. The fact that this network has begun to function, even though funds have not been released directly for the project, says several things: the CNPq/MCT funding system is very resilient—funding can be accessed from multiple sources to cover one objective; CNPq/MCT are committed to this project as they have supported it trough additional indirect means. The nucleos and individual researchers are also highly committed, as evidenced by their participation in this workshop and the way they have assessed project progress in their presentations. This bodes well for the project, and with funds now released the entire process should be strengthened. EVERYBODY IS TO BE CONGRATULATED AND THANKED FOR THIS AMAZING EFFORT, AND I DON'T USE THE WORD AMAZING LIGHTLY. THIS IS A TRULY IMIPRESSIVE EFFORT.
2. Nevertheless each of the institutions will need to establish dedicated funding streams to support CENBAM related activities into the future, with associated fund raising activities and personnel dedicated only to management of the nucleo itself and coordination with the other nucleos.
3. The decision to run the funds through a Foundation is absolutely the right one. It will make things easier in the future and prevent principle investigator burnout
4. The main objective of the project is capacity building—individual human resources and institutional capacity. The infrastructure and fellowships being provided are definitely contributing to this. However, without a core set of faculty / researchers, institutional strengthening cannot be fully accomplished. Pressure must be maintained to shift funds over to the hiring of permanent faculty, or to bring about changes in the hiring model so that senior researchers can be secured in the nucleos for at least 5 years as a salary and benefits equivalent to a faculty position, or with guarantee of a permanent faculty position following that time period, even if at another institution.
5. The capacity building and scientific research components of the project must be kept fully separate. Grades and modulos established for student training purposes cannot be expected to contribute to rigorous scientific knowledge, because their locations are not selected with a particular large scale

question in mind (one exception may be Roraima, where guidance from senior researchers has led to a very interesting distribution of sampling sites across the regions environmental gradients). The are selected for convenience, with relation to the institutions selected for the modulos. It is clear, however, that training a cohort of researchers in standardized monitoring (both methods and philosophy/research design) will make it possible for such methods to be applied in the future for actual applied or pure research—e.g. the modulos along the BR-163, etc. , so that in 5 or so years there will be a quantum leap forward in the way environmental assessments and monitoring are applied in the Amazon.

6. The network should consider inclusion of partners beyond academic institutions. Official inclusion of NGOs and governmental entities such as Embrapa will add needed expertise and allow the network to tap into additional funding sources. This makes the network more complex and harder to manage, but individual nucleos could experiment with convenios with civil society organizations. Many NGOs are establishing their own monitoring techniques that are becoming rapidly widespread—e.g. Kaninde in Rondonia is now advising the state of Para government and even CI in sampling techniques.

7. The network should make a much more deliberate effort to address participatory monitoring and the training of parabiologists, etc. Biologists cannot and will not do most of the sampling in the Amazon. Parabiologists will. Reaching out to technical schools and community associations may help here, as well as redirecting bolsas and other forms of support towards parabiologists. These individuals have much more time, field skills, and often patience, to carry out long term monitoring.