

# PROTECTING NATURE AND TRADITIONAL WAYS OF LIFE

In the tropical forests of the Guianas, indigenous people live in a traditional and sustainable manner in and with nature. IUCN NL protects the rights, the culture and the livelihood of these groups, and protects the biodiversity of their habitats.

## PROBLEMS FROM MINING

The countries Guyana and Suriname consist for the most part of extensive primary forests. In the hinterland, indigenous and tribal population groups continue to live in the traditional manner. Over the last few years, however, mining for gold and other resources have started to threaten their habitats and nature. The national governments that administer these areas from capital cities on the coast grant concessions to mining corporations or allow illegal mining to carry on unchecked, without considering the local communities. To sustain the mines, forest is felled, water sources are poisoned and the illegal trade in mercury flourishes.

## REINFORCING THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL PEOPLES

According to IUCN NL, the decision making processes in the Guianas must be made more inclusive, with attention for the culture, the heritage and the living environment of the traditional inhabitants. Against that background, we aim to reinforce the rights of indigenous and tribal people in legislation and government policy. We are working towards better cooperation by the civil society organisations that represent the local communities. Together with local nature conservation organisations, we shed light on how the government's one-sided decision making

processes are contributing to the destruction of nature across the region.

## PROTECTING CIVIC SPACE

We supported the existing association of indigenous villages and tribal chiefs to develop communication material and a checklist, sharing their protocols and guidelines with the outside world. It is also essential within the indigenous groups to support female leaders in improving their position in respect of government, and protecting their civic space. Women sometimes have other interests than men, and organise themselves independently of men.

## VISION ON LAND USE

The land rights of the tribal and indigenous peoples of Suriname were never formally recognised and in the past few years they have found themselves in increasing conflict with government. Together with

*"We support local organisations to ensure that the voice of the local communities is heard by decision makers in the capital cities."*

Liliana Jauregui, expert Guianas at IUCN NL

our partner Tropenbos International, we supported a number of tribal groups in their negotiations with stakeholders. The Saamaka, with 64 communities threatened by the development of mining and the construction of infrastructure, received our assistance with a process of **participative decision making**. In this process, with maps and in their own words, these tribes outlined their vision on the landscape and land use. By allocating areas for habitation, production and nature conservation, they are able to put forward proposals for their dialogue with the government. The result is a bottom-up discussion as opposed to the traditional top-down approach.

### HALTING THE ILLEGAL TRADE IN MERCURY

Mercury is a substance that is commonly used around the world to extract gold from river water. At

#### Example of our work

##### Influencing national policy

The tropical forests of Guyana are of huge ecological importance, also in respect of mitigating the consequences of climate change. Together with local partners, IUCN NL is trying to protect the forests against unbridled logging, uncontrolled gold mining and the illegal trade in wild animals. An essential element of this process is transparency in decision making, including the awarding of concessions. In addition, government must be forced to recognise indigenous and tribal communities and their sustainable approach to land use, and respect their rights.

Another aim of our lobbying is to influence government policy at national level. We started by organising a round table discussion with national government and civil society organisations. Together with our partners, we commissioned an investigation into the impact of possible measures and it is our hope that government will adopt our recommendations for mining and forestry.

the same time, mercury is extremely harmful to public health: it pollutes the water in the entire downstream area. Although the use of mercury in gold mining has been banned, a lively illegal trade in mercury flourished in the Guianas. IUCN NL unveiled this trade, and presented the results of its investigation to the Minamata convention, to Interpol and to the broader global community.

### MONITORING OIL PRODUCTION

Over the next few years, the exploration of and production from recently discovered offshore oil fields is expected to threaten nature in the Guianas. At present, it is unclear whether the countries' governments will produce the oil in a fair and sustainable manner. Together with WWF Netherlands, the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment and local partners, we organised a series of workshops about environmental impact assessments for representatives from the oil industry, governments, NGOs and centres of knowledge in Suriname and Guyana. IUCN NL is closely monitoring developments, and will continue to make sure that all stakeholders are informed, in good time.

### COLLABORATING WITH IUCN NL

Do you want to help IUCN NL protect the world's last great forests by strengthening the voice of the local people? Visit our **website** for detailed information and more example projects or contact our expert **Liliana Jauregui**.