



Combining ecological, social and technical criteria to select species for forest restoration

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Keywords

Indicators; Mexico; Natural regeneration; Propagation; Re-vegetation; Social value; Tropical riparian forest

Nomenclature

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Introduction

The re-establishment of native plant species is a widespread tool in ecological restoration, but in many ecosystems, such as forests in the humid tropics, the large regional species pool makes it difficult to effectively identify target species for restoration projects. Thus, a systematic approach is desirable to screen the widest possible range of native taxa for possible inclusion in restoration programmes (Knowles & Parrotta 1995). Species selection requires extensive background studies, and sometimes monitoring of hundreds of species over several years (Knowles & Parrotta 1995; Blakesley et al. 2002a,b; Elliott

Abstract

Question: How to evaluate and integrate relevant ecological, social and technical criteria to select species to be introduced in restoration projects of highly diverse ecosystems such as tropical riparian forests.

Location: Riparian forest, Marqués de Comillas municipality, southeast Mexico (16°54'N, 92°05'W).

Methods: We proposed a 'species selection index' (SSI) using five independent criteria related to ecological, social and technical information. SSI targeted species that (1) are important in the reference forest; (2) are less likely to establish following disturbance; (3) are not specific to a particular habitat; (4) are socially accepted; and (5) their propagation requires a reasonable time and financial investment. SSI may range between zero and 50, with higher values meaning higher potential for restoration purposes.

Results: Out of a local pool of 97 species, we identified 30 target tree species that together represented >60% of total importance value index in the reference riparian forests. SSI averaged 28.3 ± 1.0 over the studied species, suggesting that species with high values are not frequent. For 20 species, reintroduction by means of active forest restoration was deemed necessary. Species that established through natural regeneration, following secondary regrowth, had lower social value among local farmers. Nearly half of the identified species showed technical constraints for easy propagation and seeding.

Conclusions: The proposed procedure is useful for selecting species to initiate forest restoration projects and of other woody ecosystems that harbour high biodiversity, and is suitable for several stakeholders interested in restoration.

et al. 2003). However, restoration projects usually require short-term results with limited economic resources. Therefore, once the main objectives of restoration efforts based on a census of all stakeholders have been defined, the generation of a list of target species for re-vegetation (Brudvig & Mabry 2008) should be accomplished.

There is a wide variety of criteria to select target species for forest restoration. These depend on the ecosystem to be restored and the particular needs of each project. For example, in Australia and Thailand, the 'framework species method' (FSM) selected species with ecological properties, such as (1) high survival and growth rates in degraded sites; (2) dense crowns that shade out herbaceous

weeds; (3) provision of resources that attract seed dispersal vertebrates at early restoration age; and (4) germination traits enabling easy propagation in nurseries (Blakesley et al. 2002a,b; Elliott et al. 2003). In India (Sharma & Sunderraj 2005) and Brazil (dos Santos et al. 2008), species were selected based on their natural regeneration capacity. However, besides ecological criteria, other criteria related to social acceptance and technical feasibility for propagation are required to optimize identification of suitable native species for restoration.

We distinguished tree species that were passively restored by natural regeneration from those requiring active restoration in a previous study based on ecological criteria, namely dominance and regeneration potential (Meli et al. 2013a). However, given that biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration must embody societal values to improve their success (Garibaldi & Turner 2004), it is critical to recognize and take into account the cultural perceptions and acceptance of the species used in restoration projects. Successful restoration actions need the participation of local stakeholders, and the potential of species to be used in such actions should be evaluated not only on the basis of their ecological traits, but also on criteria that consider both social benefits and technical limitations, such as germination and propagation requirements under nursery conditions. In this study, we propose a procedure to select target species for forest restoration projects, which is illustrated by a case study related to restoration of Neotropical riparian forest. This work does not constitute a framework for implementing restoration activities (SER 2004). Rather, it pursues (1) the identification of the species pool at a reference ecosystem; (2) the selection of species from this pool based on ecological, social and technical criteria that are considered relevant for restoration; and (3) the integration of such criteria into a single and operational species selection index (SSI). It aims to link the ecology and management of degraded forests and to be suitable for implementation by various stakeholders in forest restoration efforts. We also discuss the potential implementation of the proposed procedure in other ecosystem types and in scenarios with uneven information availability related to social values and technical requirements. We finally provide some suggestions that could be addressed in future studies of species selection for restoration of tropical riparian forests and other species-rich ecosystem types.

Study site

We conducted this study at the Marqués de Comillas municipality (16°54'N, 92°05'W), Selva Lacandona region, southeastern Mexico. The climate is typically hot (25 °C annual mean), with a mean annual precipitation of ca. 3000 mm and a short dry season (<100 mm·mo⁻¹)

between January and April. Due to its diversity of soil types, heterogeneous topography (Siebe et al. 1995) and complex fluvial network, several tropical ecosystems are present in this municipality but rain forest is the dominant one. Although the Maya and other human groups inhabited and abandoned this municipality more than 500 years ago, human colonization restarted in the early 1970s, when governmental programmes encouraged immigration, and this settlement has been portrayed as spontaneous and unorganized (De Vos 2002). Former old-growth forest has been extensively converted to agricultural fields. Deforestation also includes riparian vegetation, which impacts both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Marqués de Comillas adjoins Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve across the Lacantún River, and contains a complex network of permanent and temporal streams. Therefore, the conservation of remnant old-growth forest in the region has been recognized as of high priority, both in Mexico and Guatemala (Mendoza & Dirzo 1999).

Methods

Procedure and criteria

To obtain a list of target species for the re-vegetation of riparian degraded zones, we considered five criteria that are based on ecological, social and technical information (Table 1).

1 Natural species dominance (D). This criterion evaluates dominance of individual species in the reference forest, which in our case was represented by six sites with pristine old-growth riparian forest. Sites were identified through prospective routes along stream-sides. We estimated relative density, relative frequency and relative basal area of all woody species with DBH ≥ 0.5 cm along a 50 × 10 m transect parallel to the stream in each site. Basal area was estimated using the DBH and the formula $\pi \cdot (\text{DBH} \cdot 0.5)^2$ assuming a circular shape of the stem cross plane. For each transect and species, we calculated an importance value index (IVI) as the sum of relative density, relative frequency and relative basal area of a species divided by three (Curtis & McIntosh 1951). The measured IVI_i was used as an indicator of D, and adopted values between 0 and 100.

2 Natural regeneration potential (NRP). This criterion evaluates the potential of the species to re-establish after disturbance, and was first elaborated in Meli et al. (2013a). To quantify NRP, we used five sites representing the typical secondary riparian forest. This secondary forest grew on sites formerly covered with old-growth forest similar to the studied reference forest that was totally deforested and abandoned later. Age of the secondary forest sites varied between 3 and 10 yrs. In equal transects (50 × 10 m each) to reference forest sites, we obtained for every species abundance (N_i , number of stems of species i

Table 1. Species selection criteria included in the proposed procedure.

Criteria	Indicator	Information type
Natural dominance (D)	Importance value index (IVI _i)	Ecological
Natural regeneration potential (NRP)	Spearman rank correlation of abundance across size classes (r_s)	Ecological
Habitat breadth (H)	Occurrence in five geomorphological units	Ecological
Social value (SV)	Natural abundance in riparian systems and local use according to social perception	Social
Technical constraints (Tc)	Ease of propagation (seed collection + germination + introduction alternatives)	Technical

per transect) in each of ten DBH classes (range: 0.5–>50 cm, class intervals: 5 cm). For each transect and species, we calculated the correlation (Spearman rank correlation, r_s) between abundance [$\log(N_i + 1)$] and the mid-point of the DBH classes (hereafter called abundance–size correlation). A high NRP is represented by a diminishing number of individuals as diameter sizes increase; this change will result in a significant negative correlation and therefore an acceptable potential for passive establishment of the species (Meli et al. 2013b). A null or a positive correlation for a particular species indicates that it does not establish naturally (i.e. lack of regeneration) and, therefore, it needs to be actively restored or reintroduced. We focused on the last kind of species considering that in our study site the establishment of some species could be impeded or slowed by physical, chemical or biological barriers (Holl 2007). The NRP is a continuous variable that varied between -1 and 1 .

3 Habitat breadth (H). This criterion is a surrogate of the ability of the species to develop in habitats of different geomorphology, which differ in soil and topographical properties. We assumed that species found in more habitats have higher ability to establish after disturbances. Selecting those species with higher habitat breadth implies selecting generalist species, which may be detrimental for riparian specialist species. However, we envisage the selection of generalist species as an initial restoration step that will lead to the rapid establishment of an initial canopy, thus creating environmental conditions for the re-establishment of specialist species in a later step. This criterion selects widespread, but not necessarily abundant, species. We used data from 14 permanent 20×250 m plots that were previously established within five geomorphological units that differed in soil and topography in pristine rain forest: floodplain, karst, alluvial, savanna and low-hill rain forest (Siebe et al. 1995). We then counted the units where each species occurred. As H is an ordinal criterion, it ranged between zero and 5.

4 Social value (SV). This criterion identifies locally salient species that shape the perceptions of local people with respect to (1) the natural abundance of the species in the riparian forest (in a rank of zero to 5); and (2) the local values of species for provision of food, materials, medicine and/or cultural practices (Garibaldi & Turner 2004). These

two components of the SV in our study are comparable because the number of different use types never exceeded four (see below). The information related to these two aspects was confirmed from participatory interviews with farmers in four local communities. In groups of four or five persons each, they shared photos of the 30 species with highest IVI_i at reference forest sites (App. S1). Farmers were also consulted about other suitable species for riparian restoration that were not included in the previous list. The SV was calculated as the rank of abundance plus the number of local use types; as SV was an ordinal variable, it took values >0 .

5 Technical constraints (Tc). We collected seeds in the field, and germinated and propagated them in a nursery for all available species of those selected 30 species with highest IVI_i at reference forest sites, and then scored these species. This criterion identifies cost-effective techniques for successful species propagation. We used our own data in an adapted scoring system from Knowles & Parrotta (1995) that included three aspects with three categories each: (1) ease of seed collection (combining seed size and dispersal syndrome: large and zoochorous, small and zoochorous, and small and anemochorous/hydrochorous; note that seed availability is included in this component of Tc); (2) seed germination treatment requirements (none, mechanical and chemical treatment); and (3) alternatives for introduction in the field (direct seeding, wildlings/stumps, seedlings produced in nurseries; App. S2). The categories received numerical values (1–3), with higher values for the easiest/lowest cost option and lower values for the most difficult/expensive options. These three values were added; as Tc was an ordinal variable, it ranged between 3 and 9.

For all abbreviations used see App. S3.

Assembling the index

Considering that some criteria were continuous and others were ordinal, and that they varied at different scales, to make them comparable we calculated the Z score for each criterion by obtaining the difference between a datum value and the mean of the variable and dividing this difference by the SD. Finally, we divided these individual Z scores into ten classes, from <-2 and >2 , with 0.5 class

intervals. We assigned a value of 0 to the lowest class and 10 to the highest class. We considered all criteria equivalent and calculated SSI using the following formula: $SSI = D + NRP + H + SV + Tc$. This SSI is an ordinal variable that ranges between 0 and 50.

To explore possible relationships among the five criteria, we performed non-parametric correlations (Spearman r_s) across the normalized data (Z scores) of all criteria.

Results

Criteria values

A total of 97 species were found in the reference forests, of which *Ficus* sp. had the maximum IVI_i (11%) and only ten species had an $IVI_i > 2\%$ (Table S1). We found 92 species in the disturbed forests, of which *Dialium guianense* had the maximum IVI_i (5%) and only 14 species had an $IVI_i > 2\%$ (Table S2). The first 15 species accumulated 50% of total IVI in the reference sites (Fig. 1a) and 48% in the disturbed sites (Fig. 1b). We restricted all our analysis to those 30 species that showed the highest IVI_i in the reference sites, which together covered $>60\%$ of the total community IVI .

Eight out of these 30 dominant species showed negative abundance–size correlation coefficients ($r_s < -0.6$, $P < 0.05$), which suggested that passive restoration could be sufficient for their successful establishment (Table S3). Twelve species did not occur at disturbed sites and ten species showed a non-significant abundance–size correlation, thus hinting at the necessity of introducing them by means of active restoration.

More than half of the species occurred in three or four geomorphological units (54%), whereas nine species occurred in one or two (30%), and only three species (*Brosimum alicastrum*, *D. guianense*, *Protium copal*) occurred in all geomorphological units (10%; Fig. 2, Table S3). Two sampled species (6%) were totally absent in the five geomorphological units (*Miconia glaberrima* and *Nectandra sleri*).

Farmers recognized most of the species (80%; App. S1). Ten species (33%) were recognized in all cases, while seven species (23%) were mostly unknown. In general, farmers notably distinguished Lacantún river valley and stream banks (our reference ecosystem) as environments with different hydrologic dynamics, soil types and species composition. According to their perception, only *Inga vera*, *D. guianense* and *Albizia leucocalyx* (4% of the species) were abundant in riparian ecosystems (Fig. 3). Most species (70%) were considered of low to medium abundance, and only two species (*Blepharidium mexicanum*, *Eugenia mexicana*) were considered absent. There was no agreement about the abundance of five species (8%), namely *E. nigrita*, *Jacataria dolichaula*, *Licania platypus*, *M. glaberrima* and

N. reticulata. The relative species abundance denoted by farmers was not correlated ($r_s = -0.0414$, $P = 0.8475$) with the species abundance recorded in the reference site surveys (App. S1).

Most species (41%) were used only for timber (i.e. fuelwood, fence posts, handles, boards and shelves) and five species (17%) had two use types besides timber (i.e. medicine and fodder). Only *B. alicastrum* had four use types: timber, food, medicine and fodder. Eleven species (38%) were reported as not used by local people.

Species producing seeds that were considered easy to collect represented 40% of the 30 species. A total of 53% of the species were deemed easy to propagate, with no pre-sowing treatment or only a simple mechanical scarification required (App. S2). However, we did not have suitable information about the appropriate introduction method for 33% of the species. Finally, 43% of the species attained a Tc value >5 , which could be a limitation when attempting to reintroduce native vegetation on disturbed sites.

Selection index and species selected

We calculated the SSI for the list of the 30 target woody species to restore disturbed riparian zones (Table 2). SSI was normally distributed, with a mean (\pm SE) of 28.3 ± 1.0 , and ranged between 18 and 43. Less than half of the species (43%) scored an SSI higher than the mean. The species with the lowest SSI values were those with null SV (i.e. not used or accepted by the local farmers).

We found a significant negative correlation only between the natural regeneration potential (NRP) and the social value (SV; $r_s = -0.7036$, $P = 0.0008$), suggesting that those species that naturally established following secondary regrowth have lower social value among local farmers than those species that need to be actively restored.

Discussion

Criteria for species selection

Natural dominance was the first criterion that we used for species selection. We targeted selection of woody species to initiate forest restoration projects. Although tropical riparian ecosystems contain other than woody species, these species can: facilitate the establishment of other plants (Parrotta et al. 1997) when their architecture (e.g. leaf and canopy area) buffers harsh abiotic conditions (Meli & Dirzo 2013); attract seed dispersers when having fresh fruits (Slocum 2001); and outcompete (typically) shade-intolerant grasses through reducing their cover (Zimmerman et al. 2000). They also provide organic matter to the riparian soil and promote shore stabilization in the medium-term through their dense roots (Meli et al. 2013b). All

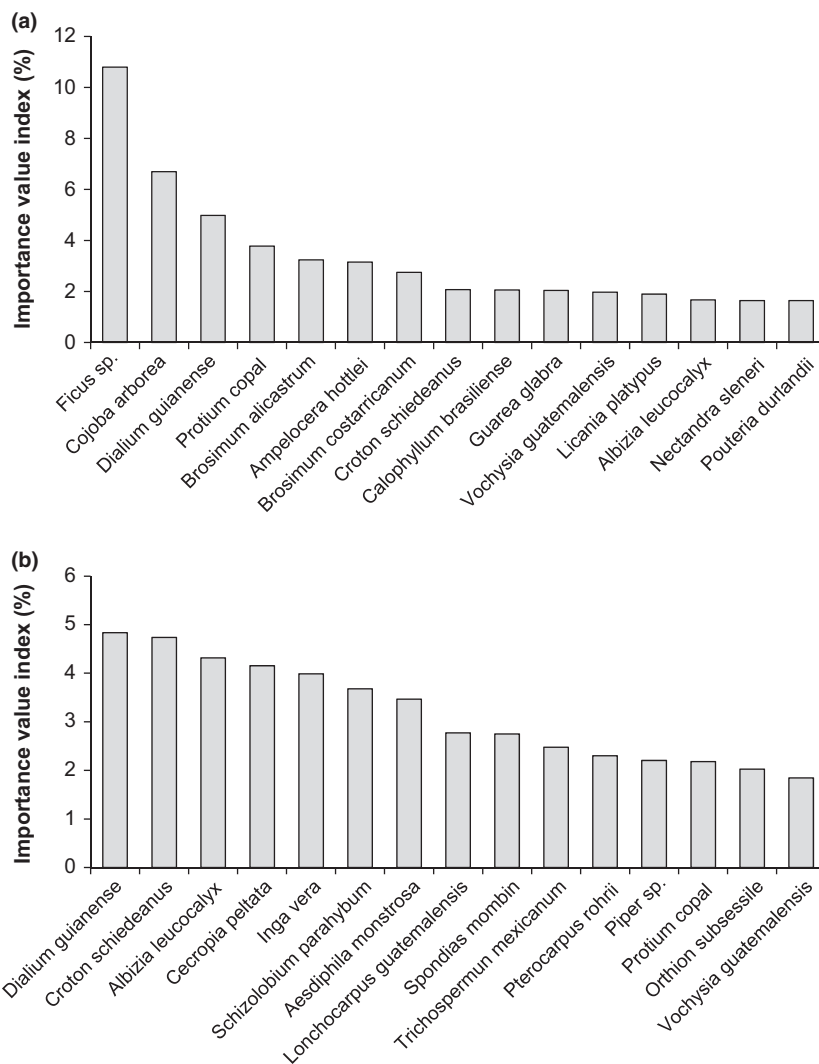


Fig. 1. Importance value index (IVI) of species accounting for >60% of total IVI in the six riparian reference forests (a) and in the five disturbed or secondary growth riparian forests (b).

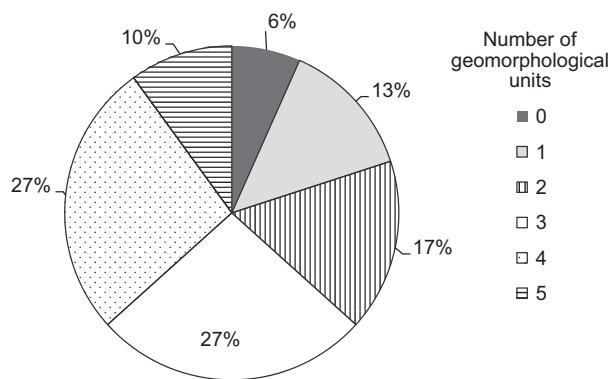


Fig. 2. Proportion of species out of the 30 studied native tree species occurring in different numbers of geomorphological units found in Marqués de Comillas.

these characteristics may be also considered as species selection criteria in forest restoration projects, but their inclusion will depend mainly on the ecological condition of the degraded ecosystem, and should be complemented with other criteria, as we have shown in this work.

Once the restoration project has been established, it is necessary to consider a wider range of species to fill under-represented niches with other life forms (e.g. herbs, palms and ferns) and with rare, endangered, endemic and/or riparian specialist species, and thus to improve the structure and function of the riparian forest (Meli et al. 2013a) and promote higher diversity and functional redundancy (Brudvig & Mabry 2008). This will ensure the effectiveness of critical ecological processes that sustain ecosystems (Society for Ecological Restoration International Science & Policy Working Group (SER) 2004).

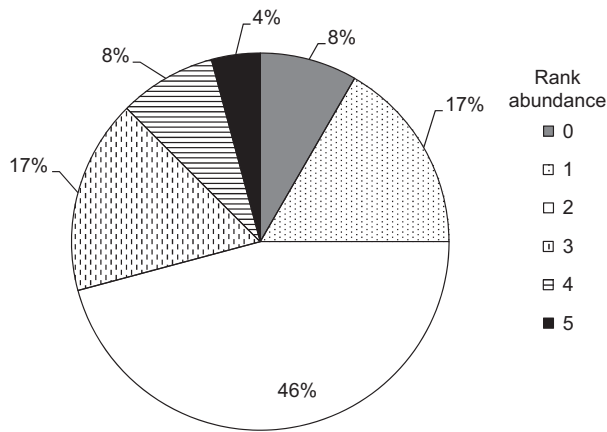


Fig. 3. Proportion of species out of the 30 studied native tree species occurring at six rank abundance categories according to local people’s perceptions found in Marqués de Comillas. See main text for details on rank abundance calculation.

We used natural regeneration potential as the second criterion. The predictive potential of the abundance–size correlations for selecting target species from disturbed sites could be limited by the small sample size, and hence decrease as their age increases and its species composition starts to resemble that of the reference sites (Meli et al. 2013a). However, the typically low species abundance in highly diverse humid tropics makes it difficult to perform accurate correlations without higher statistical power.

Assessing some preferred ecological characteristics of target species is a different way to estimate the potential for establishment. For example, longevity, resistance to herbivores or physical damage, and tolerance to flooding in the case of riparian systems, could also be important features for assessing the potential for establishment. These features focus on the species responses to particular abiotic or biotic factors. Some of these ecological features are indirectly included in our habitat breadth score, since generalist species may have life-history and functional attributes to cope with biotic and abiotic environmental filters better than specialist species (Young et al. 2005).

Young fallows such as those we surveyed to estimate the NRP are not always present in areas where restoration is being planned, but they are good sites to identify potential species for passive restoration purposes at the initial stages of restoration efforts (Meli et al. 2013a). In subsequent stages of the restoration project, other sites such as older regeneration patches and other ecological species characteristics could be used.

Our target species list is useful to restore typical disturbed riparian forests in the studied region, including those human-disturbed sites that were abandoned recently (with minimal natural regeneration) or long ago (with substantial natural regeneration). Unlike Brudvig & Mabry

Table 2. Species selection index (SSI) values for 30 woody species targeted for re-vegetation of riparian forest in Marqués de Comillas. The SSI integrates standardized values (categories of Z-values, see text for details) of Natural dominance (D), Natural regeneration potential (NRP), Habitat breadth (H), Social value (SV) and Technical constraints (Tc).

Species	D	NRP	H	SV	Tc	SSI
<i>Dialium guianense</i>	8	10	9	9	7	43
<i>Brosimum alicastrum</i>	6	6	9	9	8	38
<i>Brosimum costarricense</i>	6	10*	7	6	8	37
<i>Ficus</i> sp.	10	9	2	8	7	36
<i>Cajoba arborea</i>	10	6	4	5	7	32
<i>Vochysia guatemalensis</i>	5	7	7	8	5	32
<i>Trophis racemosa</i>	4	10*	6	6	6	32
<i>Albizia leucocalyx</i>	5	8	3	8	7	31
<i>Ampelocera hottlei</i>	6	3	7	6	9	31
<i>Calophyllum brasiliense</i>	5	6	7	6	7	31
<i>Licania platypus</i>	5	10*	6	6	4	31
<i>Posoqueria latifolia</i>	5	10*	6	5	5	31
<i>Guarea glabra</i>	5	3	7	6	8	29
<i>Protium copal</i>	7	3	9	6	3	28
<i>Castilla elastica</i>	5	3	6	6	7	27
<i>Hirtella americana</i>	4	4	7	5	7	27
<i>Pouteria durlandii</i>	5	5	7	6	4	27
<i>Swartzia simplex</i>	5	10*	3	5	4	27
<i>Blepharidium mexicanum</i>	4	5	6	4	7	26
<i>Inga vera</i>	4	5	3	9	5	26
<i>Eugenia negrita</i>	4	10*	7	0	5	26
<i>Quararibea yunckerii</i>	4	10*	3	6	3	26
<i>Nectandra reticulata</i>	5	10*	6	0	4	25
<i>Miconia argentea</i>	4	5	4	6	5	24
<i>Jacaratia dolichaula</i>	4	10*	6	0	4	24
<i>Croton schiedeanus</i>	5	2	6	5	5	23
<i>Eugenia mexicana</i>	5	6	4	0	5	20
<i>Licaria capitata</i>	4	10*	4	0	2	20
<i>Nectandra sanguinea</i>	5	10*	1	0	4	20
<i>Miconia glaberrima</i>	4	10*	1	0	3	18

*Species absent in disturbed forest and therefore considered to need active reintroduction (high NRP values).

(2008), we did not consider the species of the regional pool that were already established at the disturbed sites because they may not be the most suitable species in social or economic terms when degradation is not very severe, as was the case in our study. The ability of such species to establish naturally in degraded areas is high, and therefore it may be more appropriate to use these species for restoration of severely degraded lands, such as mined sites (Parrotta & Knowles 2001; Sharma & Sunderraj 2005) or sites highly susceptible to erosion on steep slopes (dos Santos et al. 2008). Seed size and dispersal mechanism syndromes have also been used to understand which species might require active re-establishment and which might passively recolonize degraded sites (Pausas & Lavorel 2003). For example, regenerating species in disturbed sites are frequently those with small seeds, which are widely dispersed (Chazdon et al. 2007). We believe that regeneration indices (cf. dos

Santos et al. 2008) are more accurate indicators of these two types of species. Although not all second-growth forests have recolonized degraded sites, and some species may be adapted to several forms of degradation (e.g. degraded soils, fires and weed infestations), the regeneration potential is a good indicator of the potential use of the species for restoration purposes.

Habitat breadth was the third criterion. We found that half of the species were present in at least three geomorphological units, suggesting that these species could establish in the riparian forest as in other ecosystem types. Few species showed high habitat breadth for a particular unit, and only *A. leucocalyx* was present in the floodplain and should be re-established in riparian restoration sites in our case study. The occurrence of species at particular habitats is implicitly related to their recruitment niche and should be strongly linked to ecological restoration projects. Many species can persist as adults in a far broader niche than that into which they can successfully recruit (Young et al. 2005) because habitat associations of adults do not necessarily emerge at early life stages (Comita et al. 2007). Restoration activities may broaden the dispersal or recruitment niche through translocation of propagules and assisted establishment, and create non-regenerating populations by planting saplings where adults can develop but seeds fail to germinate or seedlings have limitations to establish themselves (Young et al. 2005).

Social value was the fourth criterion and a salient contribution of our proposed procedure for restoration. Our selected species were socially accepted or, at least, had some appraisal or utility for local people, mostly for timber. However, selecting only socially valuable species may put at risk their establishment in the harsh conditions of a degraded site. Non-pioneer species are a typical case of this situation, but in the humid tropics they show high plasticity in their growth rates and often establish successfully when they are directly transplanted to open sites, even when these sites have not been previously colonized by pioneer species (Martínez-Garza et al. 2005). Monitoring field performance of these socially valuable species will be crucial in restoration projects.

Although it is not the case in our study, the number of use types could be much larger than abundance classes, making these two components not comparable. In such cases, averaging the normalized score in a single SV could be a way to obtain a single SV value. Another option could be using rank abundance and use types as separated values.

Interestingly, the species abundance denoted by local farmers (social information) was not correlated with the actual species abundance recorded in the reference sites (ecological information; App. S1). At the same time, we found that those species that are naturally established

following secondary regrowth had the lower social value among local people. This is an unusual outcome, considering that in other tropical regions the young, second-growth forests have high utilitarian as well as conservation value and will likely become important sources of timber and non-timber forest products (Chazdon & Coe 1999; Vöck 2004; Gavin 2009). This emphasizes the need for further research on flora uses among local people, both in pristine and secondary riparian forest. The fact that people did not recognize the species by their abundance or ecological dominance does not mean that they do not actually use these species. Other criteria such as utility should be analysed to evaluate the accuracy of our correlation to reflect real local uses in the region.

Local knowledge collected by interviews is important and useful to make local people pro-active participants at all stages of restoration practice (Blakesley et al. 2002b). Snapshot questionnaires may not reveal the species preferences of the local communities, but we believe they do reflect the farmer's perception, as we infer from other previous participatory interviews that were conducted since our conservation project started several years ago.

Supply of ecosystem services (i.e. supporting, regulating, provisioning and cultural services) is directly related to human well-being (MEA 2005). Any woody species can supply more than one supporting and regulating service (e.g. habitat provision, carbon fixation, soil retention and many others). Thereby, the differences among these species are mostly related to their supply of provisioning or cultural services, and thus the use of species by local people could be a surrogate for such services.

Technical constraints for propagation and introduction of target species were the fifth criterion. This criterion considers ease of seed collection, germination and alternatives for introduction. Seed availability is indirectly included when valuing the ease to collect seeds of different sizes from fruits showing variable dehiscence. However, species phenology and dioecism (seeds produced only by female trees) also affect seed availability, especially of mast-fruiting species. Further research about these characteristics of the 30 selected species would provide important information to estimate and value the entire spectrum of efforts to obtain enough seeds and will be considered as surrogate variables to score technical constraints in our riparian restoration project in the future.

While local people may be interested in propagating native species for their reintroduction in many restoration projects, this propagation may be time-consuming and expensive. Consequently, it is important to select species that are easily propagated, since local communities cannot implement techniques that are costly or hazardous (e.g. use of acid for seed scarification). Research is needed to better understand the technical constraints to propagate

and reintroduce native species, including species identification and studies of fruiting phenology, seed germination and nursery practice (Knowles & Parrotta 1995). Re-vegetation projects should emphasize the importance of this information. Lack of information underestimates the rating of some species but also guides future research on species propagation for restoration purposes. This highlights the ‘adaptability’ of our procedure. Species could be selected on the basis of one or two criteria and, at the same time, they could generate useful information about the other criteria.

Seeds from species classified as difficult to propagate should not be collected in the first stages of the restoration project, as it would be more efficient and less costly to locate and transplant saplings from the forest (Knowles & Parrotta 1995). However, the conservation status of some target species may restrict this technique, because a threatened or endangered species may not bear additional reduction in its population through harvesting (Garibaldi & Turner 2004). Also, reintroduction may be a successful strategy for overcoming dispersal limitations but may not reflect adult establishment (Turnbull et al. 2000); thus, the performance of transplanted species in the field should be included in our Tc index in future stages of the restoration project (Knowles & Parrotta 1995; Elliott et al. 2003).

Species selection index

The criteria used to constitute the SSI appear to be independent and complementary, as we found hardly any significant correlation among them. Thus, ideally, they should be used simultaneously or at least in groups of two or three. We considered all five criteria to be equivalent when assembling the SSI. However, as discussed above, when species establishment faces hard ecological limitations, ecological criteria could be more important than the technical or social ones (Sharma & Sunderraj 2005; dos Santos et al. 2008). Technical criteria could be considered most important when there are monetary or time constraints, whereas social criteria are essential and should be prioritized when there is no consensus among ecological and social interests. Thus, priority ranking of species in Table 2 could be re-ordered following these criteria (e.g. ecological priority, social priority and technical feasibility priority) in different restoration scenarios. The SSI average was near the median value, suggesting that species with high SSI were not frequent. At the same time, some species showed very low SSI due to lack of information, which highlights the dependence of the SSI on information availability.

The proposed procedure is useful to minimize costs and maximize efficiency in selecting species for forest restoration so that it can be attractive to different stakeholders. It

can also be applied to the screening and selection of woody species from a wide spectrum of other tropical and temperate regions. It is useful where trees are dominant, but its use would be limited in grasslands or other ecosystem types where species regeneration is difficult to estimate (Meli et al. 2013a). Further research is needed to select appropriate species to suit the specific ecological requirements in other ecosystem types.

Finally, the most appropriate methodology to select target species for restoration will strongly depend on the main objectives of any particular project. Other criteria could be considered in the selection of target species in other case studies, including adaptive capacity to different soils (Sharma & Sunderraj 2005), other social values (cf. Moreno-Cassasola & Pardowska 2009) or attributes such as dispersal syndromes (Sansevero et al. 2009). Technical constraints may be the most useful criterion in practical terms because these can increase the costs (time, labour, materials needed) of the restoration projects, but social criteria should be included in all restoration efforts (Garibaldi & Turner 2004).

Conclusions

We proposed a procedure to target species for forest restoration projects that leans on five criteria related to ecological, social and technical information. A major strength of this procedure is that the five criteria are independent and can be used separately in projects with different goals. Importantly, social information based on local perception is usually neglected in restoration projects. The high number of woody species found in the reference sites indicates that the regional species pool for riparian restoration is wide. To facilitate practical restoration, we identified a preliminary list of tree species that are most suitable for their reintroduction into degraded riparian zones in our study region and similar ecological and social settings (Brudvig & Mabry 2008).

A list of target species must be identified and used for the initial stages of restoration of ecosystems dominated by trees. However, the species selection criteria will depend on the main goals of the restoration project and on information availability. In human-dominated ecosystems or agricultural landscapes, prioritizing social and technical criteria to select species for restoration is crucial for restoration sustainability. Our procedure could be adapted to different social and ecological conditions and be enriched as new information is generated.

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supporting information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article:

Appendix S1. Participatory interviews with local communities and social value data.

Appendix S2. Technical constraints, methods and data.

Appendix S3. List of abbreviations.

Table S1. Species list in the reference sites.

Table S2. Species list in the disturbed sites.

Table S3. Data on importance index, natural regeneration potential and habitat breadth.