Indigenous Lands Developing Environmental and Territorial Management Plans

Indigenous-led conservation and land management in Brazil

For 15 years Indigenous Peoples and The Nature Conservancy have been working together to advance indigenous-led conservation goals and land management priorities across Brazil. Partnering with 8 indigenous lands across 13.5 million acres, The Conservancy has developed a proven approach that is now being rolled out in 34 indigenous lands.

PEOPLE AND NATURE

The Nature Conservancy’s work around the world with Indigenous Peoples and rural communities has demonstrated that healthy ecosystems and strong communities are mutually reinforcing.

With their strong historical and cultural connection to the land and their deep knowledge of the natural world and its sustainable management, Indigenous Peoples are among the most important partners for conservation. Recent research has shown that when Indigenous Peoples and local communities have rights over forests, deforestation rates are low. In fact, these communities were more successful at stopping illegal forest loss than governments were in protected areas.1

The Nature Conservancy is committed to supporting Indigenous Peoples in their conservation goals. In Brazil, a key part of this work centers on collaboratively developing effective planning tools and an enabling policy environment. This makes it possible for Indigenous Peoples to proactively manage their lands according to their priorities, and respond to stakeholders’ requests for engagement with an integrated plan of action.

IN PRACTICE

In 8 indigenous lands covering a total of 13.5 million acres and including 28,000 people, the Conservancy has partnered with Indigenous Peoples to develop Indigenous Environmental and Territorial Management Plans (PGTAs). These plans support indigenous leadership, self-determination and decision-making on the restoration, conservation and sustainable use of their territories.

The PGTAs reflect the Indigenous Peoples’ specific visions for their lands. They usually cover three main priorities:

1. Territorial control and protection, including indigenous-led surveillance and monitoring practices.
2. Sustainable management of natural resources for the promotion of food security and income generation, as well as conservation, restoration and sustainable land use.
3. Capacity building and institutional strengthening for local organizations.

Through the PGTA process, the indigenous community agrees on its shared values and priorities, develops mapping and monitoring capabilities within its own community, builds an understanding of the relevant government programs available to them, strengthens their internal organizations for dealing with outside interests in their territory, and forms binding internal agreements about how to develop (and conserve) their territory to create the future they want for themselves and the generations to come.

FROM PRACTICE TO POLICY

Motivated by the success of the PGTAs, and in response to the demands of the Indigenous Peoples, the Brazilian government established the first-ever National Policy on Territorial and Environmental Management of Indigenous Lands in 2012. Developed by a coalition including 150 indigenous groups, The Nature Conservancy and other institutions, this policy endorses indigenous-led conservation, natural resource management and environmental restoration, and it officially recognizes the PGTAs.

To implement the policy, the Conservancy is working with Indigenous Peoples, various agencies within the Brazilian government, the Global Environment Facility, and the United Nations Development Programme, through a project to implement PGTAs in 32 indigenous lands, the majority of the lands where the PGTAs are currently being implemented. Called the Indigenous Environmental and Territorial Management Project (GATI Project), this project serves as the pilot phase for policy implementation. Lessons from this work will be shared throughout 698 indigenous lands in Brazil.

**ETHNO-MAPPING**

A key component of the participatory process for developing PGTAs is ethno-mapping. The ethno-mapping process is led by the Indigenous Peoples, and is a tool for advancing their aspirations and visions and an important step in developing the PGTAs. An ethno-map reflects and integrates indigenous values, land uses and significant features of the landscape into a spatial map. It also takes into consideration relevant policies and development opportunities, and it supports the Indigenous Peoples in making internal agreements about priorities for developing their territories.

**SUSTAINABLE BENEFITS**

Through the process of developing and implementing the PGTAs, Indigenous Peoples throughout Brazil are strengthening their capacity in the areas of territorial management, use of data collection and cartographic tools, and participation in the political context. The Indigenous Peoples use the PGTAs to defend and promote their rights, as a powerful tool for engaging in dialogue with the government and companies. For The Nature Conservancy, the process of supporting the indigenous plans is one way to improve the practice of conservation through integrating human rights into conservation policy and practice.

For more information, please contact Helcio Marcelo de Souza, Brazil Indigenous Strategy Coordinator, at hsouza@tnc.org, or visit [http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/southamerica/brazil/placesweprotect/amazon-indigenous-lands.xml](http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/southamerica/brazil/placesweprotect/amazon-indigenous-lands.xml)