

Extractivism and Technology – A Factory in the Rainforest

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The first condom factory that uses latex from rubber-rich, old-growth forests was born out of a partnership between federal and state governments. The location of the Brazilian factory in Xapuri, Acre is significant because the concept of extractives reserves, the novel land use model which aims to reconcile economic development with rainforest conservation, was set in motion in this region. The factory simultaneously meets current country-level demands for condoms and the state and federal government goals to promote sustainable forest development. Specific objectives include: (1) develop technologies that increase non-timber forest product market competitiveness; (2) fortify natural rubber value chains; (3) contribute to regional economic development; (4) reduce condom imports; (5) increase technological capacity to manufacture products that reduce sexually transmitted diseases; and (6) elevate extractivist quality of life through job creation and increased income. Partnership accomplishments include the generation of 150 direct, local jobs and employment of 700 extractivists in latex collection. Some government-supported programs have been integrated to improve both family-level (i.e., improved sanitation, access to electricity, and house improvements) and community-level conditions (i.e., improved road and trail infrastructure). Lessons learned from this unique experience include challenges in shifting the operational relationship between extractivists and their employers from one of paternalism to a business-oriented relation.

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