

A Script for Success

A group of Indigenous Peoples of the Western Brazilian Amazon have organized themselves around biodiversity conservation

The Paumari people of the Tapaua River are known as the ‘water people’. They belong to the Arawa linguistic family of the Western Brazilian Amazon, traditionally inhabiting rivers and lakes. Fishing is their strongest social and cultural representation. The Paumari’s aquatic skills have long been described in the literature, including their voracious spirit for water, fishing, catching turtles and manatees. Fishing is the basis of the Paumari people’s sustenance and self-reliance.

Historically, they inhabited the floodplains of the Purus river and its tributaries. They were also known as the ‘Purus nomads’ due to their navigational mobility in the middle stretch of the river and its tributaries. Their traditional dwellings, built atop rafts and sailing rafts, are called flutuantes.

The Paumari is among the few groups of Indigenous Peoples of the middle Purus river who managed to survive Brazil’s rubber booms without armed confrontations. The booms devastated other Amazonian peoples of the Purus in the mid-19th century. And in 1998, the Brazilian government demarcated the Paumari’s three Indigenous Lands (ILs) on the Tapaua River: Paumari ILs of Lake Manissua, Lake Parica and Lake Cuniua.

Commercial fishing stands out among the countless impacts of the non-indigenous world on the Paumari; artisanal small-scale fishing is intrinsic to their culture. But the informal trade system has pushed them deeper into exploitative relationships. The Paumari supplied their regional fish and other products to the Amazon’s urban centres. That, in turn, depleted their territorial fish stocks and jeopardized their food security.

By 2008 the Paumari were willing to upturn the predatory trade practices. They sought territorial management autonomy and asserted their rights. As part of this, they began to prepare the Territorial and Environmental Management Plan (TEMP); it was designed to sustainably manage the pirarucu fish (*Arapaima gigas*).

The underlining principle was environmental conservation. It required the community to organize itself. They also strengthened territorial surveillance in the following years. Such efforts have combined to increase the pirarucu stocks in the ILs by 631 percent over the past 15 years. It has been consolidated as a successful experience in productive areas due to good practices and investments in infrastructure to guarantee the quality of the fish.

The Paumari culture is traditionally closely related to fishing and aquatic environments. All the work that promoted the paradigm shift and a leap in socio-environmental development for the people evolved through pirarucu management. It leveraged social organization and the generation and distribution of income. The traditional capacity for social organization led them to create in 2019 the Indigenous Association of the People of the Waters (AIPA for Associação Indígena do Povo das Águas), providing them formal representation before the Brazilian government, expanding their capacity to act inside and outside the ILs.

The SSF Guidelines

Considering their values and their campaign, the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) stepped in to support the Paumari in 2022. In partnership with AIPA and the Operação Amazônia Nativa (OPAN), ICSF invited the Paumari to strengthen their campaign

Operacao Amazonia Nativa (OPAN)

OPAN is Brazil's first indigenist organization. For 52 years, it has worked to strengthen indigenous leadership in various locations among people facing multiple challenges. It values the indigenous cultures and models of social organization, encouraging them by training people on autonomous and sustainable management practices for their territories and natural resources. OPAN operates in the states of Mato Grosso and Amazonas. Since 2008, it has worked continuously with the Paumari people of the Tapaua River, supporting them in strengthening their territorial management and implementing sustainable management of pirarucu.

by implementing the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines). It aimed to engage the youth to value traditional fishing by discussing the relationship between the SSF Guidelines, traditional fishing and the Paumari culture.

The training was held in the second half of 2022; it focused on instructing five Paumari in the 14-22 age group on audio-visual edu-communication. They produced audio-visual content related to the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and the Paumari culture. The training moved in three stages, two

of which were in-person and one was inter-modal.

The first stage introduced basic knowledge of equipment, terminology and planning for image collection. The inter-modal stage involved capturing images and sounds in the ILS, following the script established in the first workshop. The images were selected in the second in-person stage, after which began the editing. A professional technical team finalized the process later.

The training created an atmosphere for the young people to build awareness of concepts and practices related to planning activities, creating

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The Paumari, Brazil. The Paumari is among the few groups of Indigenous Peoples of the middle Purus river who managed to survive Brazil's rubber booms without armed confrontations

ADRIANO GAMBARINI / OPAN



The Paumari fishermen traditionally practice bow fishing, dive for turtles, and use harpoons for fish and manatees

needs, difficulties and challenges. Strengthening the youth is essential for the Paumari communities' continuity and development. They are now participating considerably more in management work such as territorial surveillance and pirarucu inventory and fishing.

The youth are noticeably interested in online tools and social media. The Internet is more present in the communities' daily lives today. However, it is still new to them and they lack experience; the Internet often leads to weaker perceptions of their own world and of Brazil's political and social contexts. This highlights the need to enable dialogue to help understand audio-visual and internet communication tools.

A documentary film is the final product of the training and shows how the young underwent such a process. They posed their questions to delineate the Paumari fishing culture of the past and the present, addressing the social organization for the struggle for human rights within the Paumari ILS of the Tapaua River.

Collective fishing is a means for indigenous peoples in Brazil to fight to stay within the ILS and secure their rights. Indigenous populations are highly vulnerable and protecting their territories require complex strategies. Communication has also been identified as a powerful tool to equip the younger generation for the challenges that lie ahead. 3

an understanding of both individual and collective responsibilities. It also provided an opportunity for them to understand the elementary principles of audio-visual and cinematic terminology. Bringing new forms to document old practices also gave them a sense of pride in their customs.

The Paumari traditionally practice bow fishing, they dive for turtles, and use harpoons for fish and manatees. They also use nylon gill-nets incorporated from the non-indigenous world, depending on the interests and needs of the people.

Pirarucu management follows an annual schedule. It involves men, women and the young engaging in territorial surveillance, meetings and fishing activity. The principles taught during the sessions are already a noticeable part of the Paumari people of Tapaua. That training allowed the value of the Paumari people's culture and pirarucu handling to be seen, especially by the youth, who now face the great challenge of rural exodus. Paumari youth have increasingly seen the exodus as an alternative to a life in their region; many have left the territory in search of education and financial resources.

AIPA addresses everyone's present needs. It's devised strategies to increasingly involve young people in activities; it understands their

For more

The importance of Fisheries Management, Purus River, Labrea, State of Amazonas, Brazil

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeYuCqYY4B8>

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