

Promoting sustainable community development through environmental education in rural Brazil

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Abstract

We discuss a weekly afterschool program of environmental and sustainable development education for youth, given at an ecological reserve in Brazil. Students were guided to develop sustainable ways for the community to generate jobs and income, while preserving environmental heritage.

Summary

Currently, many communities in rural zones in the tropics are in socio-economic and cultural crisis. The need for economic development often leads communities to adopt development plans that destroy their cultural and environmental heritage. In this presentation, we discuss our efforts to sustainably improve economic development in communities that live within an area of important environmental heritage, near the Osvaldo Timoteo Ecological Reserve, in Northeastern Brazil. The ecology of this region is threatened both by unsustainable development motivated by high unemployment, and by climate changes which cause periods of both drought and flooding.

Our efforts take the form of a weekly afterschool program of environmental and sustainable development education for local youth, given at the ecological reserve. This program was designed to improve the community's quality of life by teaching about sustainable economic alternatives, and the value of defending and preserving the region's cultural and environmental heritage. The project guided the students to develop new and sustainable ways for the community to generate jobs and income. The results were quite positive: students became qualified to work as eco-tour guides, families began small businesses, and children increased their attendance in science classes at school.

In this presentation, we will analyze the methods used to implement this educational program, and the results associated with these methods. We will also discuss how programs like this can function as a model for the development of sustainable rural communities in developing countries, and for involving all of the community in economic development and environmental protection.