

Reply

Let's not Miss the Forest for the Trees: A reply to Pinto et al. *Forests* 2017, 8(7), 230

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We welcome the comments of Pinto et al. [1] to our article [2]. These comments provide an opportunity to further discuss the general objective of our paper, and also to respond to the specific concerns they raise about the outcomes of the Amazon Environmental Research Institute (IPAM) Sustainable Settlements' project.

Our response underscores three points. Firstly, it is important to restate that the main objective of our analysis is not to evaluate the performance of payments for environmental services (PES) of any specific project in the Amazon. Instead, our contribution aims to present a discursive analysis of REDD+ in the Brazilian Amazon (and possibly elsewhere, to the extent that there are common elements in how REDD+ is presented and talked about elsewhere). We used six examples to illustrate our general argument, of which IPAM's project is one. Thus, the analysis in our paper is a conceptual and critical theory-building effort, not a theory-testing attempt. Pinto et al.'s comment seems to elide the main thrust of our contribution, and instead focuses on a specific empirical aspect of one of the examples regarding which we in fact provide relatively little discussion or detail (more on this below). Little if any of the work on REDD+ or on PES is attentive to insights from Foucault's oeuvre, or to the kinds of analytical directions that work on governmentality opens and makes available. We must therefore clarify that their summary statement about our paper, being an "interesting analysis to evaluate the performance of payment for environmental services (PES) initiatives in the region (Amazon)" is a basic misrepresentation of what the paper does.

Secondly, the information we provide in Table 2—on which the larger part of their comment focuses—is not about the performance of REDD+ or PES in the initiatives. Rather, we focus on the needs (i.e., definition of local wellbeing; what is needed to reduce deforestation), hopes and worries of smallholders in relation to REDD+ linked interventions. Smallholders were directly asked about what is wellbeing to them, and about their hopes, as well as their fears, in relation to REDD+ and the initiatives being implemented in the different cases used as examples [3]. In this sense, Table 2 data are not related to the implementation of PES specifically. We indeed state clearly on p.13 of our paper that adequate evidence of PES outcomes in increasing the wellbeing of smallholders in IPAM's initiative is not yet available. Additionally, the fact that just a small proportion of respondents are now participating in the project does not change how they perceive REDD+ interventions or what they require in order to reduce deforestation or increase their wellbeing. It even raises the question of why they have decided to not be part of the project anymore. Moreover, in this specific case, smallholders had previously participated in the first federal PES program in Brazil—the so called Proambiente. In fact, their participation creates the grounds to try to understand their perceptions and experiences. Investigating their understandings is likely to be useful in thinking about the heterogeneous constructions of subjects, as well as their motivations, interests, and responses to

future PES and REDD+ initiatives. We also note that the information we provide in Table 2 on IPAM's efforts is consistent with other studies on the project [4,5].

Finally, Pinto et al. [1] finish their comment by stating that diverse benefits are being implemented by the project and that there is an increase in income of those participating in the initiative. Even as one response to their comment is that our analysis did not seek to provide an empirical estimate of the benefits of REDD+ implementation, it is important to highlight a distinction in how they interpret our statement, and what our statement says. That some benefits are flowing to some smallholders in some REDD+ projects does not say whether these benefits are large in comparison to the overall investments in REDD+ initiatives in Brazil. In many of them, the larger part of the costs of the initiative are dedicated to its design, to salaries of consultants and staff, and to logistics of implementation [6]. Only a small—and often minimal—part of the initiatives' outlay reaches PES/REDD+ participants at the local level. Additionally, it also does not say anything about increasing smallholders' wellbeing and changing their behaviour, as an increase in income does not necessarily reflect an increase in wellbeing, and perhaps even more important for REDD+, may not change land use practices linked to deforestation.

Given the misreading of our paper represented in the comments from Pinto et al. [1], it is necessary to re-emphasize the main goal of our analysis. Studies of REDD+ and PES in general have lent overriding analytical attention to the conditions under which a rational system of rewards and punishments can be implemented in an attempt to control and predict forest outcomes. This frame for viewing research on PES and REDD+ is so dominant that even an analysis that attempts little to no impact estimation is misperceived as an empirical statement of outcomes of these initiatives. This dominant focus in strategies and writings on REDD+ for the Brazilian Amazon has led to the neglect of other ways of thinking about smallholders' interests and participation that relate to the intellectual underpinnings and objectives of REDD+ interventions.

We call for additional analyses that use a more critical frame to examine the assumptions in REDD+ and PES initiatives more generally about human subjectivities, persistence of interventions, determinants of participation, drivers of behavior change, and distribution of REDD+ related resources. We believe that such analyses will help REDD+ interventions move beyond a focus on the monetary and regulatory aspects of governance that are encoded in and presupposed by arguments favoring rewards and punishments.

We welcome the additional comments from Pinto et al. [1] to our reply [7]. The additional comments suggest that their misreading of the main objectives of our article persists. Our discursive analysis is *not* based on the smallholders' knowledge about REDD+; they are not the ones framing the REDD+ discourse in Brazil (or anywhere else, for that matter). Rather, we concentrate on critical insights linked to the rewards and punishments logic through which REDD+ proponents try to influence behavioral change toward REDD+. Based on Foucault-inspired ideas of techniques of governance, our analysis then focuses on what the current debate on REDD+ in Brazil tends to marginalize and the potential implications of such silencing. Second, as described in Sills et al. [3] and in Sunderlin et al. [8], information collected on smallholders' hopes and worries, for example, were not only about REDD+, but also about the initiatives and interventions studied.

Our analysis and critique is more thoroughgoing than being concerned simply with REDD+—it goes to what is at the heart of initiatives such as REDD+. Payments for environmental services (PES) are at the origins (and constitute the justificatory core) of REDD+. Indeed, these were strongly advocated by IPAM and its partners back in 2003 under the concept of “compensated reduction” [9]. In addition, as already stated in our reply, in this case, smallholders in the area had previously participated in the first federal PES program in Brazil—the so called Proambiente. Their experience with PES creates the grounds to try to understand their perceptions about it. Finally, the language in Table 2 (local perceptions) clearly shows that we are talking about fears and needs, and not about impacts. For example, the first fear expressed in IPAM's case is “fail to start or continue”; such fears are clearly not about performance. Instead, we strongly believe that our findings can provide useful

insights for understanding what is needed to increase smallholders' wellbeing and their motivations and actions concerning REDD+ and its outcomes. A clearer reading of our analysis should make it evident that our arguments are not so much about any specific manifestation of the payments, rewards, punishments, and sanctions embodied in a given application of this approach; rather, we seek to call into question the intellectual basis, values and beliefs behind such applications.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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