



Interview with Luciano Loubet, president of ABRAMPA (Brazilian Association of Members of the Public Prosecutor's Office for the Environment)

Ambika Samarthya-Howard

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Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Please tell me about your work.

Luciano Loubet: First of all, I need to explain a little about the prosecutors in Brazil, because we are a little different from prosecutors in other countries. We work on environmental crimes like others do in America and Spain for example. But we also work with civil liability too. If you think about the *Erin Brockovich* movie, we work with class action lawsuits in Brazil today. We work a lot with civil liability because that helps us to work more openly and more easily in assigning responsibility for environmental damage. In a criminal situation, you need to prove that the person acted with intent or guilt. But if that doesn't work, in a civil matter, you can look at the process. For example, If he gives money for cattle in one area, where will be illegal deforestation?

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: So do you work at a federal level or at the state level?

Luciano Loubet: In Brazil, we have both federal prosecutors and the state prosecutors. They both work with environmental issues. I'm the state prosecutor in Mato Grosso do Sul, which borders Bolivia and Paraguay. I am also the president of the Brazilian Association of Environmental Public Prosecutors. We have around 400 associates and they include federal prosecutors as well as prosecutors from the 26 state prosecutors office in Brazil.

It's important that we have an environmental prosecutor association because that association can bring together all the prosecutors and they will work together. Also we can work in many different areas, such as contaminations, illegal fire, deforestation, and more.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Can you tell me about the MapBiomass Project and the work you do with Avina and Connexus?

Luciano Loubet: In Mato Grosso do Sul, each of the prosecutor's departments monitor deforestation using satellite images, and determine if it's legal or illegal deforestation. We use



the MapBiomas information and other information to determine this. We put in their license to determine if deforestation is illegal or not illegal. If it is illegal, we send that to the prosecutors for open inquiry or investigation to determine responsibility and if it's criminal or civil responsibility. We have more than 1,200 investigations for illegal deforestation and other kinds of damage. [Fundacion Avina](#) has helped us implement the department for illegal deforestation. Avina also has helped us create the Latin American Network of Environmental Public Prosecutors, with a presence in 19 countries (www.redempa.org) in Latin America. Avina also has helped us to permit satellite monitoring in other countries.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Coalition-building can be very difficult, especially because you have NGOs that are spread out across regions. What are some of the challenges that you have experienced and what have you learned?

Luciano Loubet: We have a good relationship with the NGOs, and they help with capacity. We work together in creating reports on situations that aren't good, especially reports for law-changing incentives. Then, we have technical support such as MapBiomas, which has the information and the research. In Mato Grosso do Sul, we have worked with Avina since 2008. In the beginning, they helped us with satellite management. Now, we are using this information together with MapBiomas and we help other prosecutors in other states such as Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí, Bahia, [MATOPIBA] which encompass a large part of Brazil's savannah forest. Some of the biggest deforestation happening today in Brazil is in this region, more than just the Amazon, according to MapBioMas. We also work with ABRAMPA [Brazilian Association of Members of the Public Prosecutor's Office for the Environment], which can take prosecutors from other states that have expertise in this kind and help the prosecutors in a different state. For example, in Piauí, 90% of the open investigation about illegal deforestation comes from this project and in Maranhão it's 100%. All the illegal deforestation that was investigated from Maranhão, with other states, come from this project.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: I understand there are strong laws in Brazil and in the Amazon against deforestation, but that implementation is quite difficult. I know MapBiomas is supposed to help with detection. Is that the only challenge with deforestation enforcement or are there other problems?

Luciano Loubet: The problem is that you have good laws, but a bad implementation, and it's a problem throughout Latin America. We need strategies to help with this. I have worked with my colleagues in Latin America since the Latin America Network was created in 2008. So for 15 years, I talked to them, and it's the same problem. In Mato Grosso do Sul, our state is smaller and we have good information about farm ownership. Here we have just 3% of illegal deforestation.

In Amazon, because of its size, and there are problems with knowing who is the owner of the ground, the farms. You have a lot of guys who aren't owners, they are just there.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: How are you addressing this problem?

Luciano Loubet: We have two problems in the Amazon. The first is its size. The second, is not knowing who owns the ground or the farms. The people who are there are illegally occupying the land. In MATOPIBA, it's a mixture of problems as well. MATOPIBA is a savannah forest and it's not simple to know who the owner is of that part of the forest. It could be public or it could



be private. So we are developing a strategy to follow the production chain of cattle from the ranches to slaughterhouses. We investigate illegal deforestation by looking at the meat produced, or other products like soybeans, and making sure it doesn't come from illegal deforestation. So if I know that the cattle came from farms engaged in illegal deforestation, and this farm sells to the slaughterhouse, I can make the slaughterhouse liable for buying from them. They need to look at where the cattle come from. It's not simple, it's very difficult, because we don't have all the information, but we have some tools and are working on the problem this way.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: In your leadership role at the prosecutors' organization, how do you see the issue in other states?

Luciano Loubet: In some states you have an environmental prosecutor who only works in environmental law. In other states, they work on all different types of law. This makes it difficult because environmental law is very specific. So first, to involve them in environmental situations and to help them understand the importance of this work. If he doesn't know about the environmental law and he doesn't care about the environment, it will not work.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: How do you make this work feel important to people with very full schedules, who are dealing with other types of law that also are important? What do you say to them?

Luciano Loubet: Our best strategy is to bring these people into our network so they understand the situation. You put with them the best people who work on these types of issues, such as environmentalists and scientists. That's the best strategy that we have and the lawyers begin to love this work. For example, we worked with prosecutors in the Pantanal for three days, where they listened to what was happening there and to live in the Pantanal. After that, their productivity grew 300%. That's one. Then, the other is to make it easier to work. You need to build capacity and help guide their work. We also are connecting our specific work in deforestation with the climate situation. We also are working a lot with the adaptation too for natural disasters. In Rio Grande do Sul, after a big disaster there a climate department was created in the prosecutor office, and they are working on climate adaptation.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: I'd like to discuss the Tropical Forest Forever Facility, which would pay nations to keep forests preserved.

Luciano Loubet: I have not been following these issues that closely, but in the 20-plus years, I have been working with enforcement of the law, I believe we need other instruments like environmental payment for the services, and other positive instruments like the carbon credit to help us. Prosecutors are important in the fight against climate changes, but people need to make the decision. The decision makers don't know about the prosecutors and about our work. One of our goals is to show this because we know that we don't have a lot of power to influence landowners. My personal view is that we need to use these tools. We need to show that we are working on climate change and not just in the mitigation of illegal deforestation, illegal fighting, and illegal dumping or trash, But we also need to work in the adaptation to help poor people and where they live.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: How do you work across countries with different laws?



Luciano Loubet: First of all, you need to understand the local law and the challenges prosecutors are facing. So we talk with the prosecutors, how they work, and we look for ways to help them in their own situations. For example, through a project with Avina, we are helping to implement satellite monitoring in Colombia with the state prosecutor. In the past, we helped Peru implement satellite monitoring. We helped them to choose the computers and choose the satellite management. We help build capacity with the engineers and with prosecutors too.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Beyond figuring out who owns the land, which seems very challenging, what makes this work difficult?

Luciano Loubet: First, the law is not the same. Some prosecutors work only in criminal liability. Others only work in civil liability. In other places, they don't have institutions like we have in Brazil, such as a network of environmental prosecutors. We also have a lot of problems in the judiciary because they too need to understand more about environmental crimes. And finally there is the lack of funding. We had been helping prosecutors in the MATOPIBA region, which I mentioned before, but now we don't have more money for that so we had to stop the work. We aren't funded by the government so when sponsors don't have more money for a project we have to stop.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: I love the example you highlighted about getting people into the land to get them to care. If someone from another area wanted to do what you have done, what advice would you give them?

Luciano Loubet: First, help the prosecutors understand the importance of the environmental situation. They need to know that environmental issues are very important. Second, help them with how they work. I was in Argentina last week where they created the Argentina Environmental Prosecutors Association, like what we created with ABRAMPA. Many prosecutors don't have that structure, but they have a love for environmental work, so helping to create that structure is important.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What's your five to ten-year dream?

Luciano: I would like to help other countries to develop more potential with the prosecutors so I would like to see the internalization of ABRAMPA in other countries. I would like to have more capacity. All these states are working against illegal deforestation and climate change, and we have very strong prosecutors, but I think we need more. In Latin America, I would like to help other countries to develop more potential with the prosecutors.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Thank you.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard (she/her) is the Solutions Journalism Network's Chief Innovation Officer: She leads on innovation and technology, leverages communication platforms for the network strategy and creates cool content. She has an MFA from Columbia's Film School and has been creating, teaching and writing at the intersection of storytelling and social good for two



decades. She has produced content for Current TV, UNICEF, Havas, Praekelt.org, UNICEF, UNFPA, Save the Children, FCDO, Global Integrity and Prism.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*