



10 years of history



EXPEDIENT

Casa Socio-Environmental Fund Team - 2020

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Summary

A Love Story 10 years	4
Planting hope in the countryside	10
Two countries, one people.....	17
Water people, waterless people	24
All shades of green.....	29
Transforming tourism in the ally	38
Challenges and victories in South America	49
Blocked rivers	56
The heart pulled out of the earth	62

A Love Story 10 years

“I only ask God that I may never be indifferent to the pain of others, and that death does not find me empty and alone for not having done enough”

This verse, from the song of León Gieco and perpetuated in the voice of Mercedes Sosa, reflects with great clarity what moves all of us at CASA Socio-Environmental Fund: we do not see ourselves as mere spectators of a world with so much need, without doing what is possible, and many times the nearly impossible, to contribute in some way. From its founders, staff, advisors, and partners, to the more than 1000 grantees in 11 South American countries during our history, there is something very strong that unites people who believe that the world can be made better, that there is a rightful and honorable place for



every human, living being and form of life that co-habit our Planet-Home. And more, that if there is anything threatening the life of one being, it threatens the lives of all. Thus, even if not “enough” everyone can do something.



Alexandre Araújo, CaroLina Campos, Alcides Faria, Tamara Mohr e Renato Cunha

Resilience in difficulties

What we have learned in those 10 years, as we got to know and support so many groups in so many remote, almost forgotten corners of this great South American territory, is the power of resistance, resilience, creativity, unity and solidarity, of regeneration and nobility that human beings are capable of. Under the most difficult and painful circumstances, communities reinvent themselves, reach out for help, strive for solutions.

We have seen all kinds of difficulties, and much injustice: whole communities with their rivers and food poisoned for years on end by oil spills, or mercury from the mining industry, or pesticides

from monocultures, without control or punishment for the companies that provoked them. Others living in regions of extreme drought, where the few existing rivers are privatized and, therefore, unaccessible to them. Many more living under death threat for taking a stand to protect their forests from illegal logging; or being assassinated. And still others living under threat of being forcibly removed from their traditional territories inside intact forests — irreplaceable patrimony of humanity — to make room for mega constructions that, questionably, will serve to benefit people and cities far away, even when other solutions exist.

... and much creativity

There is also, of course, great creativity to find sustainable solutions to improve life while respecting the fragile processes of nature, from agroforestry systems to renewable energy production, from increasing the value of extractive

products to strengthen communities while increasing food security in cities, to ways to prepare for, and deal with, the consequences of extreme weather and other climate change issues, among many others.

The inspiration

The creation and maintenance of CASA Socio-Environmental Fund in the last ten years has been a very rich adventure of encounters

and experiences. The first thing that makes us different: CASA was not created to “be” a “fund” per se. It was brought to life to deal



Sérgio Guimarães, Miriam Prochnow e Renato Cunha



with a problem perceived by a group of South American environmentalists, and that was not being considered in the level that we believed sufficient by conventional funding mechanisms — the lack of resources needed to enable qualified participation of the communities most affected by the destruction of our great ecosystems (eco-

regions or biomes). They needed to have direct participation and voice on issues that affected their lives, to propose and implement solutions. It was, thus, necessary to seek and channel these resources to them in a consistent and structured manner.

CASA Socio-Environmental Fund is a unique fund that is born from within the socio-environmental movements of South America to support community based socio-environmental solutions throughout the region!

Where we came from

A not well known factor is that CASA's original founders conformed, in 1993, the Advisory Board of the Francisco Foundation – the first socio-environmental small grants fund created by Brazilians in Brazil. When FF was closed in 99, Global Greengrants Fund, a US based fund, invited the same group to recommend grassroots projects they could support. This initiative enables this group to meet with some frequency from 2000 on, and develop a strategy whereby small grants, in a well thought and coordinated manner, can really make a difference towards supporting local communities to engage in the protection of ecosystems, from the natural grass fields to the wetlands, the coastal zones to the savanna, the drought stricken lands to the great forests of the region. It is this experience that encourages us to look beyond: if we could find more funding partners, we would have a perfect mechanism to respond to so many more demands and create so many more solutions.

The second and most crucial factor happens in 2004 when Charles Stewart Mott Foundation decides to support the strategic planning and viability costs that, in the beginning of 2005, launches CASA. From the start, Both ENDS, a Dutch NGO, was also an exceptional partner, helping to bring new funders and partners from Europe. These initial partners stayed with us for the journey, and thankfully, many more came along.

Two purposes

The greatest thing is that our proposal was understood and was taking shape and form, serving two purposes simultaneously: to make resources available for the most remote groups whom conventional philanthropy couldn't reach, and to support philanthropic institutions, engaged in themes and issues in our region to invest in a level of society to which they would not easily have direct access.



Sérgio Guimarães, Rubens Harry Born, Amy Shannon, Fabiana Costa, Maria Amália, Tamara Mohr, Jorge Daneri e Marcelo Michelsohn

Why South America

From the start, it was obvious to us that most South American ecosystems sit across country borders. So, if we were to help protect their integrity, we needed to create a South

American fund, which, for facility reasons, was headquartered in Brazil. So that is how CASA was designed.



Cristina Orpheo e Silvio Sant'Ana

The great challenge

This journey of CASA found challenges, of course. To deal with such diverse and complex themes with such small donations can seem impossible, and even senseless. What can such a small grant achieve that can change anything

given the enormity of the existing threats? Alone and isolated, really not much. Looking at the complexity of issues that CASA needed to respond to also shaped the way we went about doing it.

Living systems

Let's try think differently to make sense of this. Take a look at an intact forest. How many millions of living beings share one square meter of forest — insects, plants, funghi, reptiles, mammals and bird species? Who controls this environment? Who determines relationships? And the human body, who organizes how it processes food, makes the heart beat, inhales the air, takes the oxigene and discards the rest? These a living systems, that function exactly because it is in their own nature to maintain life. If a tree falls and opens more

space for the sun, the forest rapidly accommodates by creating more space for new life. If the body gets sick, some small stimulus (a tea, a medicine) reestablishes the conditions necessary to return it to balance. The quicker the information about the change or unbalance activates the "response system," the faster adjustments can be made to re-balance the whole — a rapid feedback loop is crucial.

Many times, small input, departing from deep and imbedded knowledge of reality can leverage important regenerative processes for communities and their ecosystems.

How to act in complex systems

The same occurs with complex social systems that move the world. Many times a small interference, based on deep knowledge of a certain reality, can sparkle important regenerative processes for communities and their ecosystems. The question is to be an inherent part of these processes to know exactly where to intervene.

Rapid and efficient response

This is the model used by CASA, based on the *systems thinking* approach. It was designed to respond rapid and efficiently to the complex socio-environmental themes of our times, as it is fed by the knowledge of thousands of people who belong to each region and dedicate their lives to these causes in search for real results. All of what CASA supports in planned to respond quickly and effectively to the complexity of issues and regions where we work.

To make resources get to the hands of groups that hold processes and initiatives that seek to solve such complex problems, we need to rely on a quick response, and very well informed, mechanism. So, as we were accessing more resources to donate, instead of relying on just the few original advisors to recommend grants, we started to use a multiplicity of complementary strategies. We have now hundreds of advisors, friends, partner institutions, all of whom know in depth the territories and issues where they work. Any of them can bring to our attention a group that we should support, and that will count with their knowledgeable dedication to succeed.



Carolina Campos e Adriana Ramos

Our more than 1000 grantees also know us well and can always recommend groups they know, which in turn strengthens their networks. The thematic and regional networks and lists we take part in (many that we supported from the start) are the routes through which we disseminate our calls for proposals and information about each funding round, trusting they will reverberate way beyond. As the years went by, we also became better known, of course. So today some of the more experienced groups can come to us spontaneously.

Incomparable reach

This format allows us to have incomparable reach to important social actors, a great many apparently invisible to most funders. Moreover, due to our connected nature, we are able to have a “macro” vision of the whole territory while we act in the micro-level. We see the relationships among the

various groups we support and how each grant complements each other, producing much larger and even exponential results.



Equipe CASA 2015 – Rodrigo Moreira, Cláudia Gibeli, Maira Krenak, Maria Amália, Ana Campbell, Cristina Orpheo, Maha Akamine, Taila Wengrzynek e Attilio Zolin

Taking up our share

All our care with the resources we receive, and the delicate and measured way in which they are conducted to the local groups so invested in protecting their homes — the South American ecosystems — connect us to the beginning of this story. If we, inhabitants of this planet, are conscious that our way of life is putting in risk the continuation of life as we know, we must step up and do something.

And more, is it fair that the most excluded and forgotten population of our region, who live in the forests we say we value, in the rivers or fishing

villages, or even in the most inhospitable places and deserts, carry alone the weight of responsibility to protect and revitalize these places? And that they carry the financial burden alone as well? I'm sure we understand that no, they shouldn't have to.

So, can we do something about it? Absolutely!

We can support them financially, through mechanisms that guarantee accountability, such as the one that CASA Socio-Environmental Fund has created.

Choosing life

It is an investment in the viability of our own future, in the maintenance of the life conditions on this planet of which we depend. It is an act of solidarity and love towards life. We may not be able to do enough, but to step up for the protection of Life is always the right choice!

We are happy to celebrate our 10th anniversary in your company, and in that of such brave and valuable people — the caretakers of Life!



Maria Amália Souza



Planting hope in the countryside



Grupo Trama na AGRIMINAS. Foto Amalapinha

In the mountains of Minas Gerais, as in other rural areas of our region, life seems to go on peacefully and slowly, simple and joyful as in so many poems and songs that have always praised the good country life.

However, when we get closer, we see that just a few communities have resisted in the 21st century. Quite often, these communities are made up of old folks who were left behind in places abandoned by

public authorities, after their children moved away in search of work and study in the cities. These folks have lost their roots and their traditional way of life, and have never known the hoped-for future.

People with traditional knowledge of the environment, cultivation techniques, and how to live in harmony with nature felt they had no space or incentive, and had been left without access to new technologies that might enhance their lives. Abandoned to their own fate, they had no access



Festa da Lapinha. Foto Amalapinha.jpeg

to basic health and education services. In addition, incentives to agribusiness and extractivism led to the occupation of more and more territory, while

a new model of society strongly attracted young people to the cities.



Entrega de mudas para reflorestamento. Foto Amalapinha.jpeg

Guaranteeing rights to the good country life

How can the good county life be preserved, ensuring access to basic rights, living a decent life, having exchanges with the urban population, and maintaining organic cultivations and proper care of clean water sources? This has been one of the focuses of the CASA Fund, a strategy to strengthen those populations, enabling access to adequate and clean technologies, and improving the lives of family farmers, who ultimately supply most foods consumed in the cities.

Earth's generosity

Simone Fontes Pasko and Lucas Miyahara followed their hearts. Still very young, they left the city in the early 2000s in search of a simple and happy rural life.



“We longed for the quality of life, freedom, and security of a simpler life in a rural area. We moved to Minas Gerais seeking this dream, to a place with no electricity, abundance of clean water, where we

own hands, where we could raise our children with freedom and values, forming their character.”

Simone tells her story with emotion. With lots of



Casa de feitorio e sede da Amalapinha. Foto Amalapinha

could build our straw and mud house as the old folks used to do. We wanted a place where our subsistence would come from the strength of our

love and willpower, she and Lucas built this new way of life, were moved by the first harvests, by nature’s generosity and abundance, and by the wisdom and knowledge of rural people about land cultivation and other mysteries.

Rural migration — wanted or needed?

But, soon they began to notice the difficulties of rural life, the lack of infrastructure and opportunity, and the lack of doctors, dentists, tools, and materials. People in the region were leaving. The young people left in search of jobs because there was nothing to generate income locally. There was a clear contrast between the abundance of the land and the lack of access to basic goods and rights. With their knowledge about legislation, public policies, and basic rights, they started to question local reality.

As Simone stated, people do not leave their land because they want to. They love the land and value their way of life. It’s out of necessity.



Jovens trançadeiras em busca de sua identidade. Foto Amalapinha



Creating solutions



Grupo Trama na AGRIMINAS. Foto Amalapinha

“We began to think in ways to change this. The Terra Viva Network (Land Alive Network) that already had CASA’s support was the first attempt to gather the region’s surplus production and take it to the city to generate some income for the community.

“City folks liked our products quite a lot. They noted that the banana was sweeter, tastier, the coffee better, the flour more savory. Of course! Everything was organic, produced with loving care. This began to generate some income, families got involved, were excited... Thus, we had the idea of creating the Lapinha Residents, Farmers and Beekeepers Association.

“In the beginning, we were only five families of younger people who wanted to stay on the land. We didn’t want to move to the city. We got together and wrote the proposal for the first project to build the Community Workshop House, where flour and *rapadura* (hard unrefined cane sugar bar) were prepared. Everybody had a space in the backyard for those preparations, but this was very precarious. The Community House made it

possible to have more equipment and to speed up production.



Feitio de Melado. Foto Amalapinha



Festa da Lapinha. Foto Amalapinha

Trust and flexibility guarantee the first step

“We sent our proposal to an institution, but they turned it down. Then, Carolina Moura, who we had met at the Terra Viva Network and already worked with the CASA Fund, suggested we send them the project. And they approved it! Such a happy day! It was very important to get this first support, even if we did not yet have a legal, official status. CASA trusted us. This was the difference I try to explain to everybody: CASA had no bureaucracy to accept our proposal; it was flexible.”

Supported by CASA Socio-Environmental Fund, Amalapinha’s women built the Community Workshop House, equipped with a gasoline-powered motor to grind the sugarcane and grate the cassava. They invested in education and training – especially in planning, financial management, and marketing – and sought out alternatives to increase family income, and to improve the quality of life of their families and themselves.

“We created the Amalapinha Association,” continues Simone. “This was like a hurricane in our lives! After the Association, we met a lot of people, we got to know other associations, and we began to participate in councils, meetings.... The community was empowered and, at the same time, our responsibility increased. For those people who wanted to stay in the countryside, it was a dream come true.”



Festa da Lapinha. Foto Amalapinha



Chapéu de palha Indaiá. Foto Amalapinha

Lapinha women reached deep into their memories to recall the ability to weave the Indaiá palm tree straw, a knowledge handed down from

"Without the first support, our work would have gone nowhere"

Afterwards came the baking paper molds for the city's bakeries. With the Arteforma project, the women discovered new abilities and a new source of income that has since been on the rise.

"Since then, we have implemented several projects; we have identified work areas, ways of keeping the community united, with resources and rights ensured. Amalapinha was like a child we conceived, and saw being born and then growing. We learned from it, we got educated and even if one day we're no longer around, or if the Association is closed down, what we created will always be within us, in our hearts. It started



Festa da Lapinha. Foto Amalapinha

generation to generation. With the techniques and management and production practices learned at training workshops supported by the CASA Fund, that tradition became a good business with the Indaiá straw hat greatly appreciated in the region.

as a dream, but now is a reality. Over the years, in addition to ongoing CASA support, we also received other supports, we found more partners. However, without that first support, our work would have gone nowhere."

The collective ensuring success

Simone is passionate about this work, and thinks that the great achievements of Amalpinha were building a collective, appreciating people and their efforts to make their dreams come true, and the way people related to each other.

“We learned to spot people’s inner gifts, and to appreciate that in the collective. This is the way forward, to establish good relations. In its ten years, CASA’ work has also been based on

relationships, on individual talents, thus helping to form strong collectives everywhere. We’ve gone quite a bit past our starting point; the truth we’ve learned to cultivate will go a long way. This might not be clear now, but it’s inside, at the root, it’s our collective strength. You’ve got to want the best for the place and the people around you; whatever you desire for yourself, you have also to wish for the collective. That’s the secret and the treasure.”

This is also the great good and the treasure that has accompanied the CASA Socio-Environmental Fund during its ten years of existence. We want to thank Simone and her community for their effort to improve this world, starting with their own lives. The Fund exists to support these initiatives.



Simone Fontes Pasko

Two countries, one people



Ruth Buendía no vale do Rio

Ruth Buendía Mestoquiari was born in an Ashaninka Indigenous community on the Ene



River banks in the Peruvian forest. She presides the Central Ashaninka do Rio Ene (CARE) that struggles for Indigenous rights in the Peruvian Amazonia. She is also a member of the Indigenous Peoples Legal Defense Program of CASA Socio-Environmental Fund.

Ruth won the 2014 Goldman Environmental Prize, the equivalent of the Nobel Prize in the environmental area. This was an important international recognition that projected her role on the world stage and ensured visibility for thousands of anonymous Indigenous people who only wanted the right to live on their land, to follow their traditions, and to have their basic rights respected.



Povo Ashaninka. Foto Ashaninka-Apiwtxa

A warrior's path

Ruth Buendia's personal story blends into the stories of thousands of American Indigenous people facing up to governments and economic powers that see other uses for forests, rivers, and mountains.

Ruth's father was murdered during the years of armed struggle that split Peru in the 1980s and 1990s. She lived with her mother and five siblings in a kind of concentration camp run by guerrilla fighters. She managed to flee, enduring the forest, hunger, fear, and disease until she got to the city of Satipo. There she encountered underemployment and prejudice, but her inner strength was greater than the burden of reality. She began to change her own fate, she resumed her studies, and she met CARE. The young fighter volunteers to help in improving the condition of her people and returns to her territory to work with the Ene River communities.

She got the news of the construction of the Pakitzapango dam through a radio report in 2008. This dam would affect around 10,000 Indigenous people and was intended to generate electricity for export to Brazil. At that time, the communities already faced timber exploitation and oil drilling, through concessions the Peruvian government granted to companies – without prior consultations with local communities.



Rio Ene. Foto Jonathan McLeod

Thus, Ruth decided to seek information and allies to prevent yet another disaster. In this process, she met Monti Aguirre and Glenn Switkes (from International Rivers), both long-time CASA Advisory Board members and partners.

Key Partnerships

This is how Monti defines her role as CASA's Advisory Board member: "More than an institutional relation, it's a personal relation of friendship and trust. All the projects I recommend are for groups that I have known for a long time, or that I've come to know through my work to protect rivers, human rights, and Indigenous rights. It's the story of a life.

"That's how I met Ruth and got to know the case of the Ene River Ashaninka. We visited the area and began a relation with people from CARE. We noticed the Ashaninka people in Peru needed capacity building on the issue of the dams. We noted the urgency of supporting their interaction with other groups facing the same challenge, especially groups in Brazil, a country also interested in infrastructure and energy projects in Peru."



Jovem Ashaninka. Foto Blog Ashaninka-Apiwtxa

Strategic approach

Based on an analysis of the context and the local situation, we concluded the Ene River communities hadn't been consulted about the dam. There was a legal issue to explore – the possibility of initiating the struggle using the ILO Convention 169 that regulates a number of Indigenous peoples' rights.

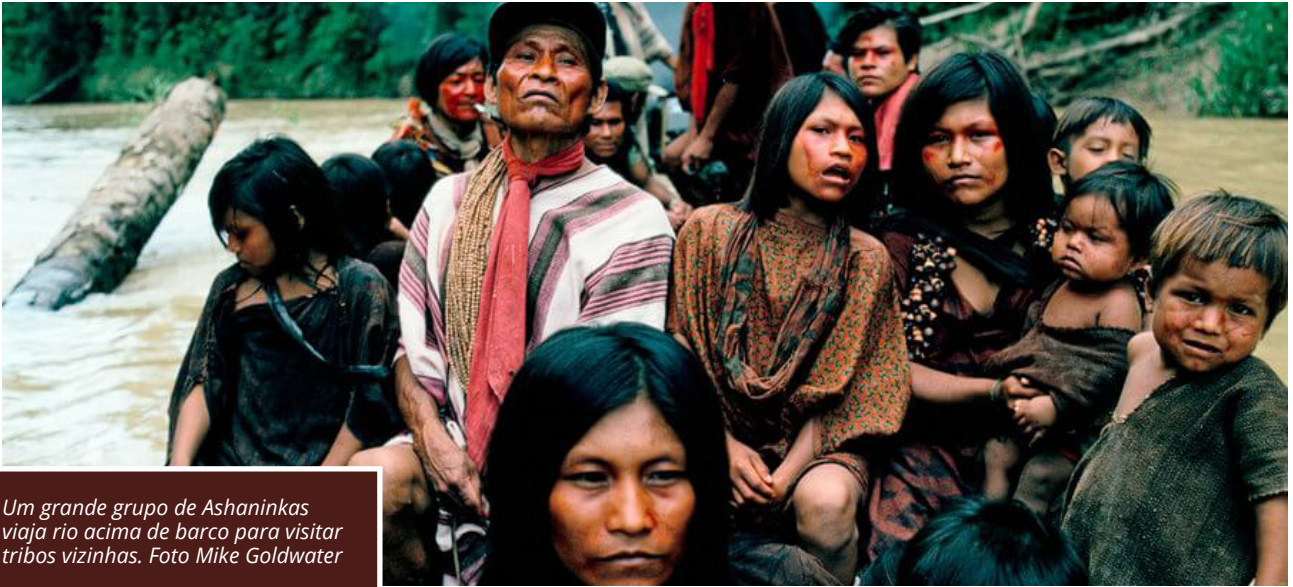
"With some support from the CASA, we contacted a lawyer to prepare the legal case. With a legal study that argued the company's malfeasance, we managed to stop the construction of the Pakitzapango dam. Later on, the contractor in charge of building the hydroelectric power plant (Odebrecht) gave up the project."

Ruth also visited European countries, the United States, and Brazil to denounce arbitrary measures and threats. Other Indigenous leaders from Brazil also joined the struggles, as these damages to the forests and rivers crossed the borders.

CASA supported several actions in Acre state, along the border with Peru and Bolivia, and also in other countries, under the South America Support Program geared to communities affected by large infrastructure and energy projects, with Mott Foundation funding, as well as support from CASA's Indigenous Peoples Legal Defense Program.



Ashaninka fiscaliza a fronteira. Foto Acervo CPI-AC



Um grande grupo de Ashaninkas viaja rio acima de barco para visitar tribos vizinhas. Foto Mike Goldwater

Joint and complementary response

Expansion of the CASA's support beyond our own borders takes place to address in a joint, articulated, and complementary fashion issues that are pervasive throughout the region. We helped especially in capacity building with people under threat, supporting combined strategies, such as the use of ILO Convention 169 for Indigenous peoples in several countries, and providing funds so they could travel and participate in hearings of UN, OAS, and ILO human rights committees.

The Acre Pro-Indian Commission (CPI) is an important partner of the CASA for action strategies in this sensitive region where forests, rivers, and Indigenous groups existed well before today's states were formed and established borders, always at the cost of much conflict and war.

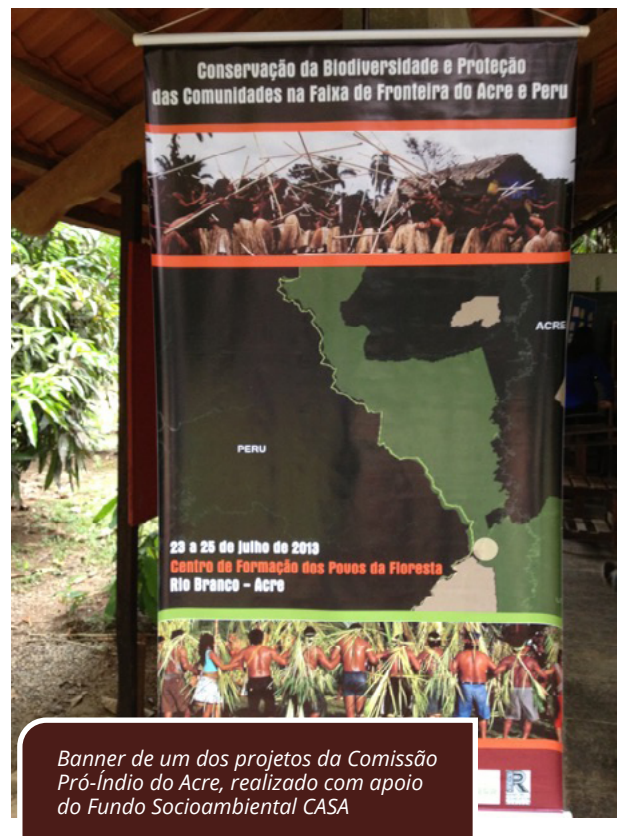
Knowledge sharing

Maria Luiza P. Ochoa, also known as Malu, coordinates the Acre CPI's Public Policies and Regional Networking Program. She has been involved in this issue for over twenty years – and she notes the importance of CASA support.

“In 2005, we had the first binational gathering of Indigenous populations, pulling together dozens of representatives from Indigenous organizations from both sides of the Brazil-Peru border. It was quite an experience for the CPI to understand what was happening on the Peruvian side. This meeting

provided information that made it possible to put forward strategies for threatened areas.

This region has a mosaic of cultures, with predominance of Indigenous peoples and isolated populations. It's a very vulnerable region,



Banner de um dos projetos da Comissão Pró-Índio do Acre, realizado com apoio do Fundo Socioambiental CASA



Ashaninkas do Brasil e Peru definem estratégias para proteção de seu território. Foto Acervo CPI - Acre

especially along the border with Peru, where the government signs concession agreements for the exploitation of timber, oil, and gas even in Indigenous and park areas. The presence of drug traffickers aggravates the conflicts.”

There is the geopolitical framework through which South American governments are increasing the region’s infrastructural integration, with the construction of roads, railways, waterways, gas pipelines, hydroelectric power plants, and other large projects. The objective of all these projects is the economic and physical integration of South American countries and they will not hesitate to transgress protected areas. In addition, there are bilateral agreements to exploit minerals, oil, and timber, as well as to build routes to move all these products to ports on the Pacific coast for export to China.

With CASA’s support, the CPI has worked to mobilize Indigenous communities, creating spaces to gather and share information, and giving voice to those actors.

“The first project supported by CASA in partnership with the CPI was a 2012 workshop on the ILO Convention 169. This UN Convention guarantees to traditional peoples who are potentially threatened by proposed projects on their lands the right to free, prior and informed consent. Thus, we managed to get together a large number of Indigenous people from different ethnic backgrounds to learn about the legislation and the possibility of using that Convention to safeguard their rights,” added Malu.



Equipe da Comissão Pró-Índio do Acre. De camiseta rosa, no meio, Maria Luiza P. Ochoa. Projeto Monitoramento, Vigilância e proteção dos territórios indígenas e índios isolados na região de fronteira Acre (Brasil) e Madre de Dios (Peru).



Young leaders conquer new spaces



Lucas Manchineri. Foto Acervo CPI – Acre

Lucas Manchineri and Isaac Ashaninka are two Indigenous young men with a history of leadership and activism in their communities and with partners. Their work helps Indigenous peoples to increasingly have their own voice, their own strategies, and actions to protect the physical and cultural integrity of their territories, so the people in the Indigenous villages can enjoy health and respect, and resist threats.

“Before information came from the top down,” Lucas Manchineri explained. “We are changing this scenario. We organized five workshops with teachers on Indigenous Land about the ILO Convention 169. We discussed how the process takes place and what was impacting our lands. The law says that to develop any project you must first listen to the community. There must be a study of the impact and consultations with the community to clarify issues and provide information. This is the international law, but it’s also in our Federal Constitution. To face this reality, we must know our duties and rights. Today, our peoples know how to talk to authorities; it was hard educational work, but it was worth it.”

Isaac Ashaninka is member of a family who pioneered the work to defend rights and build a new reality for their people, who live along the Amônia River, in Acre state. He is a teacher and community leader; and he comments on the situation of his people divided between two countries. These countries have different laws for Indigenous peoples, but both implement actions that have the same negative impact.

“In 2014, four Ashaninka were killed on the border between our territory and Peru. But, this violence is nothing new, it’s been happening for centuries. Since I was a kid, I’ve heard these stories of violence. Loggers invading our lands, cutting down the forest, and threatening the Indigenous people; companies that come to exploit oil, gas, and minerals; the action of drug traffickers. These



Ao fundo, de camiseta vermelha, Isaac Ashaninka. Foto Acervo CPI – Acre

people are now called *narco-loggers* because they work together.

“Our leaders receive death threats because they resist and denounce the invasion and violence, because we are now using our knowledge and technology to defend ourselves. But how can we change this situation? Only with positive actions, with sustainable social, cultural, and economic alternatives, with knowledge production and

exchange, with diplomacy and dialogue will we be able to stop the other side. A well-organized community, feeling that they are valued, with increased self-esteem can act on their own behalf; and they can intermediate conflicts with the Peruvian side. We have achieved all this with our own organization and support from and partnership with people such as those in the Pro-Indian Commission and the CASA.”

We want to live well

Today, Ruth Buendia and other Indigenous leaders from Peru continue their struggle, winning some battles but always keeping alert, and seeking joint strategies with leaders in Brazil and other South American countries. They know they can rely on the key support from partners such as the CASA. Her agenda is very busy and she has little time to be with her five children. This personal sacrifice is rewarded by the union of the Ashaninka people and the protection of a territory that belongs to future generations. That is how she describes her wish:

“Our past of warfare and terrorism marks us. We suffered the armed struggle and we don’t want to suffer another kind of terrorism, the economic terrorism imposed by the hydroelectric power plants. The Sendero history is still alive, and because of this we demand that the state show us some respect. The Ashaninka people do not want conflict; we want to live well. For the Ashaninka, the territory is our reason to live. If the dams flood the valley, where should we go? It would be as if we had disappeared.”



Benki Piyako Ashaninka – Liderança Apiwtxa. Foto Acervo Fundo CASA

Water people, waterless people



Foto Acervo ECOA

What does Dona Neuza have in common with Dona Edil, Daniel, Cleide, and thousands of other people who live in the Pantanal region in Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul states, and in contiguous parts of Bolivia and Paraguay?

All of them share life, dreams, and challenges in an ecosystem of rare beauty and great vulnerability. All of them led a relatively sedate life, eking out



their subsistence from the lush and generous nature until drastic changes in land occupation took place in the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries. These changes began to rapidly affect this equilibrium.

Pantanal land prices increased and provoked the greed of farmers. Mining companies occupied large areas, transforming green hills into huge piles of extracted minerals to be shipped to ports on railway freight cars or river barges. Tourism also discovered this region and many of its initiatives proved to be predatory, and highly damaging to the local population and ecosystem.

Invisible communities, guardians of our heritage

“I got to know the Pantanal as a researcher. Up to a certain point, I only saw data, the research numbers; but then I began to see the social and political dynamics of this vulnerable ecosystem. I met the invisible inhabitants who endured all kinds of pressure, living in poverty and without perspectives. And then I realized these people were looking after resources in priority areas; they were indeed responsible for that region’s incalculable cultural, historical, and natural heritage.”

André Siqueira, Executive Director of Ecology and Action (ECOA), has been a partner of the



André Siqueira – Diretor Presidente da ECOA – Ecologia e Ação. Foto Acervo ECOA.

CASA Fund since its inception. He talks about his involvement with the socioenvironmental cause and the importance of ECOA’s contribution to create a Fund that directly supported local populations – a key instrument to protect this large region.



Foto Acervo Fundo CASA.jpeg

A true partnership, concrete and inspiring

“The history of the partnership between the CASA Fund and associations representing Pantanal traditional communities is real, concrete, and inspiring. CASA Fund-supported actions in the Pantanal have changed the socioenvironmental and economic realities of some of the country’s most vulnerable groups. The joint work was initiated in 2000, with ECOA-supported networking in the territory. This nongovernment organization has worked for over 20 years in the region, where vulnerable and invisible groups obtained for the

first time access to funds that helped to strengthen their collective – a kind of work that other funders found it difficult to support.”

Dona Neusa, of the Miranda Artisan Fishers Association, summarizes in a few words the drama of fishers and extractivists who live in dozens of communities along riverbanks.

“Here we struggle on all fronts, darling! We catch the fish, we fish for the bait, we plant, we make



Foto Acervo ECOA

preserves, we welcome tourists... The women are in charge of the hardest tasks. They leave home very early and work all day in waist-high water. These are older women, mostly 45, 50, and 60 years old. It's very hard to manage everything

because when we get back home after 10 hours in the water all the household chores are waiting for us: clean up, put the house in order, look after the laundry, do the cooking. We realize that we have nothing else left but our will power.

“But we look back and see that the situation has improved, and improved a lot! We have had many victories. And this happened because we got support from the CASA Fund since the beginning, since the time there was no Association. With this support, we managed to get our first impermeable overalls to work in the water. This protected people from diseases, and snake bites. The Fund also supported our work to improve the management of live baits. Before this, the baits used to die in large numbers. Later, we got funds for processing fruits, especially *bocaiúva* (*Acrocomia aculeata*) that grows in this region. And with this funding we managed, through the Association, to link up with other groups, to get to know other associations from the region, meet other partners, and get other support. Of course, there is still a lot to do, and we still need a lot of help. But for sure, we've already won.”

No water and no air to breath

Alongside populations that live off the rivers, the nearby Antônio Maria Coelho community faces another reality: an absolute lack of water, destruction of forests, expulsion from the land, and disease-bearing pollutants.

“I was born here in Antônio Maria Coelho, a beautiful place, at the foot of the mountain, with lots of streams, and many native fruits. My family moved to the city, but I returned when I was 17. Life in the city was very hard. That's why my husband and I came back. In the family farm, we had everything nature offers. We grew our food and picked the fruits. We managed to live well. We used to have fruits everywhere. Then, everything began to change... It changed radically; we went from paradise to hell.

“In the view of powerful people, this was a place for the sole exploitation of large companies, the mining corporations that extract iron. Vale and five other companies built ports, large plants, and railways to transport the mineral. They didn't want other people living here, no fruits, no medicinal plants...It was to be only the iron. Everything began to be destroyed; the place was completely transformed...”

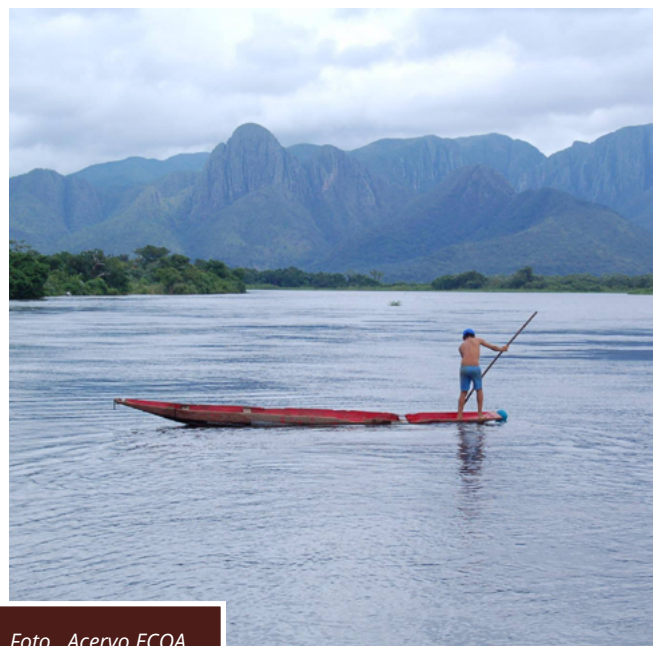


Foto Acervo ECOA

Edil, as Edeltrudes Correa de Oliveira is known, is the president of the Antônio Maria Coelho Residents Association. She talks about the



Foto Acervo ECOA

“The authorities didn’t want to listen to us...it was very hard. But, if we didn’t look for ways of surviving, what would happen to us? Today we have no water. The streams all dried up because of the wells drilled by the companies to get water to wash the mineral, while we went without drinking

community’s astonishment and indignation at the changes. We felt like reacting, but at the same time we had no confidence we could really change anything. We were invisible people, without a voice.

“The community became stronger, started to be noticed and heard!”

water! We have to rely on water trucks. This is tragic. People have to know this can happen. In addition, there is disease and death caused by pollution.”

Feeling indignant and confronted by this dilemma, the community got together in search of ways out.

“Then we decided to get down to it. With the help of ECOA and the CASA Fund, we managed to formalize the Association – although we didn’t understand much about bureaucratic procedures. Without this initial help that we needed so much at the very beginning, we wouldn’t have gotten what we have today.”

With the Association, the community was strengthened, began to exist, to be listened to! They started to be invited to public hearings, gatherings, and meetings; other partners came by, other projects were proposed that directly or indirectly benefited the whole community.

“Today we have the community kitchen equipped with CASA Fund support. With help from other partners, we are chasing our dreams of improving our lives. Women used to have no perspective, now we are generating income with the *bocaiúva* palm tree that only grows in this region. From the *bocaiúva* nuts we get flour, pulp, sweets, and oil. Men joined our struggle and are important companions. Some battles we have won, such as getting the SEBRAE seal for our products. In other struggles, we are making headway to victory, as in the fight for access to water.”



Foto. Acervo Fundo CASA



Foto Acervo Fundo CASA



Foto Acervo Fundo CASA

Empowerment is the only path to real and lasting change

workshops, associations, and registration at the notary public – the CASA Fund directly supported around 80 projects on the Brazilian Pantanal border in the 2000-2015 period (the support began even before the Association was legalized). This created a large network of communities linked around their ideals and needs. As the CASA Fund is focused on large ecosystems, we have supported another 50 projects in neighboring countries – Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Argentina – that form the large Paraguay-Paraná Basin.

More than supporting a specific project, the CASA Fund strategy is to combine resources to achieve broader results, influencing governments, and other partners and funders working in the region. The only road to actual and lasting change is to empower communities and strengthen local organizations to resist threats and defend their right to a decent life.

Women live bait collectors, Indigenous women, artisan women, the frontier teachers' collective, solar panels, radio communicators, production of informational materials, capacity building

In addition to protecting South American humid systems, this strategy of uniting forces has been able to challenge large projects with highly destructive potential, such as the Paraguay-Paraná Waterway. Since 1994, the resistance put up by this broad alliance has helped in protecting this marvelous region. This network operates in an organic way, mobilizing energies, skills, other resources, supporters, and knowledge to solve problems and to develop solutions.



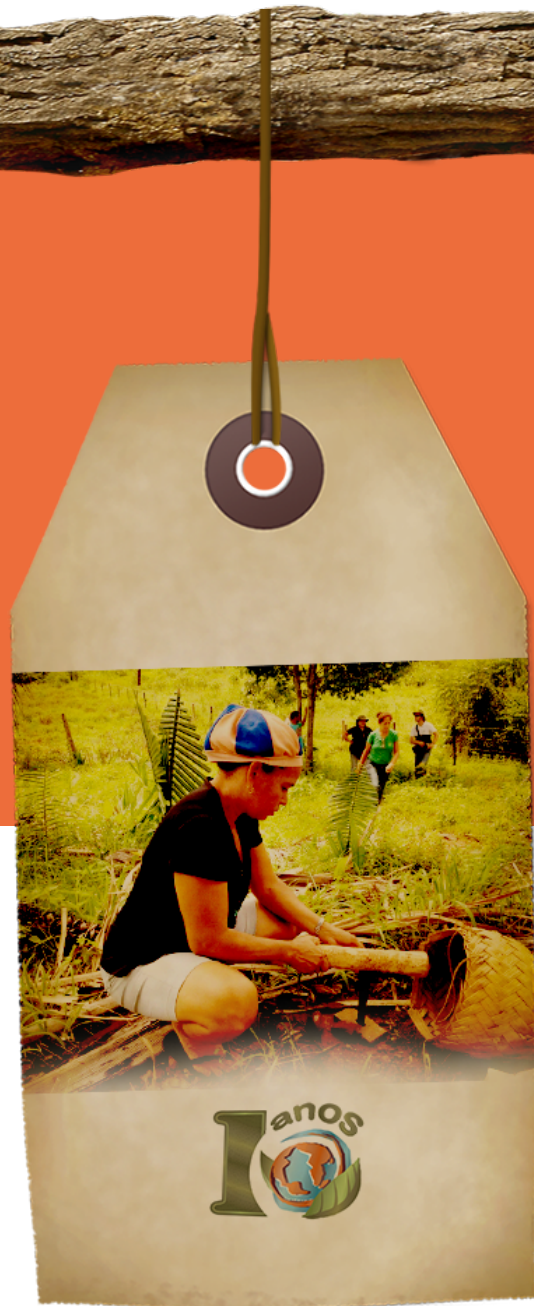
Foto Acervo ECOA

All shades of green



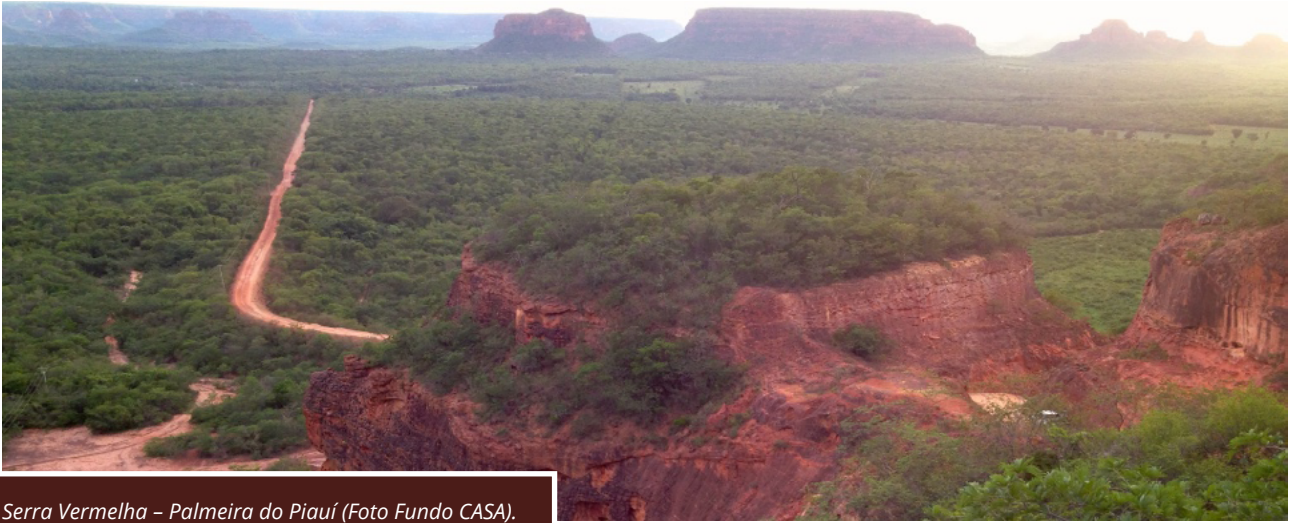
Vicente de Paula e esposa Dona Rita – Carrancas – Buriti – MA
(Foto acervo Fórum Carajás).

“I was born and raised here in Buriti. My father also lived here in the same conditions. I don’t feel like leaving. I love this place. I feel happy living here, seeing the number of fruits in the Cerrado, the hunting, the water... I have a fairly good area of preserved Cerrado. I’ve got some bacury trees... good fruit! Everything from this tree is useful. The seed has rich oil; we make soap with it. The wood is very good – “cool” wood that helps to keep water in the ground. If I turn my back, people will come and destroy everything. If I move out, all



this will be finished. They will cut the forest down, the soil will be left without protection, headwaters and rivers will dry up.”

These are the words of Vicente de Paula who lives in the city of Buriti, in the Lower Parnaíba region of Maranhão state. They express the feelings of thousands of other men and women, who were born, and lived for decades off family farming and extractivism, in the vast, diverse, and rich region between southern Pará state, northern Tocantins and Maranhão states. It is a place of many shades of green, where the Amazon Forest meets the Cerrado, meets the palm trees, and then becomes Caatinga.



Serra Vermelha – Palmeira do Piauí (Foto Fundo CASA).

Beginning of the end

Vicente de Paula and people living in hundreds of communities could not even imagine that right near them, under the forest, lay the world's largest high iron content ore reserves. In addition, there is gold, tin, bauxite (aluminum), manganese, nickel, copper, and other rare minerals. This "discovery" would mobilize the federal government and many other partners to implement the Grande Carajás Program, thus called in homage to the Serra dos Carajás, where it was first implemented in the 1980s.

Since then, the diversity of biomes, the many shades of green that were the natural richness of this vast region have been transformed and replaced by brownish mineral soot, and the dull landscape of pastures and large soybean and eucalyptus farms.

What has value – for Vicente de Paula, for the ten Indigenous peoples who still live in the region, for

the babassu nut women pickers, riverside dwellers, Quilombolas, extractivists, people who have been forgotten by public authorities, but face life with courage – is the land, plants, animals, clean water, and the tranquil life they used to have.

In a short period, this reality has completely changed. Consolidation of this ambitious project required building heavy infrastructure that included the Tucuruí hydroelectric power plant and the Carajás railway, which covers almost 1,000 km up to the Ponta de Madeira port, in São Luis. These projects destroyed hundreds of hectares of the Amazon Forest and Cerrado. Then, the construction of metalworking industries took place, industrial areas to produce pig iron, in addition to complementary programs that brought in agribusiness with cattle, soybean, and eucalyptus to replace the old natural landscape.

Illusion of progress

At first people were excited with all the publicity: progress was arriving, thousands of jobs would be created, and communities' life would finally improve. But pretty soon the promises proved to be mere illusion. Entire communities were

displaced, causing social destructuring, swollen cities, violence, accidents along the railway, and slave-like work in charcoal kilns. The timber industry and charcoal production deforested huge areas. Charcoal is an indispensable element used



to transform ore into pig iron – the raw material to make steel. Some of the consequences brought about by the implementation of this large project are damages to the water table, river and air pollution, and desertification.

Alike Vicente de Paula, hundreds of families were threatened, persecuted, suffered violence and

reprisals. Many lost their traditional way of life. Nothing got better for them, just the contrary.

However, some people resist; they insist on staying in their territories, struggling for improvements in the affected areas, fighting for their rights.

Hope that transforms

“With the Carajás Forum’s help and the project supported by the CASA Fund, I managed to remain here, on my land,” said Vicente de Paula. “I could resist a lot of pressure to sell out. The funding arrived just in time. I was desperate, in a difficult situation, almost leaving... Many friends and neighbors could not resist the pressure and sold out. The money they received didn’t go very far. It was just an illusion. They were left without land, without a place to live, without means to work. Money doesn’t solve the problem. The project gave

us a new boost. We reforested with bacury trees. The seedlings grow strong; it’s easy to replant them. In no time we’ll have a lot of fruits and animals. The river is now protected and will have more headwaters.”

Created in the mid-1990s to take into account the local complexity, the Carajás Forum is today an important CASA Fund’s partner, indicating communities and projects in need of support and with potential impact on the local reality.

From being supported to become an Advisory Board member

The CASA Fund supported the Carajás Forum before partnering with it. In that period, they mostly needed support to get organized. The CASA Fund helped keep the network alive and active, which enabled them to accompany the implementation of large developmentist programs and their impacts

on the region, such as the installed infrastructure and the advance of monoculture. The Fund also helped the Carajás Forum to gather information in impacted local communities, to disseminate it, and to seek the empowerment of those communities.

Soybean invasion

In 2005, Maranhão state became a priority for funding from the CASA Fund’s specific program for regions affected by the soybean advance. Funds for this program came from a pool of Dutch foundations (Doen, Cordaid, and Solidaridad), Blue Moon Fund, and the Global Greengrants Fund. In Maranhão, the focus was on the Lower Parnaíba

where agricultural expansion, with soybean and eucalyptus (which is used as fuel in the metalworking industries’ blast furnaces), as well as the introduction of the sugarcane crops, threaten what is left of the palm trees, and the Cerrado and Caatinga areas.

Unity to seek for solutions



Foto acervo Fórum Carajás.

Mayron Regis, from São Luis, Maranhão state, is a journalist. Since 2001, he has been a member of the Carajás Forum, maintaining close ties with communities in the region. He talked to us about his trajectory and work:

“Several issues led me to this pathway, such as a political perspective that implied raising questions, a concern about how to influence the reality in Maranhão (where wealth sharply contrasts with extreme poverty) and about how to improve living conditions in the communities. To achieve this, it was important to publicize these realities, write

articles, promote political networking, and develop specific projects.

“Thus, the partnership with the CASA Fund began, with the Carajás Forum indicating projects in the region based on the relations established with groups, individuals, and communities, and knowing the local context and reality. There were also urgent problems to tackle – such as deforestation, loss of natural heritage, threats against family farming, and intimidation against people who had chosen to remain in the countryside – always seeking to achieve economic feasibility for the families.

Ten years of partnership

“The CASA Fund has been key in these ten years of partnership, supporting over 20 projects in the area through the Carajás Forum. Without this fundamental support our work wouldn’t have advanced this far, it would be lame.”

Projects approved for this region include actions against deforestation in Indigenous areas,

workshops, gatherings, capacity building of communities in agroforestry, reforestation, economic processing of Cerrado fruits, a fight against slave work, as well as actions against mining that has ripped the heart out of this land.

All of this so all shades of green may return to this beautiful landscape.



An ocean of challenges



Mariselia Carlos Lopes (Nega) – Presidente da Associação de Pescadores da Ilha. (Foto Erick Sales/ arquivo CESE).

“They say we are now overcoming poverty, but in fact today we’ve got less support and many more problems. The situation is worse because the large projects are destroying everything. The government is trampling on nature and people, eliminating the mangroves that are a source of life. There is also the Industrial Area, the Aratu Port, the Landulpho Alves oil refinery, oil-drilling platforms, real estate speculation...

“In 2013, there was an explosion when the Golden Miller boat was being loaded with propane gas



at the Aratu Port. The toxic fumes reached our communities, affecting our lives and some people fell sick. Oil leaks happen quite often and damage the mangroves. Violence against the communities is very strong. We get a lot of pressure to leave our land; they want to destroy the mangroves even more now with shrimp farming and the projects in the Aratu Port. Here we have already had people murdered in ambushes; others were shot and became handicapped; water sources have been poisoned; and women have drowned trying to go out deeper in an effort to make a living...”

Nega, as Mariselia Carlos Lopes is known, heads the Ilha de Maré Fishers Association. She is a

fisherwoman in the Bananeiras community, in Ilha de Maré (Tide Island); and she speaks with indignation about the situation of the communities living on this island of the Baía de Todos os Santos, in the municipality of Salvador, Bahia state.

Unfortunately, the reality described by Nega spreads along all northeastern coasts, from Maranhão to southern Bahia, affecting thousands of traditional communities that have always lived in those areas. These people are accustomed to get their food, shelter, and medicine from nature. They also produce their culture, festivities and artistic products locally.

Sharing traditions and challenges

We have descendants of Indigenous peoples (who still carry in their culture and bodies traces of their ancestors), organized Indigenous villages, Quilombos, and fishers' communities. For centuries they have occupied this strip of land between the sea and mountain; and they all share not only a very similar way of life, but also the negative impacts of the country's development model.

In Caravelas, in the Bahia state deep south, we also find this mixture of peoples and cultures. However, there we see a struggle to value their cultural and natural heritage, for the recovery and protection of the environment (the Abrolhos National Park is located in this area), for the affirmation of their identities, and for rights to ensure a decent life for people who have been abandoned by public authorities for a long time.

Transforming through education and art



Espetáculo de cunho socioambiental – Movimento Cultural Arte e Manha – Caravelas – BA – (Foto Movimento Cultural Arte e Manha).

Jorge Galdino Santana is one of the activists of the Arte Manha Cultural Movement in Caravelas. Here is how he explains the emergence of this movement:

“Other activists created the movement to struggle through art and education, before I joined it. People who knew something got together and began to teach classes, expanding the movement for awareness raising, reflection, and organization of our communities. The group became



consolidated and more focused. In 1992, the Arte Manha Cultural Movement was formally legalized to broaden its actions. Socioenvironmental issues are intrinsic to this movement and are present in everything it does. The Movement uses audiovisual instruments, as well as artistic expressions, such as theater, exhibits, and publications, to inform, educate, and reflect on the problems of the coastal region, and the struggle to create the Caçurubá Extractivist Reserve. In addition, it helps to strengthen the identity of Afro-Indigenous populations in the region, through valuing their

knowledge and art. This in turn enhances their self-esteem.”

The CASA Fund has supported communities in Ilha de Maré and Caravelas, as well as dozens of other groups and associations along the northeastern coastal areas. It coordinates strategy with partners such as the Bahia Environmental Group (GAMBÁ), headed by Renato Cunha, in order to strengthen the traditional way of life of coastal populations who care for and respect the coastal marine ecosystem.

Support that builds capacity, creates solutions and gives voice

This support enabled the organization of educational workshops, meetings, and assemblies, the creation and strengthening of associations and groups, income generation projects, communication projects, production of audiovisual materials, and the dissemination of issues to a wider audience.

“Some years ago,” Nega explains, “if you talked to me, I’d say nothing...I learned in the struggle. Today we speak for ourselves. We are the ones who know what we have to go through here. To get to where I am now, years of education were needed. In all social movements, the greatest difficulty is political education, capacity building for the resistance, the struggle for rights, and institutional consolidation.

“Here lies the great importance of supporting small projects; their results are magnificent. I can give my testimony of the value of the CASA Fund support because I personally received this benefit. Today, like myself, here the women are prepared, the young people are prepared. Some time ago, institutions would arrive here to carry out environmental compensation studies. They were paid by the companies that wanted to develop their projects. They knew nothing about our reality, and could not prepare any plan. We have always lived here and have to rely on this place to continue living. We know our own needs. Today, with our empowerment, we don’t depend on anyone else to speak for us; we are building our present and our future.”



Reunião do Movimento Cultural Arte Manha – Caravelas – BA – (Foto Movimento Cultural Arte e Manha).

Networking and growth starting with little

CASA Fund support brought about significant change in terms of the growth and achievements of the Arte Manha Movement:

“The CASA Fund support came at the right time for our consolidation. The work here is all voluntary, but we need the infrastructure and funds to cover maintenance costs. Having our computers, equipment and bills paid for gives us stability. This enables us to take on more projects and activities, thus generating more work and income

for our communities. And, we manage to send project proposals to other partners. Today we are a Point of Culture. Several of our documentaries received awards, and we reach a large audience. We strive to strengthen our territoriality in order to promote a good life for rural people, appreciating our traditional income-generating activities. We network with other groups and we look for other ways to reach our objectives, such as pedagogical and cultural tourism.”

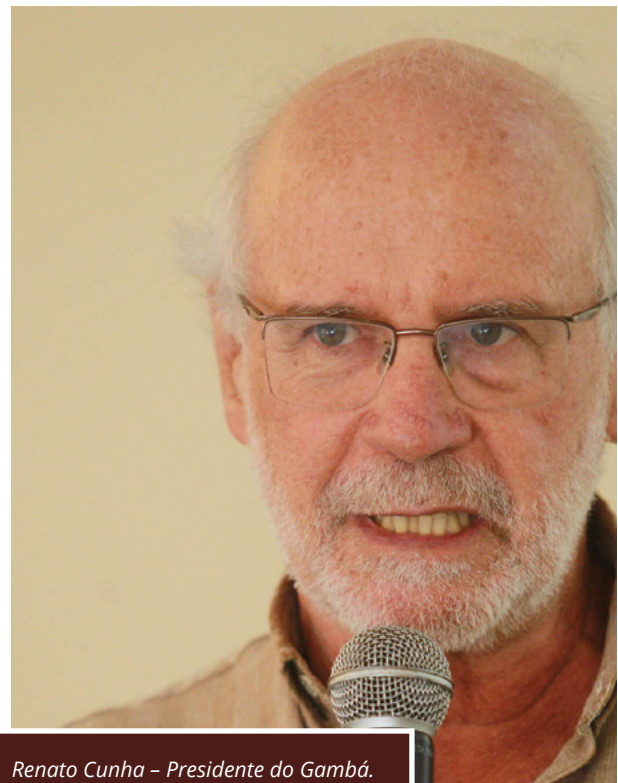
GAMBÁ – partner and advisor since the beginning

In Brazil’s northeastern region, our main partner has been the Bahia Environmental Group (GAMBÁ), represented by Renato Cunha, CASA Fund’s Advisory Board member and founding partner. Working in this area since the early 1980s, Renato deeply understands its problems, needs, and struggles.

“The first struggles led by GAMBÁ were meant to draw Bahia society’s attention to the treasures of its natural heritage, focusing on the exhaustion of natural resources such as water, the Atlantic Forest, and associated ecosystems such as dunes, lagoons, and mangroves. These struggles also included the serious problems caused by industrial pollution, lack of basic sanitation systems, use of agrochemicals, pollution of beaches, rivers and lagoons, and the consequences of uranium mining.”

In addition to awakening society to so many environmental issues, through educational actions and mobilizations, GAMBÁ worked hard with public authorities to create legislative, executive, and judicial instruments to ensure an economic model based on sustainable development and environmental protection for present and future generations.

According to Renato, “strengthening small institutions of the Brazilian environmental movement was the greatest motivation we had, together with other environmentalists, to create the Socioenvironmental Fund (CASA). The existence of active citizens concerned with environmental injustices in Brazil and in the other South American



Renato Cunha – Presidente do Gambá.

countries needs indispensable support and solidarity to develop actions and unite people to fight against the prevailing predatory model; and to search for sustainable solutions at the level of each territory, maximizing networks and connections. Actually, these initiatives need to gain greater scope and be much more visible to society. The CASA Fund has played this important role and thus encourages us to continue this work.”



In the northeastern region, the CASA Fund also supported projects focused on the struggle against the São Francisco River transposition, and uranium mining in the city of Caitité (where the world's largest reserves of this mineral are located). As well, we backed initiatives to protect and recover the Atlantic Forest by supporting local communities. We supported more than 168 projects over a ten year period.



Obras da transposição do Rio São Francisco. (Foto TV NBR).



Pescadores de Caravelas. (Foto Movimento Cultural Arte e Manha).

Transforming tourism in the ally



Pescadores da Prainha do Canto Verde – CE (Foto prainhacantoverde.org)

Beaches with emerald-green or deep blue seas, the Atlantic Forest framing the landscape, mangroves and sand banks (*restingas*) teeming with life. Rivers of translucent waters with colorful fishes swimming among underwater gardens, food cooked on wood-burning stoves, starry skies, sing-alongs – fortunately, these postcard-like scenarios still exist, spread along the coastal areas and in the



countryside. These areas extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific in South America, sharing the same exuberant and preserved natural environment and cultural diversity.

However, it is not a simple task to maintain such diverse and rich landscapes and cultures. The opposing forces are very strong: unplanned urban occupation leading to sprawling cities, the predatory tourism model that displaces traditional communities with huge resorts, in addition to developmentist projects that overrun biomes to build large engineering projects, such as dams, industrial plants, ports, and mining facilities.



Prainha do Canto Verde – Ceará
(Foto: prainhacantoverde.org)

The caretakers of life

Traditional communities, Indigenous peoples, riverbank dwellers, extractivists, and Quilombolas have struggled with mettle, seeking allies and strategies to keep their traditional way of life, generate income, and implement sustainable businesses. The struggle to remain in traditionally occupied territories, which because of this more organic form of occupation have maintained their cultural and biological diversity, is also one of the strategies put forward by the CASA Fund.

The support to communities, projects, and initiatives that ensure the continuity of these human spaces for living in harmony with nature and cultural production, with capacity building and empowerment, information and communication, as well as infrastructure for income generation and community tourism initiatives, have benefited thousands of people and have improved their living conditions.

“Here we are happy, but ongoing struggle ensures this space. I’m proud of my ancestors, I’m descendant from local traditional peoples, fishers, farmers. We identify ourselves with the local traditional people. We have in our faces, in our appearance much from the Indigenous peoples, our ancestors. And also, in the way we live on this

land, respecting nature and also partying a lot.” Thus Painho, as Roberto Carlos de Lima Ribeiro is known, introduces his Prainha do Canto Verde community, near Fortaleza, in Ceará state.

“It’s a big fight, against very powerful people, but with modesty, fraternity, and God’s presence, we are winning. Today, we are an example for other communities, showing that it’s possible to live well, have a place to live, a job, a business.”



Pescadores tradicionais da região da Prainha do Canto Verde – Ceará (Foto prainhacantoverde.org)

Multiplied challenges and dreams

Just as with Painho, Robson Dias Possidonio, of the Trindade Boat Owners and Traditional Fishers Association (ABAT) in the Rio de Janeiro southern

coast, is also overcoming all the pressures and changing his reality with projects supported by the CASA Fund. The same is happening in the



communities of Quilombo da Fazenda in Ubatuba and the Juréia Park Residents Association in Iguape, the former, in the northern São Paulo coast, and the latter in the deep south of that state.

These communities face real estate speculation and constraints imposed by conservation units, as Environmental Protection Areas and Ecological Parks developed along the coast to stop deforestation of the Atlantic Forest. Despite the positive aspects of the creation of these conservation units, they cause serious conflicts with traditional communities that already occupied those areas and are now unable to fully enjoy their natural resources that they always relied on for their physical and cultural survival.

“I think we all cause some impact living off the land. People need to eat the fish. I reckon we cause very little impact – compared to large industrial fishing boats, large companies and what they do these days. And the Park doesn’t see this,” says an indignant Robson. He defends the right of his community to live off the fish that always fed



Robson Dias Possidonio, presidente da ABAT – Associação dos Barqueiros e Pescadores Tradicionais de Trindade – Rio de Janeiro. (Foto Attilio Zolin/Fundo CASA).jpeg

da Bocaina National Park that stretches to the ocean.

While negotiations with Park authorities proceed, the Trindade community gets ready and attempts to find alternatives to remain in the territory they have occupied for many generations.

Roots to be cultivated

The Quilombo da Fazenda community, which still seeks legal recognition of its territory as a *quilombo*, faces a serious challenge because its traditional area overlaps the Serra do Mar State Park Picinguaba Unity. With restrictions affecting the occupation of the area, the community had begun to fall apart. Many families had moved out in search for survival.

Production of Juçara palm tree fruit juice, construction of a community kitchen, and programs boosted with the Quilombola culture to receive tourists were some of the solutions to tackle that reality. Likewise, the Trindade community also received training to provide boat rides for tourists attracted to that beach. With its project of community tourism, Prainha do Canto Verde has attracted many tourists because of the beach’s beauty but also because people wish to share a bit with the traditional community, enjoying their simple and healthy life.

“The CASA Fund support was very important,” said Painho, who lives in Canto Verde. “It came to strengthen our struggle, supporting our communication and organization work, with our young people learning how to produce radio

shows, so they could reflect on their situation here.”

“ABAT had never submitted a project proposal,” explained Robson. “Where else would we find a funder to help us this way? We got wind that the



Caiçaras de Trindade



CASA Fund was an institution that helped small initiatives like ours. At that time, they supported communities that would be affected by the World Cup and the Serra da Bocaina National Park was a World Cup park.”

World Cup promise and the real legacy

Robson speaks of the first project prepared by ABAT with support from the Atlantic Forest Permaculture and Ecovillages Institute (IPEMA), an important partner of the CASA Fund. The CASA Fund created this special program to support communities affected by the World Cup. Many projects – in urban areas, on the coast, and in the countryside – were part of this strategy to strengthen the population in the face of large



Culinária quilombola no Quilombo da Fazenda Picinguaba (Foto: quilombodafazenda.org.br)

governmental projects and initiatives to receive tourists during the 2014 FIFA World Cup.



Barqueiros da ABAT levam um grupo de turistas para passeio. (Foto Attilio Zolin/Fundo CASA).jpeg



One of these governmental programs was “World Cup Parks,” a joint initiative of the Ministries of the Environment and Tourism that selected federal, state, and municipal parks, located near or in one of the 12 cities hosting the soccer games. The planned R\$ 668 million investment was intended to upgrade park infrastructure to receive tourists and prolong their stay in Brazil.

This program failed. Less than one million reais were usefully invested. Communities that had hoped for the benefits, as well as the Brazilian population at large, never received the so-called “World Cup legacy.” However, somehow this federal government’s failed initiative had a positive impact on communities that sought on their own to get training and information, and to achieve change.

Even very isolated villages in the Brazilian outback, such as the São Francisco community, in the Pantanal, found community-based tourism to be a means for their self-affirmation, networking with other partners, and income generation. This tourism activity also involved young people, reinforcing their sense of belonging and building the collective.

In the last ten years, the CASA Fund has supported around 50 projects that contributed to protect historic, cultural, and natural heritages, thereby strengthening communities in their traditional way of life, helping to develop community tourism, and enabling the quest for alternatives for local economies.



Barqueiros da ABAT aguardam a chegada de turistas para passeio a piscina natural do Caixa D' Aço, localizada dentro do Parque Nacional da Serra da Bocaina. (Foto: Attilio Zolin/Fundo CASA)

Protected Atlantic Forest



Mudas de juçara para reflorestamento (Foto Coletivo Catarse).

“When folks arrived here saying we could eat the Juçara palm tree fruit, we thought it was weird... That was something for the birds... People were scared of even trying it. For us, that tree gave us the palm heart.”

In the beginning, there was resistance. Then, some braver ones tasted the Juçara palm tree (*Euterpe edulis*) fruit juice, and the fate of this tree, already on the Atlantic Forest’s list of species in extinction, began to change. The possibilities of protecting and recovering the Atlantic Forest biome also changed.

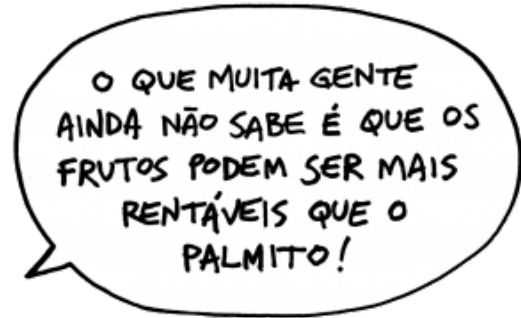


When the first Europeans moored their ships on South American shores, they found lush forests with thousands of trees of all kinds and sizes, and numerous animals they had never seen. Of course, they also encountered a diverse population, spread from the extreme south to the north, living a full life adapted to this complex ecosystem we now call the Atlantic Forest.

After five centuries, little of this original landscape, or of the inhabitants who contributed to its diversity and richness, has survived. Dona Dalva, who opened this story talking about her experience with the Juçara palm tree fruit juice, is a descendant of that original population – seacoast dwellers (*caiçaras*) who still face many challenges to maintain their traditional lifestyle. She is a very



Suco da juçara (Foto Coletivo Catarse).



Dona Dalva talks happily of the great change in her life after she got to know, tasted, and liked the Juçara palm tree pulp juice, and after she became part of a network of producers, researchers, and promoters of this powerful food that also has helped to preserve the forest.

Dona Laura, a leader in the Quilombo da Fazenda community, also located in Ubatuba, is another representative of this population. They are helping to preserve the forest through their form of occupation. However, she also admitted that the community used to cut the palm hearts to sell, unaware of the environmental damage this practice caused.

active community leader, the vice-president of the Sertão de Ubatumirim Residents Association. This is a traditional community located in the Ubatuba municipality, on São Paulo state's northern coast.

“To tell you the truth, I didn't know the Juçara palm tree fruit juice,” added Dona Dalva. “I lived in Ubatumirim all my life. I raised my children and now I have five grandchildren. These families around here... everybody knew the palm heart to eat, to sell... but not the fruit. Now, with the production of the juice, everything has changed!”

“We here didn't know the Juçara palm tree was becoming extinct. We used to sell [the palm heart] without noticing we were helping to finish the forest off. Nobody knew we could eat the fruit. When I tasted it...I loved it! If there is juice every day, I'll drink it. I got addicted to it.”

Biosphere reserve, national heritage

The importance of the Atlantic Forest led UNESCO to declare it a biosphere reserve. Even Brazil acknowledged its importance when the 1988 Constitution recognized it as a national heritage. Conservation units were initiated to protect what remains of the Atlantic Forest (8.5%). Economic interest groups wanting to exploit those same areas immediately confronted them. This also revealed a little known reality: the traditional populations have cared for and managed those forests, enabling them to survive to this day.

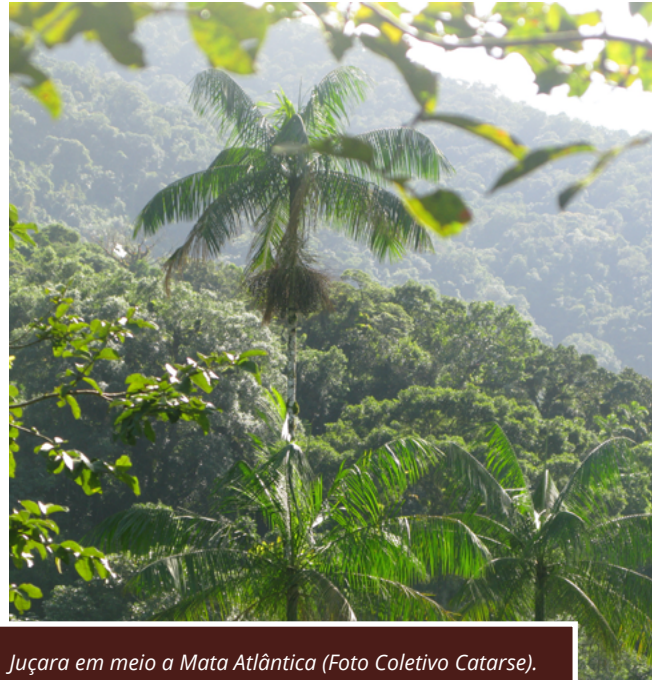
They were the Indigenous peoples, Quilombolas, seacoast dwellers, people who always dealt with the forest, farming small lots, collecting plants, and hunting – such as Dona Dalva and Dona Laura's families. Despite the illegal extraction of Juçara palm hearts that brought the *Euterpe edulis* to the brink of extinction in this biome, these communities have helped to preserve the forest. Their engagement in the Juçara project means they can reverse that situation.



Getting to know and working in the Atlantic Forest

To try to understand and work in this biome, the CASA Fund created a special program to support projects and initiatives, working in partnership with other institutions and organizations to identify problems and invest in possible solutions.

Support for community-based tourism is one alternative that helps families and communities to remain in threatened areas of the Atlantic Forest. Other such initiatives include: projects with fishers and family farmers' associations; support to communities fighting to block large projects and other interventions damaging to the environment; reforestation projects; confronting advances of soybean, eucalyptus, and mining activities; projects to publicize and circulate information involving publications, courses, and documentaries; education and capacity building; and public policies.



Juçara em meio a Mata Atlântica (Foto Coletivo Catarse).

A network promoting the wellbeing of forests and life

Perhaps the Juçara Network, with dozens of nodes in all states along the Brazilian coastline (from Rio Grande do Sul to Espírito Santo states), is the factor that has raised more hopes for protecting what is left of the Atlantic Forest, and for recovering degraded areas. It involves the active participation of communities, as protagonists, beneficiaries, and multipliers of this experience. Dona Dalva's story continues:

"This work has been going on for eight years. I've been part of this project for five. Since then, the number of Juçara palm trees in the forest has increased a lot – and here in my backyard and on the small farm where I spent my childhood. I really like this work. Together with other women, we clean and wash the fruit carefully, then we leave it soaking in warm water to soften the fruit pulp, extract the pulp, and make the juice. Adult and



Primeiro encontro da Rede Juçara, projeto apoiado pelo Fundo Socioambiental CASA (Foto Coletivo Catarse).

young men climb the palm trees to get the Juçara bunches. This is difficult. The tree is very tall, and they have to be careful not to damage the fruit. They use a piece of cotton waste bag to support their feet when climbing. They call this kind of strap *peconha*."

Learning about the Juçara palm tree

Dona Dalva said that the children in the community are now used to drinking the Juçara fruit juice.

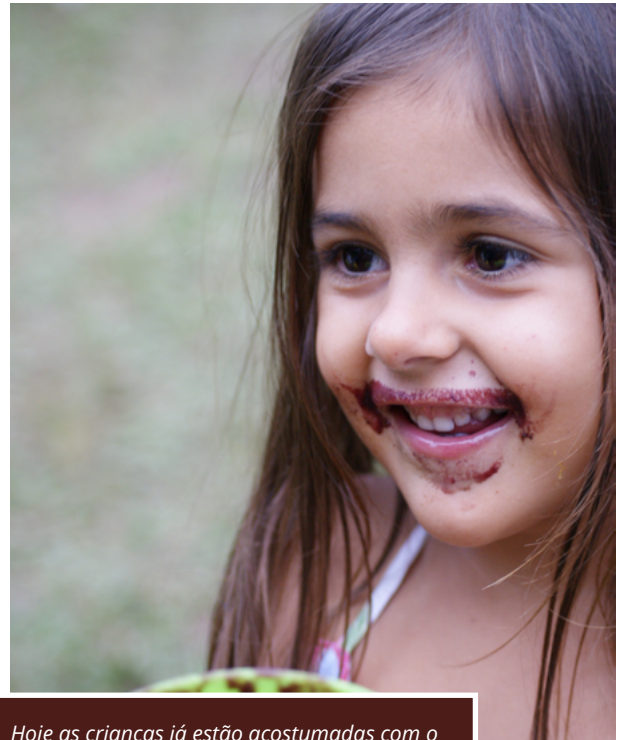
“We blend it with other fruits too. It’s very tasteful and good for your health. The community supplies the fruit for school snacks. Thus, school kids eat healthy food, from our region, and learn to appreciate forest fruits.”

Just as other communities that resisted in the Serra do Mar, between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro states, this community’s territory overlaps areas of the Serra do Mar State Park (PESM) and the Serra Bocaina National Park (PNSB) – thus restricting the community’s use of those lands. Utilization of the Juçara palm tree fruit gave a new breath to those communities, improving their diet, generating income, reinforcing their relation to the land, and offering work involving several generations.

“The Juçara Project was very important for our community,” said Dona Laura. It’s not just the juice; it changed our lives. Today, we have a special affection for the Juçara. It improved the kids’ health because it’s full of good properties, brought us more joy, partners, and possibilities. The Palmares Foundation recognized our territory as a *quilombo* in 2005, but the land hasn’t been legalized yet. We are inside the Serra do Mar State Park and this makes it very hard for us to have projects approved, and manage to survive on our land. That’s why this project is so important.”

Dona Dalva also says she feels very glad to see new palm trees growing in the forest. “After taking out the juice, we use the seeds for seedlings. We also throw the seeds directly on the ground to grow more palm trees. We learned all this with the people from the Atlantic Forest Permaculture and Ecovillages Institute (IPEMA), who came here to show us the value of the Juçara and teach us the procedures.”

Hamilton Bufalo is one of the “fathers” of the Juçara Network. “The Network was born in a bar conversation, during a Ministry of Environment Demonstration Projects Subprogram (PDA) meeting in Rio de Janeiro, in 2007. Research work and implementation of Juçara management projects had been going on for years, in isolation, in different regions. It only began to gain momentum in 2008, when the Network was organized. Sometimes, the person is there,



Hoje as crianças já estão acostumadas com o suco da juçara, que além de nutritivo é uma delícia! (Foto Coletivo Catarse).



Frutos da juçara (Foto Coletivo Catarse).

working hard and alone. He or she has no idea of the importance or the direction their work could take. When they can participate in workshops, meet other people who experience the same issue, then the exchange is very exciting.”



Conflicts between conservation units and traditional populations

Hamilton began working at the IPEMA Institute as a volunteer. IPEMA is a public interest civil society organization headquartered in Ubatuba. Because of his involvement and direct work with the communities, he focused on the conflict with the Conservation Units.

“The legislation doesn’t include a harmonious sharing of territory, and makes any initiative very hard. All of a sudden, communities cannot plant cassava and bananas that provided for them. They cannot extract materials for arts and crafts; they no longer manage to survive on their land. Juçara management has brought about new possibilities. The project was very well accepted, as returns are visible and fast. The Juçara fruit juice was well received, seeds were returned to the forest, and a species in extinction was reborn. It all started slowly, with artisanal production, but it has gradually grown because people could see the result of their effort. Today, here in São Paulo state, the Ubatumirim community is the most advanced. It has a processing kitchen, equipment, and supplies products to the São Paulo municipality. There are over 20 families providing several products in this Juçara project.”

The CASA Socio-Environmental Fund played an important role in the construction of this Network. We supported the 2010 Juçara Network Meeting held in Registro, in São Paulo state’s Ribeira Valley. Over 300 people came together,



Sede do IPEMA em Ubatuba (Foto IPEMA).

involving 15 partner organizations and other invited institutions. The CASA Fund also directly supported the work of some communities, such as the Quilombo da Fazenda, the Ubatumirim Association, and the seacoast community of Praia do Bonete. It has also supported many communities to develop agroforestry projects, following the Juçara Project, as the Juçara palm tree is just one of the species that can be managed sustainably in the Atlantic Forest to improve the lives of traditional populations.

The Juçara Network pools together organizations from several regions in the country, each one with its own reality and specificity. The Luiz de Queiroz College of Agriculture (ESALQ) has been a very important partner in research and analyses that helps to develop projects. The palm tree *Euterpe edulis* was becoming extinct, but is now recovering well in the areas where the project unfolded. That, in addition to enhancing the local fauna, demonstrates its importance. Human intervention also changed the social and cultural scenario in those areas, with more appreciation for their work, empowerment of communities, increased self-esteem, improved food security, and income generation.



Encontro da Rede Juçara (Foto Coletivo Catarse).



Future challenges

“Each community has its own pace,” said Hamilton. “The Indigenous and Quilombola communities involved in the Juçara management make progress according to their culture and pace. But they also feel the benefits. There are still lots of issues to be settled. The market is our biggest bottleneck. These communities don’t have the knack for marketing. That’s why we need to invest now in this commercial area, providing tools so producers can reach consumers directly.”

Traditional communities that only recently discovered this fruit already included the Juçara in their typical dishes. They invented new dishes, creating a new *caiçara* (seacoast dwellers) gastronomy. The Quilombo da Fazenda is still trying to open a restaurant to serve its new creations, but in the meantime it has launched two recipe books with dishes that use the Juçara.

“I make a delicious squid stroganoff with Juçara! You’ve got to come here and taste it,” invited Dona Laura. And, for all those who want to have fun with the *caiçara* music, dance, joy, and tastes, here is an invitation to the Juçara Festival, always held in July in the communities of Ubatumirim and Quilombo da Fazenda.



Os Sistemas Agroflorestais com espécies nativas recuperam o solo e geram renda para os produtores. (Foto Coletivo Catarsee).



Culinária quilombola do Quilombo da Fazenda, em Picinguaba e pratos feitos com juçara (Foto Quilombo da Fazenda)

Challenges and victories in South America



Looking at the planet Earth from space, the large South America appears green with shades of yellow, in a beautiful triangular drawing. Thus, from a distance, it is impossible to evaluate how much beauty and diversity this part of the Earth contains, from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans, from the Caribbean Sea to the Drake Strait that separates us from the Antarctica continent.

Here we find the largest rivers, the greatest waterfalls, the biggest forest, one of the largest deserts, glaciers, wetlands, thousands of kilometers of beaches – a unique and irreplaceable biodiversity. So many peoples, cultures, and languages – all intermixed.

Seen from space, this continent has no borders – rivers are born and flow freely along their course, as well as mountains, forest, and the

central highlands (where the great continental hydrographic basins originate). The peoples who have always lived here, since the dawn of time, also circulated freely, without any acknowledgement of the geopolitical limits imposed during over 500 years of colonization.





Na Argentina, bomba de petróleo contrasta com comunidade carente ao redor. (Foto Vaca Bonsai)

From another perspective. . .

Looking up close, so many contrasts! Side by side with the immense natural and cultural wealth, there is wealth concentration in the hands of a few, producing overwhelming inequalities and the “invisibility” of those who protect territories and their natural resources. These gatekeepers, without voice or rights, face all kinds of violations and a legal system that criminalizes community actions, while protecting the powerful and producing the world’s highest violence rates.

Even so, the original peoples and the populations created by an incomparable ethnic mixing still resist, dream of and search for solutions to protect their territories, values, and way of life. These are communities living in the most faraway and isolated places. The Indigenous peoples, who are the gatekeepers of knowledge and territories, civil society organizations structured to care for the common good, students fighting for a more sustainable and just world, lawyers using their knowledge to defend the rights of the excluded, scientists and researchers, who together, address these challenges and try to redirect the course of human history.

Although in various languages, this common voice rises up and mobilizes powerful forces, in much the same way the waters of large rivers are formed by small streams and finally flow into the ocean.

Ronald Suarez, of the Shipibo Conibo Indigenous group, is one of these powerful voices. With his work as a documentarist and with CASA Socio-



Ronald Suarez, cineasta e indígena do povo Shipibo Conibo (Foto www.apcbolivia.org).

Environmental Fund support, he has transformed the reality of his people:

“My name is Ronald Suarez; I’m a Shipibo Conibo from the Peruvian forest, in the region of Ucayali, province of Pucalpa. I’m 39 and I work with documentaries about the environment, Indigenous peoples, health, and intercultural relations. I’m also an actor.

“*Canaan, the promised land* was a documentary I made with the CASA Fund support. It has the testimonies of my Shipibo brothers and sisters about their experiences, for over 43 years, with the Maple Gas oil company, which took over the Petroperu operations. These relations in our territories are very tense, with terrible damages



to the environment and to the people, and many social conflicts. Communities face the pollution of their lagoons and rivers. The fishes they consume for their subsistence are highly contaminated,

and neither the government nor the company is concerned with this situation. Until the Shipibo began to protest, to demand shutting down oil wells, until they managed to be heard.”

A larger issue

Unfortunately, intensive oil drilling in environmental protection areas, without any concern for the environment or the local inhabitants, is not



Logko Albino Campo, liderança do povo Mapuche. (Foto Vaca Bonsai Audiovisual).

leakages, water contamination, and well collapses that directly affect the Neuquén River, where we have always lived.” Thus, Logko Albino Campo, a leader of the Mapuche people in the Neuquén province (Argentinian Patagonia), began his testimony. There, for over a century, multinational corporations have drilled conventional oil wells. Nowadays, a new tragedy has emerged with oil exploitation in fracking wells. After the US, Argentina is the world’s second most affected country by the environmental, social and public health damages resulting from the shale gas exploitation using the high pressure injection of water, sand, and chemical products to cause the fragmentation (or fracking) of underground rock and the gas release.

“Underground water is being contaminated. Small water sources are drying up. Our Neuquén River came up to here, where I’m standing now. Today, it’s no longer a river. It looks like an irrigation canal, weak and contaminated. The oil company syphons off millions of liters of water to pump the wells. When we complain, they ask, ‘What do you want? Money?’ It’s not a matter of money. When they depart, what are they going to leave behind for us, in this place where we have always lived? It’s not only a problem for the Mapuche people, but also for the neighboring towns. How do you live without water? Our hope is to involve all civil society in this struggle so people will have a stand on what is happening. We have to make everybody aware of this conflict. There must be alternative ways of producing energy. We don’t have to look after nature, we just have to respect it, and not to destroy it. It’s nature that looks after us.”

a problem that affects just Peru. In all South American countries this option for a fossil fuel energy matrix has caused irreparable damages, conflicts, and future consequences that are still hard to predict. All this took place with governmental approval, participation of state-owned or mixed-ownership oil companies, and the presence of multinational corporations.

“Here in Lof Campo Maripe, where we live, there are over 300 oil wells. All the time we are facing oil

Great challenges

This work of research, information, dissemination, and search for strategies to tackle oil industry impacts has been developed by the Argentinian organization *Observatório Petrolero Sur*/South Oilwatch (OPSur). In the words of Diego di Risio, one of its coordinators:

“This whole issue has led to the creation of “sacrifice zones,” territories where natural resources are appropriated to the detriment of local interests and well-being. Governments do not provide information, nor ensure human and collective rights, exercising explicit and implicit violence against the resisting population. In



Poço de petróleo não convencional, que realiza a extração através da fratura hidráulica (Fracking), na Argentina. (Foto Vaca Bonsai Audiovisual).

addition, the clear evidence of climate change and its close links to fossil energy consumption expands socioenvironmental problems to a global scale.

“The CASA Socio-Environmental Fund supports OPSur’s research work and its efforts to establish and strengthen social organization networks to face the oil industry onslaught. This support has been very important for two main reasons. First, funds with a Latin American origin and outlook are rare; so, the CASA Fund support is a real privilege. Second, Argentina is not a priority country for international cooperation, and this CASA Fund focus enables us to consolidate our work.”

Jorge Daneri, a CASA Fund Board member since its creation introduced OPSur as an important

initiative to be supported. He has been a key partner in identifying other strategic projects:

“The CASA Fund has been supporting strategic organizations in South America, and has also had a consistent presence in the Prata Basin. I can single out some emblematic cases. In the Misiones region, there is resistance to the construction of dams, led by the organization Cuña Piru. This organization has produced solid information demonstrating the negative impacts of those dams, and more specifically of the Garabi-Panambi hydroelectric power plant on the Uruguay River, at the Brazilian-Argentinian border. This organization has had profound public and political impact, and managed to promote a broad discussion between Brazil and Argentina with relevant repercussions.

“*Encuentro por la Vida* (Gathering for Life) is active in the Paraná River wetlands and participates in the Alliance of Paraguay-Paraná Ecosystems. The *Ala Plástica* group has also been supported to develop a very original art-based work in the Southern Prata Basin, in the Argentinian Pantanal. One of the supported projects was the ‘Itinerant Workshop’ that travelled through localities in the Paraná River Delta with multidisciplinary activities, involving art and the environment, and the development of mobile radio equipment to expand their action.

“The way the CASA Fund provides support is very positive, and has had relevant results for populations seeking to reverse negative environmental impacts, as it enables strategic actions by local groups and networks that complement each other and strengthen society as a whole. This type of support should be strengthened and expanded.”



Jorge Daneri é advogado e presidente da Fundação M'Biguá para a Cidadania e Justiça Ambiental e faz parte do Conselho Consultivo do Fundo Socioambiental CASA. É especialista em Direito Ambiental, trabalhando para, e com, organizações de justiça socioambientais na região do Cone Sul (Foto: acervo Fundo CASA).

Seeking justice in the Courts

The *Instituto de Defensa Legal del Ambiente y el Desarrollo Sostenible*/Institute for the Legal Defense of the Environment and Sustainable Development (IDLADS) is another example of a CASA Fund-supported work with positive results. It is a collective of young Peruvian lawyers who got together and put their professional experience at the service of a healthy and balanced environment, and a better quality of life that would respect Indigenous peoples' rights. Henry Carhuatocto, founder of this important Lima-based organization, is yet another voice to rise and unite with other voices:

“Although IDLADS has already 10 years of existence, it only received its first financial support in 2012 from the CASA Fund. This grant enabled us to consolidate the institution, with valuable funds to cover the high costs of legal actions initiated by our pro-bono lawyers, as well as to pay for the publication of our Book of Strategic Litigation in defense of Indigenous peoples and the environment. We also systematized our cases in a text that demonstrated our background of struggles and opened the doors to our participation in the National Human Rights Coordinating Committee (CNDDHH).

“In 2013, the CASA Fund provided a grant to cover the cost of legal actions in defense of peoples in voluntary isolation in the Territorial Reserve of Kugapakori, Nahua, Nanti and others (RTKNN), as well as support to organize a congress on the defense of Indigenous peoples and the environment. In 2015, the Fund supported us to obtain a writ of mandamus to grant land titles and compensation to Indigenous peoples living in the Four Basins (Pastaza, Corrientes, Tigre, and Marañón Rivers); and also to strengthen vigilance and control of their natural resources through legal support to the Kukama Association for

Development and Conservation of San Pablo de Tipishca (ACODECOSPAT).



Dr. Henry Carhuatocto, Presidente e fundador do IDLADS.

“We just have to thank the CASA Fund for this fundamental partnership that enabled the development of our relations with the Amazonia and the Peruvian Andes' Indigenous peoples. Thanks to this support, today we are legal advisors to ACODECOSPAT, FEDIQUEP, FECONACO, ORAU, CORPI, FECONAU, ORPIO, CNA, ONAMIAP, CARE, and Indigenous organizations across Peru. We hope to continue relying on the Fund support that was key for our institutional life and for the defense of Indigenous peoples.”



(Foto: <http://acodecospat.blogspot.com.br>)



Whoever loves also cares

The CASA Fund's driving thought is that the combination of love and action is infallible. No one is mobilized without understanding what they may lose. "Whoever loves also cares" could not be a more relevant saying for this work.

Positive results from CASA Fund grants can also be seen in the testimony of Ronald Suarez on the repercussions of his film: "When the film *Canaan, the Promised Land* was ready, we were censored by the Maple Gas Company, which did everything in its power to prohibit exhibitions in Lima. We couldn't find exhibition spaces because institutions are manipulated by economic power. However, we managed to show the documentary to a broader audience in public squares. After that, the film was exhibited in many other spaces in Peru and abroad, including at the COP 20 Lima Conference in 2014.

"The media impact of the documentary was quite big and since then the government has been forced to pay attention. With the great visibility achieved by this documentary, the Indigenous community of Canaan de Cashiyacu managed to establish dialogue with the Maple

Gas Company and the government. We managed to get some benefits, such as a health post, a primary school, and electricity. Negotiations to provide compensation to the Shipibo people are still underway. It's a long process, but we hope to achieve more rights for the people who are now in direct dialogue with government authorities.

"We have to thank the CASA Fund a lot for having believed and supported our project. Without this grant, we wouldn't have done this work that had positive and practical results for the Shipibo people."

In addition to projects involving mobilization, protection, and information, other actions supported by the CASA Fund across South America are linked to the legal defense of Indigenous peoples and communities affected by infrastructure projects, mineral extractivism, energy projects, climate change adaptation and mitigation initiatives, women defenders of the environment, and much more.



Cena do filme *Canaán, a terra prometida*.

New challenges, new victories

The South American context is very critical, and socioenvironmental conflicts tend to become more acute. The scenario includes hydroelectric power plants in all large river basins, the issue of fossil fuels in the Chaco, mining everywhere, the impact of monocultures (such as soybean, sugarcane, and palm oil), disorganized cattle raising, the large regional infrastructure integration projects (roads, ports, waterways, railways, and gas pipelines) – all this demonstrates the dimension of the challenge. National governments have adopted a development model focused on the infrastructure, with the Pacific Alliance, free trade agreements, and interoceanic corridors. All of these have had irreversible impacts on the planet's most fragile ecosystems.

We realize that these small funds do not solve the serious problems of our continent, but they do provide visibility to those small groups of grantees

that manage to broaden their relations through networks and thematic articulation. Thus, they are strengthened and attract new resources and support. This has always been the case among projects supported by the CASA Fund.

We are convinced that this network of friendship and solidarity reinforces civil society and amplifies the voices of those seeking new alternatives to face challenges. The small daily achievements give us strength and energy to move forward, seeing on the horizon a better place for all to live with less inequality and more respect for life, recovering the joy, force, and dignity of the multicultural, multifaceted, and incredibly brave peoples of this great South American territory!



Cena do filme Canaán, a terra prometida.

Blocked rivers



Salto Augusto, no rio Juruena. Esta cachoeira com uma queda de cerca de 20 metros consta no plano decenal da Empresa de Pesquisa Energética (EPE) com potencial para geração de 1.461 MW. A previsão é construir uma hidrelétrica até o ano 2025. (Foto: Thiago Foresti/Forest Comunicação).



“You can’t stop a river. It’s alive, it breathes, it’s got mood. If you stop a river, it dies.”

This statement by the Kayapó warrior Raoni Metuktire, from Pará state, well-known in Brazil and across the world for his struggle in defense of forests, rivers, and rights of Indigenous peoples, sums up well the thinking of traditional peoples about the rivers. These live beings are key characters in the origin myths, traditional stories, and daily lives of thousands of villages spread throughout the South American continent.

In addition to the original peoples, thousands of other persons, such as riverbank dwellers, fishers, Quilombolas, and extractivists, have learned to live with respect for and in harmonious interaction with the rivers that provide them food, health, and joy.

Raoni is one of the Indigenous leaders who coordinated the great Altamira Meeting in 1989. This gathering mobilized hundreds of relatives from over 30 ethnic groups and thousands of people of the most varied origins – including the singer Sting – against the military government plans to build a complex of hydroelectric power plants on the Xingu River.



This movement resonated throughout the world and the Kayapó warrior chants helped to stop the megalomaniac plans for over 20 years. Until the monster again left its cave (or drawer), now under

a democratic government that has ignored all opinions and facts against the program – that they claim to be “clean energy.”

Dangerous liaisons

The large dams are fantastic civil engineering works, increasingly larger and more impressive. They try to prove that human beings are really superior to nature that they can control and dominate for their own benefit.

Besides the human-versus-nature competition, economic interests of governments and large contractors mobilize huge amounts, moving the economy and political relations, and ignoring public interest and the planet’s well-being. This dangerous combination has been lately revealed by the Brazilian and international media covering the Federal Police’s anticorruption investigation.



Construção da usina Teles Pires, no rio Teles Pires. Com cinco barragens o complexo hidrelétrico no rio está afetando a vida das pessoas na região. O Teles Pires corre ao lado do rio Juruena e forma o rio Tapajós. (Foto: Thiago Foresti/Forest Comunicação).

Social control as an instrument

Since its foundation and even before its legal constitution, the CASA Socio-Environmental Fund has supported communities defending their rights, their traditional way of life, protection of the environment, and populations affected by hydroelectric power plant dams. These dams have multiplied across South America, often with funds from the BNDES, Brazil’s development bank, thus revealing the prevailing policy in the country.

For over ten years, the CASA Fund, together with important partners such as International Rivers, Amazon Watch, Instituto Centro de Vida (Center of Life Institute), Socioenvironmental Institute, Rainforest Action Network, AINDA, and many others, has supported organizations and communities resisting the construction of the Belo Monte Hydroelectric Power Plant, in Pará state. This is one of the projects interrupted more than 20 years ago and now resumed by the current government.

A struggle that did not end

Antônia de Melo, coordinator of the Xingu Forever Alive movement, is an example of such support. She has struggled for over 30 years against developmentist projects in northern Brazil: “The CASA Fund has always understood our needs, they understand what many other organizations cannot see – the importance of funds for mobilization. This is done without any bureaucracy, in a way that fits into our working conditions. Without this support, we wouldn’t have been able to collect information about rights, and take it

to faraway communities, listen to what they are thinking, and help them to come to the city for meetings and mobilizations.”

Despite all networking and resistance, despite many protests, reports by specialists proving the illegality of the dam construction, formal requests from the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the problems caused by lack of mitigating actions, despite it all Belo Monte was built. And Antônia, who lived in Altamira, saw her house torn down, as were all the



others, and the forest and a way of life that stood in the way of the project.

In a beautiful article by journalist Eliane Brum for the newspaper El País, published on September 14, 2015, Antônia talks about her disappointment, but also about the continuity of her struggle: "I'm losing my house, losing the river, losing everything. This loss is of a life that is now gone, a life that had an objective, a dream, a project. I don't feel well when I go down to the river and see what is happening. The islands destroyed. No. My house is all this... or was: the free river, the beautiful green islands. For me, everything is connected. Such a great sadness.

"Every time I look and see what they are doing, destroying the houses, destroying the river, destroying lives, the more I get stronger in my resistance, I find more courage and strength to say 'no' and continue to resist. For me, Belo Monte is not a done deal. I struggle against this model of destruction and death to generate energy. I fight against this model of development at any cost. Belo Monte is a crime against humanity. I can't change my position. I can't, I must not. Never, not



Obras da Usina Hidrelétrica de Belo Monte. (Foto Wikimedia Commons).

a wee bit. Even if one day I end up alone, I'd still resist."



Antonia Melo. (Foto: <http://www.ligaoperaria.org.br>)

Successful stories

This same strength to resist gave visibility to the Ene River Ashaninka people in Peru, whose struggle the CASA Fund also supported. Led by Ruth Buendia, through CARE, their work achieved an important victory when they managed to stop the construction of the Pakitzapango hydroelectric power plant, also being built by Odebrecht with BNDES' funding (read the story "Two countries, one people" on this site). This project would have affected over 17 Indigenous communities.

These are not isolated struggles. They exist in response to the global model of occupation and development that affects everyone. Protagonists in these resistance struggles get together, exchange experiences and information, share strategies. Ruth, Antônia, Raoni and so many other leaders are now united to renew hopes in the struggle of the Munduruku people. With a population of around 12,000 people, these warriors present to society and government solid arguments against the construction of seven hydroelectric power plants on the Tapajós River Basin. The CASA Fund and other partners also support this resistance.



Antonia Melo, sentada entre as ruínas da demolição de sua própria casa. (Foto Lilo Clareto).jpeg

A prize and many allies

Once again the dominant system tramples upon laws and rights of Indigenous peoples. FUNAI, the government agency supposedly in charge of protecting Indigenous peoples' interests, does not assume its role and does not demarcate lands that were already identified as belonging to the Munduruku people. This opens the possibility of land invasion and usurpation of rights. However, the Munduruku got together to carry out their own territorial demarcation and have not been silenced by the threats.

For their struggle, Indigenous leaders Maria Leusa Kaba Munduruku and Rozeninho Saw Munduruku received the UN Equator Prize 2015 at the Climate Conference (COP 21), held in Paris, in December 2015. This award is granted to communities that undertake initiatives to conserve and protect their territories, and the sustainable use of natural resources, thus reinforcing the importance of Indigenous and local communities' role in mitigating climate change.

The Munduruku people show their indignation in one of the letters written and publicized by their leaders:

"We came here to speak to you about another tragedy we will fight to prevent: the loss of our territory and the loss of our lives. We did not come here to negotiate with you because you cannot negotiate territories or lives. We are against the construction of dams that kill the Indigenous lands because they kill the culture when they kill the fishes and drown the land. And this kills us, without a single shot. You continue to kill a lot. You have already killed too many in 513 years." [June 4, 2013, Vitória do Xingu, Letter no. 9: Tragedies and Dams (the struggle does not end there or here)].



Ruth Buendia no vale do Rio Ene, Peru. (Foto Goldman Prize)

Betting on solutions

Across the border, in Chile, the resistance put up for almost ten years by the Patagonia Without Dams Campaign has finally managed to stop the construction of a complex of hydroelectric power plants on the Baker and Pascua Rivers, in the Aysén province (Patagonia).

A historic decision of Chile's Council of Ministers in 2014 suspended the HidroAysén megaproject.



Maria Leusa Kaba Munduruku. (Foto Marcio Isensee e Sá)



Irmãos da etnia indígenas Apiaká brincam no rio Juruena, próximo à região de São Simão. A cachoeira, considerada local sagrado para os Apiakás, consta como potencial hidrelétrico e pode ser desafetada para a construção de um empreendimento energético. Pesquisadores e antropólogos temem que a história de Sete Quedas, no Teles Pires, possa se repetir no Juruena (Foto: Thiago Foresti/Forest Comunicação).

This action followed the Campaign that involved many actions throughout a decade. They managed to mobilize thousands of people, providing information on the risks that megaproject posed to the environment, as well as to traditional societies and cultures.

The CASA Socio-Environmental Fund rejoices at the victories of these supported communities in Chile and Peru, and we continue to believe in effective social control in Brazil and across South America. The objective of our support is to make these communities and organizations stronger, so they can find their own solutions and ways for learning and sharing information and strategies.

At the same time, we support true clean energy programs, such as wind and solar energy, which are increasingly viable, pointing to solutions to the energy crises announced by governments. Popular mobilizations, technical contributions, and actual examples that we helped to spread across the country should help to build a future where rivers remain unblocked, flow freely, stay clean, and continue to generate life.

Footnote

A few weeks after the text for The Blocked Rivers story was ready, the life of Berta Cáceres was taken. She was an indigenous leader who fought for the freedom of her people and rivers of Honduras. Like the “interrupted rivers,” her life was interrupted on March 3 with shots fired by unknown men inside her home in La Esperanza, 200 km from Tegucigalpa.

Berta Cáceres received the Goldman Environmental Award 2015, one of the most important international recognitions for environmental rights defenders, for her work in defense of the Lenca territory threatened by the construction of Água Zarca Hydro Dam Project, of the Chinese transnational Sinohydro and the Honduran company Desarrollo Energy SA (Desa).

Just like Chico Mendes, also winner of the Goldman prize for the defense of the Amazon forest and the traditional way of life of indigenous and extractivist peoples, Berta joins hundreds of men and women who have their life trajectories interrupted for defending the rights to a fairer, cleaner, and more dignified world.

Also in March, between 7 and 17, Brazil received the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur for



#AlertaDefensoras HONDURAS

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En la madrugada del jueves 3 de marzo, **Berta Cáceres** fue asesinada por sujetos desconocidos que ingresaron al interior de su vivienda, ubicada en el sector La Esperanza, departamento del Intibucá del sur-occidente del país.

Cabe destacar que una semana antes **Berta Cáceres** había denunciado mediante conferencia de prensa que cuatro dirigentes de su comunidad habían sido asesinados y otros habían sido objeto de amenazas. Todo ello en un contexto en el que se han agravado los ataques y el hostigamiento contra el **COPINH** y las comunidades en resistencia frente al proyecto hidroeléctrico de la **Empresa DESA-Agua Zarca**.

Desde la **IM-Defensoras** expresamos nuestro profundo dolor e indignación ante tan cobarde crimen, el cual repudiamos y condenamos absolutamente. Asimismo, exigimos su esclarecimiento mediante una investigación avalada por instancias internacionales.

#JusticiaParaBerta!



ASESINADA BERTA CÁCERES

Berta Cáceres era una reconocida indígena lenca defensora del territorio y el medio ambiente, coordinadora del **Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH)** e integrante de la **Red Nacional de Defensoras de DDHH en Honduras**.

A raíz de su defensa de los **#DDHH** de las comunidades de Río Blanco, **Berta** fue objeto de múltiples agresiones como amenazas, detención arbitraria o criminalización, por lo que era beneficiaria de medidas cautelares otorgadas por la **CIDH**.

Su labor le reportó numerosos reconocimientos a nivel internacional, como el **Premio GOLDMAN 2015**.



indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz — a Philippine indigenous person of Kankanaey Igorot ethnicity. She met with representatives of government, civil society and hundreds of indigenous leaders from the states of Mato Grosso do Sul, Bahia, Pará and Brasilia. She visited villages and areas of large projects. In her preliminary statements she expressed concern about the setback in the protection of indigenous rights and the increase in the number of attacks, violations and murders of indigenous and campesino leaders. Her final report should be disclosed by September 2016 containing conclusions and recommendations to the Brazilian government and the UN Human Rights Council.



Victoria Tauli-Corpuz (Foto ONU/Jean-Marc)

The heart pulled out of the earth



O rompimento da barragem de rejeitos da mineradora Samarco causou uma enxurrada de lama que destruiu todo o distrito de Bento Rodrigues, em Mariana, na Região Central de Minas Gerais. (Foto Rogério Alves/TV Senado).

Images of a tsunami of toxic mud with iron ore residue devastating cities, landscape, rivers, and Espírito Santo state seacoast are still vivid in the minds of Brazilians. This tragedy was caused by



the collapse of the Fundão mining residue dam, owned by the Samarco mining company, a Vale and BHP Billiton joint venture. Although damages have yet to be assessed, this disaster will directly impact over three million people living in the Rio Doce Valley, and may well affect several future generations. So far, the death of at least twenty persons, hundreds of thousands fishes and other aquatic and wild animals, and extinction of all life in the areas affected by the toxic mud have been confirmed. Yet to be assessed are the consequences for the Atlantic Ocean and peripheral ecosystems along the coasts of Espírito Santo down to southern Bahia states.



The Great Grandfather Watu

The Krenak Indigenous people are among millions of persons directly affected by this environmental crime. The Krenak people's name for the Rio Doce (Sweet River) is Watu. They have struggled for almost a whole century for legal recognition of their lands on the Watu banks. In a territory devastated by pasture and monoculture, the Krenaks tried to recover the forest, the fauna, and resumed their ritual ceremonies in homage of Watu, their Great Grandfather. They now cannot survive without the river's waters and fishes, and new generations will be denied any daily interaction with the Rio Doce.

The social and environmental disaster caused by Samarco in the city of Mariana is replicated, in lesser but no less serious proportions, in many regions of South America and in other continents where those mining companies operate, ripping the heart out of the earth and sapping its vital energy to feed an increasingly voracious consumer society.

The mining of ore, tin, nickel, bauxite, gold, diamonds and other precious stones, and other minerals such as uranium, is violently displacing populations in the Carajás Industrial Area, in Pará, Maranhão, and Tocantins states, throughout the whole Minas Gerais state, in the interior of Bahia, along the borders of Brazil with Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina, in Peru, Colombia, and in several areas of the Pan-Amazonia. This activity pollutes



Índigena do povo Krenak recolhe peixe morto às margens do Rio Doce. (Foto Vanderley Elias Melo)

the atmosphere and waters, drains the water table, and harms the environment in general. This happens without any clear-cut legislation, without monitoring by public authorities, without norms to protect ecosystems and people – with the single focus on profits to fatten the bank accounts of large corporations' shareholders.

Networking with affected people in many continents

“We visited Mariana region a few months before the disaster, together with the International Movement of People Affected by Vale Southern Caravan. We visited these places that no longer exist.” Carolina Moura, CASA Fund's Advisory Board member and partner, talks with emotion and indignation about the environmental disaster that happened in December 2015. She is also a member of the International Movement of People Affected by Vale, made up of individuals and organizations from Brazil, Chile, Peru, Argentina, Mozambique, Canada, and Indonesia. They network and mobilize in countries where Vale operates collecting information, sharing experiences, and exposing the socioenvironmental problems, thus confronting that mining company's methods and discourse.





Carolina lives in Minas Gerais state, in the Casa Branca municipality, close to Belo Horizonte. “Even here in Casa Branca we live under the threat of expanding ore mines invading environmental protection areas and putting at risk the water table that supplies the region. There are hundreds of mining residue dams without any official monitoring

that may collapse at any time, causing new tragedies.”

The CASA Fund has supported dozens of projects across South America to empower populations affected by mining and its byproducts, such as railways and ports to ship products, deforestation, and eucalyptus monocultures to produce charcoal.

Comboni Missionaries for justice

In the Carajás Industrial Area, in Brazil’s northernmost region, where mining activity also transforms the landscape and cultures, the Comboni Missionaries are coordinating the “Justice on Tracks” campaign, which the CASA Fund also supports. Today the Fund has become an important ally of local populations in search for decent living conditions. Father Dario Bossi speaks in this way about this partnership:

“The CASA Fund is an ally that goes much beyond just funding projects; it’s also a partner in political actions, in campaigns. It has supported us to go beyond the local territory and influence higher spheres, as well as receive partners and political allies for important exchanges. The Fund is a political actor in the struggle for environmental justice, helping to empower us, and to structure our network at its difficult beginning, ensuring the basis to consolidate our work.

“And now something very beautiful is happening. We have the privilege of establishing ties with more popular entities and communities and of motivating them to submit projects to the CASA Fund, such as the Pequiá community.

“The same way we were benefited, we are now helping others to get their benefit, and so it goes on and on. We believe that support has a lot of potential when well done, within a dynamics of relations, not only financial but also political. Things happen in the territories, as seeds we sow are spread around and then create new seeds. A network, linking affected communities with each other and with external entities and movements, can make a difference. The CASA Fund gave us two important grants to help in networking with the International Movement of People Affected by Vale. These projects aimed to reinforce the struggle by helping to organize the Plenary Meeting and

support the participation of leaders of the affected communities in the Vale Shareholder Assembly



Ato em defesa das comunidades impactadas pelo Programa Grande Carajás. (Foto www.justicanostrilhos.org).

and Rio+20 Conference.”



Papa Francisco recebe os delegados ao Capítulo Geral da Congregação dos Missionários Combonianos. Entre eles estava o padre Dario Bossi, de camisa azul na fotos. (Foto www.justicanostrilhos.org).



Innovative strategies

The International Movement of People Affected by Vale has innovated in its composition. It pulls together representatives from a broad range of interests: families affected by mining activities, workers exploited in ore, charcoal, nickel, and copper mines, trade union members, environmentalists, feminists, politicians, students, teachers, Indigenous peoples, Quilombolas, riverbank dwellers, fishers, peasants... In addition to traditional spaces, the Movement also innovates in its search for new spaces for justice, and in new action tools and strategies. Campaigns utilized “shadow reports,” such as the Unsustainability

Report, production of graphical materials mirroring the ones made by Vale, but with information based on valid research and facts. This counter information is an important tool and has had a positive impact on the dissemination of information that seldom reaches the public. CASA Fund has also supported these actions.

The Critical Shareholders was another innovative methodology. In the last six years, persons from the Movement have purchased Vale shares at the Stock Market and thus had access to the company’s shareholder assemblies, where they could raise questions and give testimonies.



Movimento Internacional dos Atingidos pela Vale.

Capital has no flag

Gabriel Strautman, an economist from the Institute of Alternative Policies for the Southern Cone (PACS), is one of the creators of that Movement. He spoke about the importance of the CASA Fund’s support to their actions that pull together people from several countries to exchange information and to share knowledge and strategies for the struggle for rights, in response to Vale’s initiatives:

“The CASA Fund’s support has been fundamental because it has enabled the convening of international meetings among the movement’s different actors. These gatherings are the richest networking moments, getting people together and enabling knowledge sharing, exposing the impacts of a Brazilian mining company not only in Brazil, but also in several other countries where it operates. This is especially relevant when we



discuss South-South relations and other forms of globalization. This movement raised in this debate a Brazilian company – which is not a northern hemisphere firm, historically northern companies have always been more criticized –

but it's a company that reproduces a pattern, a development model in neighboring countries and other continents showing the same predatory action as northern companies, thus demonstrating that capital has no flag.”

Protecting the earth's heart

The importance of social control for issues of such impact as mining is made clear in these brief accounts by some CASA Fund's grantees and partners. Only an active and well-informed society that understands its right to demand inspection and vigilance policies for extractivist companies, that demands responsibilities from companies, requires compensation compatible with the extent of damages – such as this Samarco/Vale/BHP disaster – and that is ready to get directly involved in these processes will be able to turn this game around.

The CASA Fund tries to help social control actions because we believe that only a fully aware and empowered society is able to deeply transform its destiny, creating new ways to protect people and all natural life on which we depend. One day, who knows, we will learn from our traditional peoples, the best caretakers of this planet, that to continue living here we cannot rip out the earth's heart.



Gabriel Strautman. (Foto TV Senado)



Imagem de satélite da foz do rio Doce invadida pela lama. Foto: NASA Earth Observatory image by Joshua Stevens, using Landsat data from the U.S. Geological Survey.

