



Indigenous Solutions for Global Challenges: a Visual Tale

Community Owned Solutions for Sustainability
across the Guiana Shield, South America

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Project COBRA
analysed policies affecting
the Guiana Shield region
from the perspective
of its inhabitants

- It aimed to understand the social, ecological and cultural impacts of global environmental policies
- It used community training in video and photographic techniques to foster Indigenous people's understanding of the environment
- It worked with ten Indigenous communities in the Guiana Shield region of South America, a region with the highest percent of forest cover and lowest rate of deforestation on the planet

This book is a visual tale of local solutions to global challenges from Indigenous communities who participated in the EU funded Project COBRA.

COBRA (Community Owned Best practice for sustainable Resource Adaptive management in the Guiana Shield, South America) aimed to better understand the impacts of new global policies at the local level in a region of the world known as the Guiana Shield. The project investigated how far the priorities of global environmental policies match the aspirations of Indigenous communities to thrive in their traditional homelands in a fast changing global policy climate.

COBRA supported Indigenous communities to make recommendations, based on their own understandings and observations, which will be used to facilitate the establishment of strong policies in support of community owned solutions in European international and national funding mechanisms and policies.

In the period 2011 to 2015, Project COBRA worked on increasing confidence across Indigenous communities in the Guiana Shield by: discussing the challenges facing the communities; identifying their own local solutions to these challenges; recording these solutions using participatory video and photography; sharing the solutions with other communities; and implementing best practices within these communities.

Project COBRA has demonstrated that local community owned solutions can offer practical instruments to address challenges in sustainable development and the management of natural resources. These solutions can be a source of inspiration for other communities, as well as provide an effective intervention for policy makers and governments to support.

This book emerges out of a collaboration between photographers, researchers of Project COBRA and Indigenous communities of the Guiana Shield.

The majority of photos were shot by Andrea Borgarello, Claudia Nuzzo and Matthew Simpson, with photostories by the Makushi Research Unit, North Rupununi District Development Board, Guyana.

The Guiana Shield region of South America is part of the world's largest contiguous block of tropical forest. It is characterised by the highest percentage of forest cover and lowest rate of deforestation on the planet. The Guiana Shield contains 10-15% of the world's fresh water reserves and is home to an extremely rich diversity of plants and animals, most of which are unique to this region. The Guiana Shield is still largely inhabited by thriving Indigenous communities, whose knowledge and skills are indispensable for effective conservation of the region and are a great asset to world culture (the communities Project COBRA worked with are shown in red on the map).



Most of the Guiana Shield region is still covered by forests, ranging from dry evergreen and seasonal forests to montane and lowland evergreen rainforests.

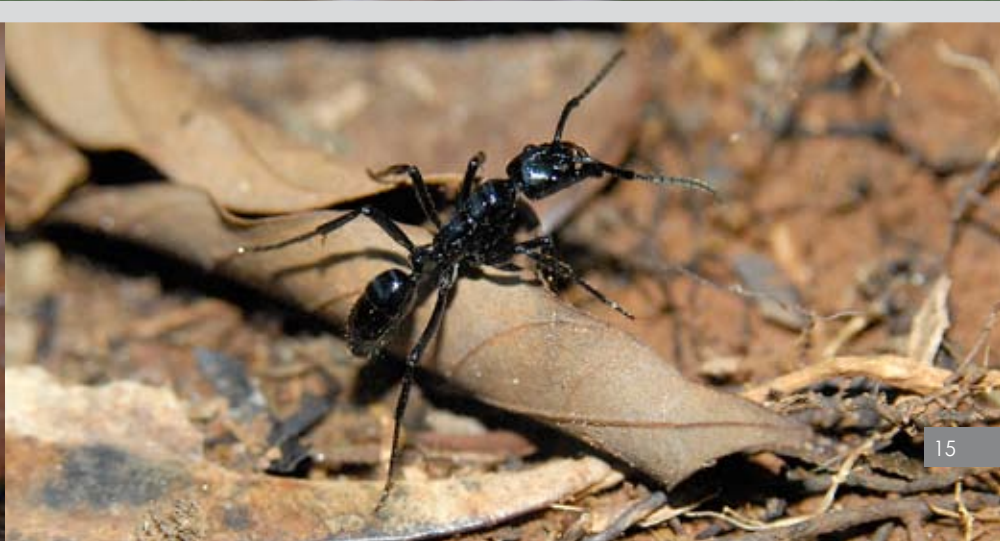














*These forests are home to more than a thousand species of trees.
The Guiana Shield's tropical climate, unique geology,
and relatively pristine ecosystems support extensive areas of species-rich natural habitats.*







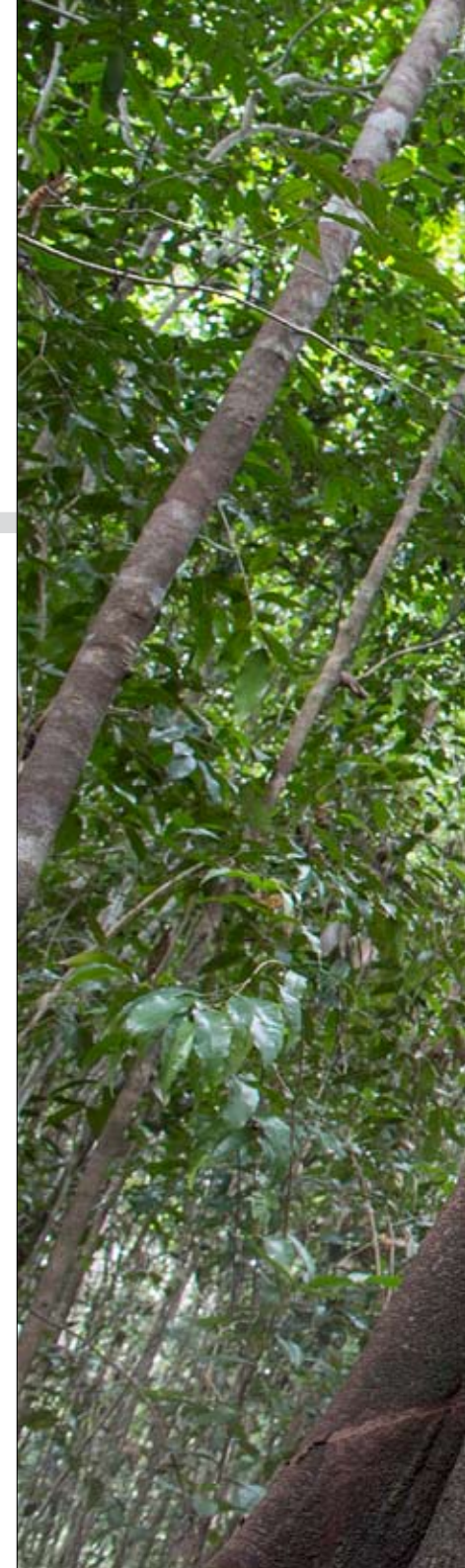


*Portrait of a couple
from the Wapishana Indigenous community of Katoonarib
in the South Rupununi, Guyana.*





*Indigenous communities are responsible for the conservation of the forest.
The community council decides how much logging to do
(Annai, North Rupununi, Guyana).*





Future challenges

The people of the Guiana Shield are totally justified in their push to achieve the same standard of living of developed countries. Making use of the vast natural resources present in the region is seen as playing an important part in the development process. However, much of the development which has taken place so far has been badly planned and poorly executed; deforestation is increasing, the environment is being polluted, while the vast majority of the people living in the region are confronted with poor public services and severe health problems.

*Illegal and destructive goldmining
in the Guiana Shield region.*





The economic transformation of the Guiana Shield based on the conversion and degradation of its natural ecosystem is gaining momentum. Yet, there are also many examples of the sustainable exploitation of the region's natural resources alongside the protection of its biological and cultural diversity. For instance, the agricultural system of the Guiana Shield's Indigenous communities is based on rotational forest farming which allows forest regrowth.











*The economic transformation is also changing some local habits.
A house in Annai (North Rupununi, Guyana):
tin plate roofs are increasingly
replacing traditional palm leaf thatched roofs.*

*Motorbikes are commonly used for transportation,
being more appropriate for the rough conditions than cars
but faster than walking or horseback.*



A grocery store in Annai (North Rupununi, Guyana) shows the presence of a wide range of imported products which are becoming part of the daily life of Indigenous communities.





Local solutions

Indigenous communities already have many solutions for developing the region in a way which is ecologically sustainable and socially fair. Identifying and promoting these solutions is Project COBRA's mission.

Through the use of participatory video and photography, Indigenous communities identified their solutions to a wide variety of challenges and shared these with other communities.

Community members during participatory video training. Beatriz and Jacir Filho are drawing the history of their community, Maturuca, in the Raposa Serra do Sol (Brazil), in order to identify past, present, and future challenges and identify solutions. These solutions will then be filmed and photographed.





Storyboarding consists of drawing a scheme for the different scenes we want to include in a participatory video or in a photostory. Storyboards can then be used as a guide for filming and photographing.







Information is collected by participatory filming and photographing.











Some filming/photographing may involve interviewing people or recording a group discussion.





It can also be used to illustrate the theme of discussion by directly filming aspects of this theme or engaging individuals in role-play activities.



*As the video/photographs are collected and logged
they can be progressively edited and shown
to the wider community and to other communities.*



Photostories of the Makushi way of life

Paulette Allicock, Benita Roberts, Ascenia Xavier and Jordan Joseph of the Makushi Research Unit, North Rupununi District Development Board, Guyana, were trained by Claudia Nuzzo in using photography to represent their sustainable way of life.

The following photostories were put together to show how the Makushi cultivate and process cassava, their staple crop, and grow and weave cotton into hammocks.

Cassava bread story













How to make a traditional hammock









Best practices

Through participatory video and photography, Indigenous communities of the Rupununi identified and recorded their best practices for sharing with other Indigenous communities of the Guiana Shield.

Best practice: Traditional fishing

In order to secure the key resources for their existence, communities selected traditional fishing practices as one of their main solutions.









Fishing nets allow the capture of a greater amount of fish, but may not be sustainable in the long run.







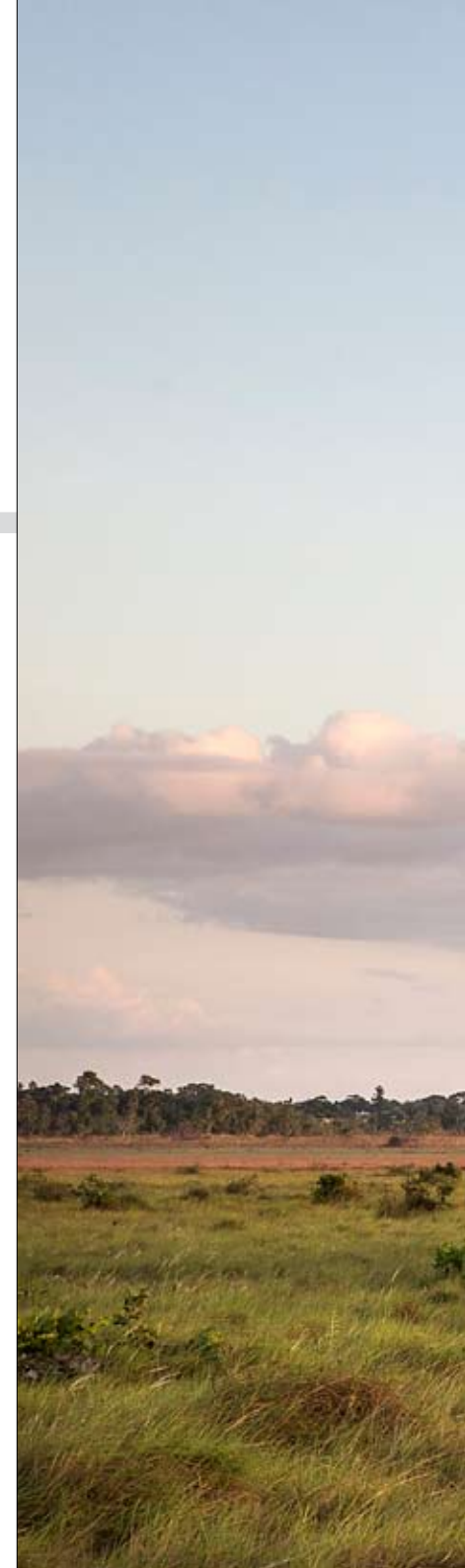
*Traditional fishing with bows and arrows
allow the capture of bigger fishes,
leaving the smaller fish to grow.*





Best practice: Traditional farming

In order to maximise flexibility in a very diverse environment, communities use traditional farming practices with many varieties of crops in different locations.









Cassava is at the basis of the local diet.





*Agriculture in the Rupununi is based on rotational forest farming.
Every 10-15 years, farmers return to the same plot, cut down the secondary forest regrowth
and burn it in order to farm it again.
This approach requires no artificial fertilisers or pesticides and contributes
to the long-term enrichment of the soil.*









Best practice: Maintaining and promoting Indigenous culture

Maintaining culture and a strong identity allows communities to resist against the effects of negative impacts during a time of unpredictable change.





*Women in the Wapishana community
are skilful cotton weavers.
They take care of the entire process:
from growing the cotton,
to the harvesting, spinning and weaving.*

*They produce their own hammocks and dresses.
Each Wapishana hammock requires
over 500 hours of work
(South Rupununi, Guyana).*



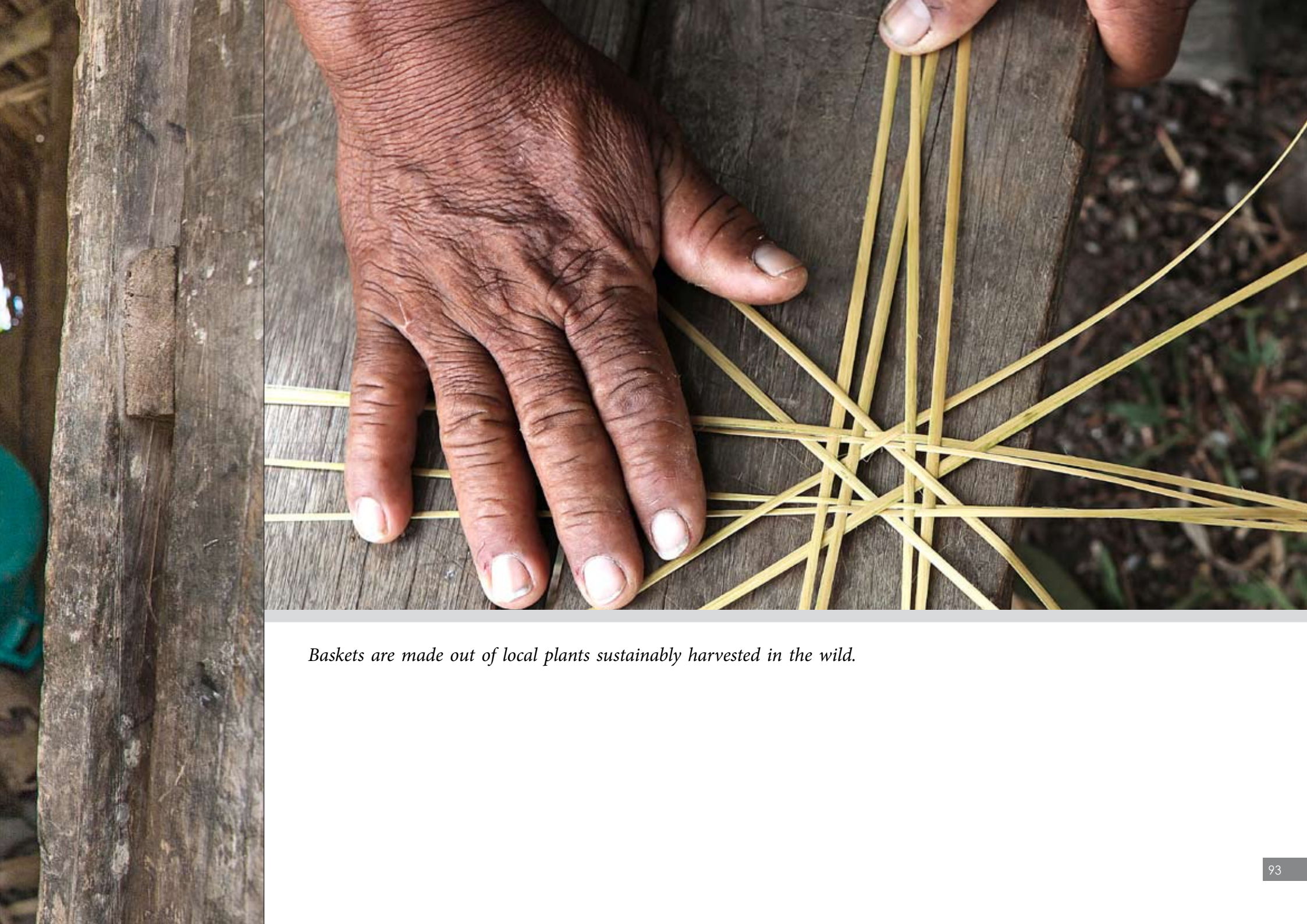






*A man making a traditional handicraft using cow skin
(South Rupununi, Guyana).*





Baskets are made out of local plants sustainably harvested in the wild.



Traditional herbal remedy preparation.





Best practice: Community radio

By adapting traditional practices through the use of new technologies, such as community radio, communities keep up to date and informed about local, national and international news, while promoting their culture in their own language.



RADIO BATHOMAR
97.1 FM
The First Community
Radio,
In Guyana
Bina Hill
Annai
Rupununi, Region #9

ON AIR







Best practice: Developing partnerships

Forging partnerships with various organisations, including local and national NGOs and international bodies, allow communities to coexist with other interests in the region.







Best practice: Self-help

When people volunteer to work together for the benefit of the community, the ideal conditions are achieved for resolving local issues without external assistance.













*The community council decides how much logging to do.
In the picture, four trees are cut in order to build a seating area
for the community football field.*

*Cleaning the well,
which is the main source of water for the majority of households,
is accomplished through the collective effort of all community members.*

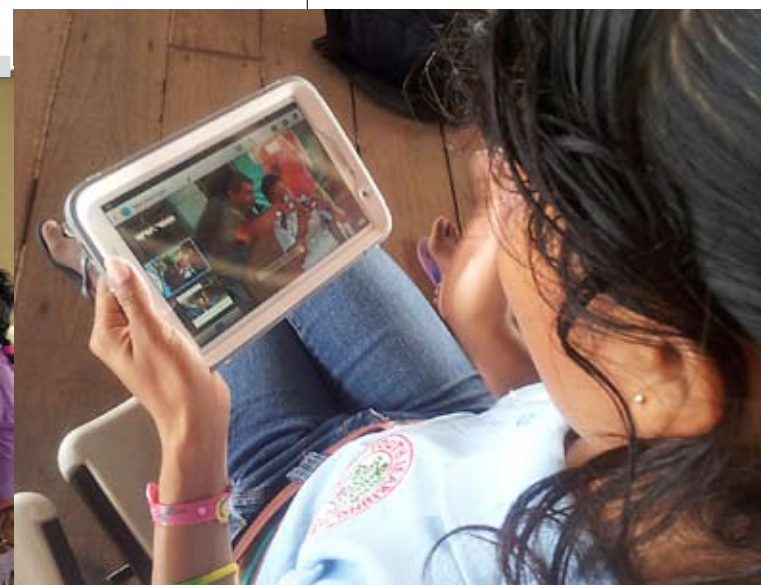




Indigenous communities feel pride in sharing their solutions with other communities and with the rest of the world.









Fair policies

National and international policies that focus on sustainable development, climate change and biodiversity conservation need to support community owned solutions rather than undermine them. Community owned solutions go beyond managing single issues, whether it is carbon storage in forests or the conservation of rare species. They protect community identity, Indigenous culture, and the local environment in a way that is socially and ecologically integrated, and mutually reinforcing.

Project COBRA demonstrates an approach which is inclusive, equitable, and adaptable by supporting local civil society. These local organisations have an important role to play in facilitating community engagement, establishing networks for information exchange and putting Indigenous voices on the negotiating table.







Lakeram Haynes

Luc Bas

How to take sustainable decisions?

"Where there is no vision, the People Perish".

WHENEVER THE COUNCILLORS AND LEADERS MAKE A DECISION,
THEY MUST CONSIDER ITS IMPACT ON SEVEN GENERATIONS BOTH
SEVEN GENERATIONS BEFORE AND SEVEN GENERATIONS AFTER.
SO IN THIS WAY A CHOICE MADE BY THE PEOPLE TODAY WOULD
AFFECT THEIR CHILDREN, THEIR GRAND CHILDREN AND EVEN THEIR
GREAT GRAND CHILDREN'S GREAT GRAND CHILDREN! THIS IS HOW
THEY RESPECT THEMSELVES AND RECOGNISE THAT THEY ARE
NOBLE" FIRST CLASS CITIZENS."

Support Community Owned Solutions

A solution is owned by the community if:

the community needs it

the community does it

the community controls it

the community benefits from it

the solution is fair

the solution is good for the environment

the solution is self reliant and not dependent on long term external support

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Our work in developing Project COBRA has been incredibly rewarding and an important personal and professional experience for us all. We'd like to thank the community participants and communities we have worked with for the warmth and enthusiasm they have shown us and for sharing with us their community owned solutions that are lessons to us all for how to live equitably and sustainably with your environment.

The background image shows a forest setting. On the left, a man in a white cap and headphones is gesturing while talking to a woman in a red shirt. Next to him, another man in a tan cap is operating a video camera on a tripod. On the right, a man in a dark cap and a white t-shirt with a logo is looking towards the camera operator. A boom microphone is suspended from a tree branch above the group. The ground is covered with dry leaves and branches.

“It is not always easy at the beginning, as people sometimes are shy or afraid of new things, but after a while things start to work and through the very process of investigating and capturing best practices, community members rightly feel a sense of pride and empowerment.”

The Project COBRA team

