

Current scenario and prospects for Public Health research in the Amazon

Various indicators demonstrate the Amazon's scientific and technological gap in relation to other regions of Brazil and the limited number of PhDs and research groups and scarce resources for research development, leading to low scientific output. At the intra-regional level there is a persistent asymmetry between the various Amazonian States, with a concentration of resources and initiatives in the States of Pará and Amazonas.

The local institutions' limited installed research capability is directly linked to the small number of training programs for highly qualified researchers, a variable with direct implications for the capacity to produce innovative science.

Initiatives like the *Quadrennial Plan 2004-2007* and the calls for health research projects issued by the Science and Technology Secretariat of the Ministry of Health in partnership with the National Research Council (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico – CNPq) and various State Research Foundations, fostering a growing flow of funds to Amazonian institutions, as well as the successive plans to promote training of researchers, such as the *Northern Regional Project for Research and Graduate Studies* and the recent *Acelera Amazônia* (Speed Up Amazon) project, have thus far proven incapable of reversing this situation.

Current research and graduate studies, concentrated in Federal public institutions of higher learning and in non-university research institutes, are largely focused on biological research, with particularly limited scientific output on the “human” dimension of the Amazon. Within this scenario, there is an even more evident lack of research in the field of Public Health. Rondônia and Amazonas are the only States with such initiatives (albeit incipient), which may in the future break the vicious circle of lack of graduate studies programs, and which in turn jeopardizes the organization of permanent and well-structured lines of research in Public Health, thus perpetuating the paucity of systematic knowledge on the regional reality.

The geopolitics established by world environmentalism has highlighted research on the Amazon's biodiversity, and although acknowledging the importance of local populations for managing sustainable development, such research limits local participation to the condition of “repositories of rainforest knowledge”, overlooking knowledge on the prevailing socioeconomic inequalities and their relationship to public health policies influencing the population's disease profile. The necessary incentives for graduate research in Public Health in the Amazon could help overcome the strictly biological approaches, giving way to ecosystem approaches capable of grasping the complexity of living conditions for the Amazon's 20 million inhabitants and their influence on the production and modulation of the endemic and epidemic profile, currently less dependent on relations with nature and more linked to the region's urban living conditions.

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