



Photo: Jørgen Braastad



## An Amazon without boundaries

*This is how we go about saving the world's biggest rainforest*

*Rainforest Foundation Norway has worked together with indigenous people to protect rainforest in the Amazon since 1989. In 2007, this work gained considerable momentum when we received support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for our ambitious initiative “Rights-based sustainable management of large contiguous territories in the Amazon”.*

This document (2012) introduces our work and presents some of its results. First of all, however, we would like to briefly explain why we wanted to undertake this initiative.

### The rainforest is under attack from all sides ...

The pressure on the Amazon rainforest has increased considerably over the last few years. This pressure arises to a large extent from the political ambitions of the countries within the Amazon region. The Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA) is an illustrative example of the policies that threaten the rainforest. With

rapid economic growth as an incentive and economically powerful Brazil as a driver, IIRSA has become a platform for the linking together of geographically remote areas and an increase in energy production within the Amazon region. Roads are being built through areas where travel was once possible only by river, on foot, by plane or by helicopter. Grand plans of hydroelectric power projects threaten to submerge forest under water and displace its inhabitants.

The development of infrastructure makes it possible to exploit natural resources in forest which so far has been difficult to access and has therefore, to a large extent, been protected from destruction. New roads and other infrastructural

projects, bring with them a considerable increase in activities that are destructive to the forest, such as logging, agriculture and gold mining. In addition comes tremendous pressure from the oil, gas and mineral industry to gain access to new areas.

The Amazon rainforest can seem robust because of its size. However, if the forest is carved up into ever smaller sections by roads and other activities which follow in their wake, the territory loses much of its natural ability to regenerate and survive changes, both those caused by nature and by man. We risk reaching a stage at which the Amazon rainforest is depleted to a point where it can no longer be saved.

Many indigenous peoples – the rainforest's guardians – are now extinct because of violence, disease and oppression following the arrival of Europeans in South America. The indigenous groups that continue to follow traditional ways in tune with nature are also under threat. An important reason is that the forest which provides their livelihood and to which they have rights, is reduced in size and encroached upon by invaders searching for oil, gold, pasture, timber and other resources that can easily be monetised. The indigenous peoples' rights are systematically violated, and they are forced off their land and into a life as society's underprivileged.

## ...and must be defended on all fronts

The Amazon as a whole can and should be regarded as one vast ecosystem, and managed accordingly. To achieve this, we need to look beyond and across national borders in the Amazon region. The situation is not the same in all Amazon countries, but there are many similarities. Those who are destroying the forest are powerful and well organised. They disregard national borders, but so do the forest and its indigenous inhabitants. We need to protect large tracts of forest that span national and other boundaries. Existing protected areas must be managed in an ecologically sound way and

in conjunction with contiguous areas under protection, including when these happen to be situated in neighbouring countries. Those of us who wish to protect the rainforest must unite forces across national borders and work collectively for an alternative development of the Amazon region. Countries must collaborate to protect, rather than destroy, the rainforest.

After more than twenty years' work with local projects in the Amazon, Rainforest Foundation Norway has built the expertise and the networks needed to plan cross-border protection of the rainforest. The support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has enabled us to put this plan into practice.

## How?

If we are to succeed in saving large areas of the Amazon rainforest, we must make experience and expertise at the local level the very foundation of forest management – at regional, national and multi-national levels alike. Here we outline the principles that in our opinion must form the basis for management of the Amazon rainforest – principles that concurrently shape Rainforest Foundation Norway's cross-border Amazon initiative.

## The role of the rainforest must be recognised

The tropical rainforest has evolved over the last 50–100 million years. It covers no more than five to six percent of the earth's surface, but is nevertheless where the majority of the world's terrestrial fauna and flora can be found. The rainforest is home to around one thousand indigenous peoples, but it is vital to the rest of humanity also because, among other things, it regulates the climate, stores important water resources and is a source of medicines. The world's forests together contain far more carbon than can be found in the atmosphere. If we preserve the rainforest, we have a much greater chance of managing and limiting man-made climate change.

The fact that the rainforest must be preserved because of its vital importance to humanity and the environment has to be recognised, and it must shape policy in those countries that are responsible for the management of the forest, as well as in those countries that can influence development in rainforest regions.

## **Indigenous peoples must be respected**

Indigenous peoples have particular rights to the land where they live, and to be heard in matters of concern to them. These rights have to be respected, and must form the basis for forest management. Indigenous peoples' collective rights to the land where they have traditionally lived must be formally recognised. Experience from the Amazon region demonstrates that indigenous territories provide the best protection against rainforest destruction.

As such, providing support for indigenous movements and their efforts to establish indigenous territories, and promoting respect for indigenous rights, are core objectives of our work. Indigenous peoples constitute our most important target group. Additional target groups are environmental organisations and others that work closely with indigenous people for the protection of the rainforest and indigenous rights.

## **Indigenous peoples must be involved**

We believe that indigenous peoples and other rainforest inhabitants must participate actively in forest management that is environmentally friendly and founded on the legal rights of forest-dwellers. Indigenous peoples possess a unique knowledge of how to utilise the forest without destroying it, and it is in their interest that the forest is preserved.

One example of the ways in which indigenous peoples themselves protect the forest can be found in Corrientes in Peru. There, the indigenous people are fighting the harmful effects of oil extraction by means of surveillance.

One of Rainforest Foundation Norway's partner organisations – the local indigenous organisation Federación de Comunidades Nativas del Corrientes (FECONACO) – has established a unique and effective system for surveillance of the petroleum exploration activities in the Corrientes river basin. This has enabled the local population to discover and report leaks and emissions, and raise the alarm.

## **Environmentally friendly sources of income must be developed**

Putting in place alternative, and environmentally friendly economic activity is vital to securing sound rights-based management of indigenous territories. Ecologically responsible sources of income provide indigenous peoples with a real alternative to income-generating activity that is destructive to the rainforest, and makes it possible for them to say no to those who offer to buy rights to extract timber and other natural resources from indigenous land. Marketing of environmentally friendly rainforest products made by indigenous people also contributes to raising the general public's consciousness about the rainforest, its value and the interactions that sustain it.

One illustration of our work with economic alternatives comes from Xingú National Park in Brazil. In Xingú, indigenous inhabitants collect seeds from the forest, which they then sell on to landowners who wish to reforest areas around the sources of the Xingú River with indigenous species in order to protect the river. This collaboration is organised through a seed network, and has created alternative sources of income for many indigenous people in the region. Another example comes from Purus in the Peruvian western Amazon. There, indigenous peoples earn some money by collecting and selling mahogany seeds. They make use of an internal market for mahogany seeds that has arisen around various reforestation projects in other parts of the Peruvian Amazon.



**1** "THE WESTERN AMAZON": ECUADOR, BRAZIL, BOLIVIA AND PERU

The western Amazon comprises the areas around the border between Peru and its neighbors Ecuador, Brazil and Bolivia. This is the area in the Amazon with the largest number of oil concessions. The concessions often overlap with indigenous peoples' territories and other protected areas.

**2** "THE XINGÚ BASIN": BRAZIL

The Xingú basin is situated in the centre of what is referred to as the Brazilian Amazon deforestation belt. In spite of this, it contains one of the world's largest continuous corridors of different protected rainforest areas.

**3** "THE GUYANA PLATEAU": BRAZIL, FRENCH GUYANA AND SURINAME

The Guyana Plateau comprises areas around the Brazilian border and the protected areas in southern French Guiana and Suriname. Much of the forest has been preserved, but the area is under threat from plans for large-scale infrastructure projects, mineral extraction and logging.

**4** "THE RIO NEGRO REGION": BRAZIL, VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA

The Rio Negro region extends from east to west in the area where the Brazilian, Venezuelan and Colombian borders meet. Gold mining is a major problem in the region.



# Where?

*Our cross-border work in rainforest protection is concentrated in four Amazon regions, which all comprise several indigenous territories and conservation areas. In addition, we engage in political advocacy work, take part in cartography collaborations and work to promote human and social rights at the multinational level.*

## The western Amazon

This area of rainforest stretches from the Andes in Peru, into Bolivia and Brazil. Here is a patchwork of different types of conservation area and other rich areas of rainforest which are under threat from oil and gas extraction, road building and logging. No other part of the world is home to such a large number of indigenous groups living in voluntary isolation from the outside world. The area is also the Amazon's richest in terms of biodiversity.

In the western Amazon, we prioritise support for efforts to ensure that contiguous protection areas are managed as one and in environmentally sound ways; that new territories for indigenous populations are established; that environmental activists from Peru, Bolivia and Brazil collaborate with each other; and that indigenous organisations are strengthened. Protection of the numerous indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation is a main priority in this region.

## The Xingú basin

Xingú is one of the Amazon River's main tributaries in the southeastern Amazon. The area is the size of Spain and contains a patchwork of large and continuous areas of protected rainforest – both indigenous territories and conservation areas. A high level of cultural variation and biodiversity characterises the area. The landscape varies from savanna in the far south to rainforest further north. The Xingú basin is situated right in the middle of the area of Brazil which has seen the most rapid and extensive deforestation in the last decade due to large-scale cattle farming and

industrial crop cultivation – mainly soybeans.

The area is under threat from the controversial hydroelectric power project Belo Monte.

In Xingú, our main priorities are the creation of new models of land management which allow indigenous territories and protected areas in the Xingú basin to be managed as one continuous corridor, in a sustainable way and with the support of all sectors of society; the development of environmentally friendly economic alternatives for local indigenous groups, peasants, rubber tappers, nut foragers and fishermen; and the halting of the hydroelectric power project Belo Monte, which if completed will have dramatic consequences for the people and the environment in Xingú.

## The Guyana Plateau

This geological plateau in the northeastern Amazon is covered by rainforest which reaches into Brazil, French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana, Venezuela and Colombia. Around 80 percent of the rainforest here is protected. However, strong political and economic forces are pressing for the construction of big roads and dams, the mining of minerals and the granting of new logging concessions in the region – something that will have harmful consequences in the protected areas and for the many indigenous people who live there.

Our main priorities on the Guyana Plateau are to develop and put in place sustainable economic alternatives; to address environmental issues in indigenous territories; and to create an efficient network of the various indigenous groups on

the Plateau so that they together can consolidate their position vis-à-vis national authorities.

## The Rio Negro region

This is one of the most undisturbed regions of the Amazon. More specifically, it consists of areas where the borders of Brazil, Venezuela and Colombia meet. Around 70 percent of the area is protected. The military presence on the Brazilian side of the border has been considerable and has limited illegal mining, logging and large-scale agriculture. However, gold prospecting is a problem. An area the size of Portugal is inhabited by the Yanomami people, the largest indigenous group in the Amazon region to maintain its traditional way of life. The Yanomami number close to 30,000, and their settlement area straddles the border between Brazil and Venezuela.

Rainforest Foundation Norway variously assists in exchanges between representatives of the Yanomami in both countries of habitation; the establishment of an organisation for the Yanomami in Venezuela; the production of bi-national maps of the Yanomami territories together with pilot management plans for some of these areas; and efforts to protect Yanomami territory against invasions from gold prospectors. We also support a network of indigenous groups

and several other organisations that carry out environmental protection work in the Rio Negro basin. Among other things, this network will work for sustainable regional rainforest management and will update maps of the Rio Negro basin.

## Regional framework

The growing economic cooperation among Amazon countries presents significant challenges to the environment and human rights. As we have established, work across ethnic groups, organisations and states will be necessary to combat these threats. Significant improvement to the Amazon countries' legislation and effective measures at regional levels are necessary to secure indigenous rights and protect the rainforest. The work we do to promote rainforest management based on legal rights in our four target territories depends on an effective inter-state framework for the management of natural resources.

A main priority is to facilitate efficient cooperation between agents who work with similar issues and who can push regional rainforest policy towards the observation of legal rights and rainforest management. This kind of collaboration produced the first map showing a complete picture of all the various protected



## About the Amazon rainforest

- The Amazon rainforest covers an area of more than 1.7 billion acres. This makes the Amazon the world's biggest rainforest.
- Approximately 3 million indigenous people live in and derive a livelihood from the rainforest
- The Amazon rainforest is one of the world's richest ecosystems

areas, together with deforestation, across all of the Amazon Basin. To achieve this we provided support to the cartography network “the Amazon Network of Geo-referenced Socio-environmental Information” (RAISG). Through this network, strategic partners from Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela have exchanged digital geographical information about the Amazon region. In addition, through the lawyer network RAMA, our partners share experience and information in order to advance their efforts to secure indigenous people’s rights in several parts of the Amazon.

## The Amazon in Norway

Norwegians in general are very interested in the Amazon rainforest. We sustain this interest with information about the rainforest, indigenous peoples and their rights, and threats and solutions. We also work systematically to stop Norwegian contributions to deforestation, for example by notifying the Norwegian Government Pension Fund Global’s Council on Ethics of transgressions.

In order to inform the Norwegian public of our activity and mission, we work strategically to secure media coverage of particular topics, and we produce reports on topical issues. We use our website and social media proactively and creatively. We organise and contribute to different kinds of events and activities which help place the rainforest on the agenda in Norway, such as open seminars about the Amazon rainforest; exhibitions; and film screenings.

## For more information:

*[www.rainforest.no/en](http://www.rainforest.no/en)*



Photo: Bo Mathisen

## ABOUT THE AMAZON ACROSS BOUNDARIES INITIATIVE

- The main aim of the initiative is to ensure that “the Amazon rainforest is managed in a holistic and sustainable way, across national borders and with due respect for the rights of indigenous peoples and other forest inhabitants.”
- The work was initiated in 2007, and is taking place over two periods. The first phase of the programme ran from 2007 until 2010. The second phase runs from 2011-2015.
- A thorough evaluation of the experiences from the first phase was conducted by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2010. The evaluation pointed to “positive results”, and emphasised the link between forest protection and indigenous peoples’ sustainable use of the rainforest.





## RAINFOREST FOUNDATION NORWAY

Rainforest Foundation Norway fights to preserve the world's rainforests and secure the rights of indigenous peoples and forest dependent communities, in cooperation with more than 70 local indigenous and environmental organisations in southeast Asia, Oceania, Central Africa and the Amazon.