

Environmental Perception of the São Francisco Riverine Population in Regards to Flood Impact

Francisco Sandro Rodrigues Holanda, Suzete Silva Imerim, Igor Pinheiro da Rocha, Alysson Santos de Jesus, Renisson Neponuceno de Araujo Filho and Arisvaldo Vieira de Mello Júnior

*Universidade Federal de Sergipe, São Cristóvão, Sergipe, Brasil, 490100-000,
E-mail: fholanda@infonet.com.br*

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ABSTRACT The São Francisco river discharge regularization, which regulates floods on the riverine population land, has promoted changes in land use associated to the implementation of irrigated areas, leading to a destruction of natural riverbank vegetation and an increase in soil and bank erosion. Past river and land use involved fishermen and landholders in a complex relationship which provided for the practice of both activities: fishing and agriculture, without any constraint. The objective of this work was to understand and analytically interpret the perception of the riverine population regarding the natural or artificial floods caused by the operation of dams in the São Francisco River Basin, in its lower course. A survey related to the perception of the riverine population concerning to flood occurrences at the lower Sao Francisco river municipalities was carried out, especially in regards to the 2004 flood, with the evaluation of the produced externalities through intentional and non-probabilistic questionnaires. To the riverine population, natural floods were always historically recognized as being positive, with the practice of agriculture on the flooded lands possible and also working as a nursery area for fish, promoting the local biodiversity conservation. With the river discharge regularization throughout the year, a decrease of fish quantity, biodiversity, and waterlogged land farming (marginal lagoon) was reported. The social and environmental costs resulting from the policies of development in the São Francisco River Basin were not considered by the policymakers.