



Current leadership capacity in Saamaka Authorities

Assessment report and way forward

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Introduction

Saamaka communities have had a profound relationship with the forest and they depend on it for their cultural, religious, health and economic needs. With their territories harboring about 12,540Km² of forests, Saamakans are critical leaders for building a healthy and sustainable future not only for Suriname but also for the world. In this context, the role and responsibilities of traditional Saamaka leaders is vital in the pursuit of solutions to pressing local to global conservation challenges. As such, a strong capacity in these traditional leaders is necessary to enable effective management of the intact forest region they inhabit (Fig 1).

However, land use economic forces, lifestyle changes and top-down policies have been gradually

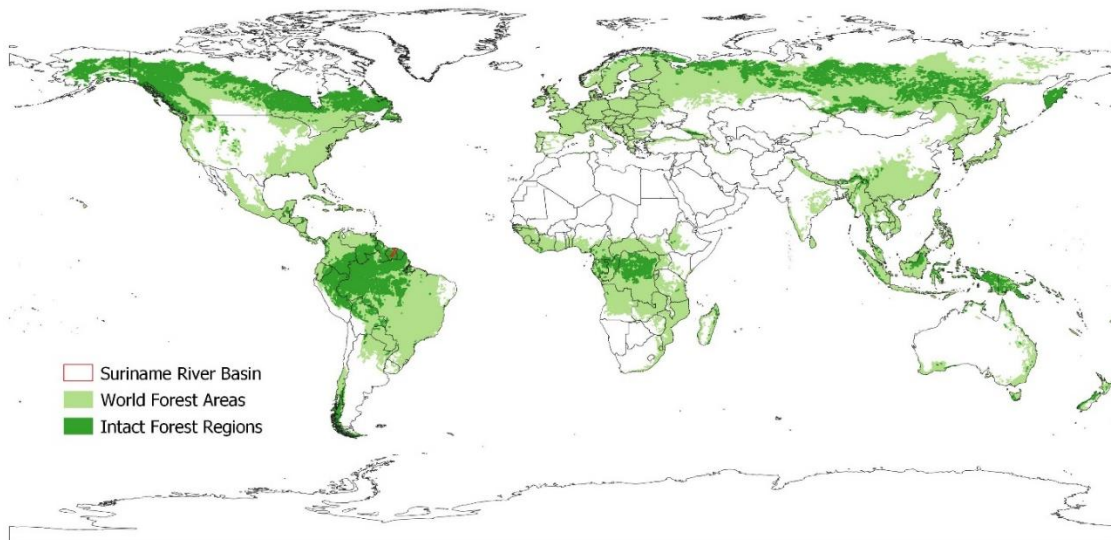


Figure 1 World's intact forest regions and location of Saamaka territory within

undermining traditional leadership system, challenging the stewardship capacity of the Saamaka communities. In addition, the speed and intensity of globalization and associated external pressures that trigger social and environmental change, is outpacing the capacity of traditional Saamaka governance institutions to respond to rapid change. Hence, as Saamaka communities become increasingly connected and embedded in national and international networks and systems, and their overarching social-ecological context continues changing, it is important to evaluate the efficacy of their customary natural resource governance and assess its robustness in current and future situations.

Scope of this study

The objective of this study was to understand the current leadership capacity of Saamaka authorities. This includes an understanding of the main leadership roles and responsibilities as well as the main bottlenecks in their jobs. Furthermore, this study sought to gather information about local institutions and governance system as well as the perspective of the youth in relation to traditional natural resource management and traditional leadership.

Methodology

The present report is based on semi-structure interviews conducted with 191 (141 men and 50 women) Saamaka community members from 64 Saamaka villages (annex 1 contains the list) spread over the whole Suriname River watershed. Among the respondents, 74% were traditional authorities and 26% regular community members. The interviews were conducted between 14th of September and 20th of November 2020. Complementary, five workshops took place between 5th and 7th November 2020, which brought together 78 traditional Saamaka authorities. These additional workshops provided extra information about issues faced by traditional authorities in their work and revealed some additional needs. From the list of 72 questions, 26 were open-ended questions recorded, in Saamakans, with a voice-recording device. Later, these were transcribed into Dutch language and classified according to the topics addressed in the present assessment report.



Figure 2 Pictures taken during the interviews





The traditional Saamaka Authority system

Social organization

Saamaka society is based on a kinship system composed of twelve matrilineal clans (Lö's) each of it consisting of the respective matrilineal descendants of escaped slaves from the same plantation. These clans (each having several thousands of individuals) are the Awana, Abaisa, Bakapau, Biitu, Dombi, Fandaaki, Langu, Matjau, Nasi, Nyafai, Paputu and Watambii who are spread over seventy communities within the Suriname River Basin including several displaced communities located to the north and west of this area. Clans are subdivided into different lineages or extended family groups, locally known *běě*, usually comprising 50 to 150 people descending

from a more recent ancestress (or founding mother). Several *běě*'s from a single clan constitute the core of every village (Price, 1975). Traditionally, each clan has a captain (*lö kabiteni* or *fii pau kabiteni*) who is the respective predecessor of the first captains of the 12 clans appointed within the Saamaka community centuries ago.

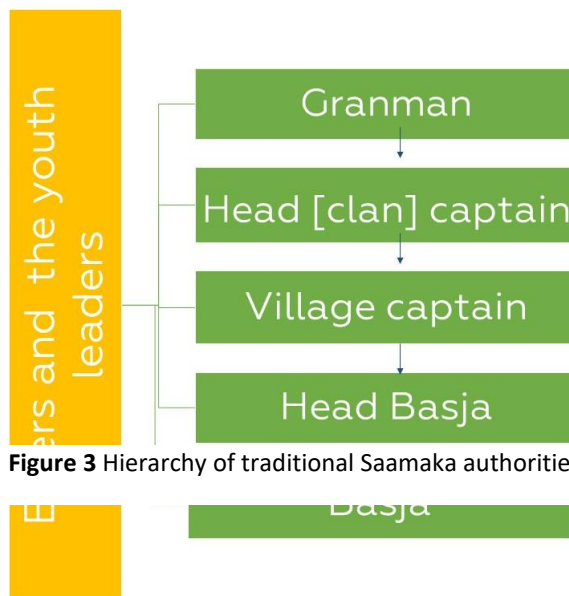


Figure 3 Hierarchy of traditional Saamaka authorities

Structure

Traditional Saamaka leadership is hierarchical, involving five levels of captainship (Fig. 3). The highest level is that of the paramount chief [Granman or Gaama] followed by head captain [*Hedi kabiteni*, *lö kabiteni*, or *fii pau kabiteni*], the village captain [*Kabiteni*] and lastly the head administrative assistant [*headi basja*] and the administrative assistants [*basjas*] who can be both men and women. Elders and youth representatives (*Hedima u kijoo*) have an important advisory role to each of the authority positions.

Traditional functions

This report focuses on the four lowest levels of hierarchy in figure 3: the captainship and *basjas*. Additionally it addresses the roles and responsibilities of the elders and the youth leaders.

The captain

The captain (*Kabiteni*) of a village is primarily the leader of the village and works under the supervision of the paramount chief (Gaama) and or the head captain (*Hedi kabiteni*). The duties of the head captain are similar to those of the village captain. However, in some cases a head captain has the authority over the captains within their respective villages. In other cases, head

captains have the authority over village captains of a region (consisting of several Saamaka villages).

Selection process

This function is passed on from generation to generation but there are different ways how the captainship function is passed on. Traditionally, the **nomination** of captains is done by the *bëë* leaders (*bëë masa, gaanwomi u konde, gaanwomi u konde*) within which the captainship resides. Usually, a person nominated for the position of captain is not informed in advance of this nomination but is informed after the selection is made. When the procedure of nominating through the *bëë* is used, the person nominated must be related to a captain on his mother's side of the family (i.e. great uncle, uncle or cousin). Then the **selection** is done in several ways. For example, after the death of a captain, it is then determined through ceremonial questioning of the spirit of the dead of its predecessor, who (within the *bëë*) is to become the next captain¹. Another way a person is nominated and selected to become a captain is through observation of the behavior of the said person by the elders of the village (often taking several years). The elders then deliberate and consult with the *bëë* of the person to be appointed. The final decision is made based on whether the person is respectful and agreeable, among other things.

In addition, the Granman can **nominate and select** a candidate as a way of promoting or thanking a person for services rendered (but first the Granman must consult with the *bëë* of the nominee before appointing the person). Moreover, when a village or founding family –*bëë*– within a village grows to certain point, in some cases a captainship is given to this family keeping in mind the minimum requirements for the position of captain. Lastly, a non-traditional way that a person can be nominated and selected as a captain is through the interference of a political party or the central government.

Appointment

After the nomination and selection of the suitable candidate, there will be a meeting to discuss the candidate's behaviors and the family of the candidate will be consulted. When the candidate agrees with the nomination, preparations are made for the swearing-in. At the same time, a message is sent to Granman and when he accepts the candidate, the traditional official appointment (*weti futu*) is organized and preceded by the elders within the *bëë*. From the moment of the traditional swearing-in (a public affair), the appointee is regarded as a captain by the community. From that point onwards, the official government accreditation process begins for which a letter is sent to the District Commissionaire (DC). Once the government accredits the appointee as an authority, this will receive a small stipend from the head office of the ministry of Regional Developments (RO) to cover transportation and few other costs related to his tasks. The official appointment gives Government recognition to the traditional authority for a specific area within the Saamaka territory. Despite their official recognition by the government, traditional Saamaka authorities have no law or justice mandate. Yet, traditional

¹ In certain parts within the Saamaka community, the captainship (e.g. clan captain) alternates between certain founding families of that part of the community.





authorities may enforce their customary legal and juridical system as long as these systems are in agreement with the national laws.

Challenges in the selection and appointment process

In the past, no permission was asked to a person to be nominated as a captain but nowadays a person's permission is asked beforehand. This is a challenge because before nomination, the person (i.e. potential candidate) is observed for years and if the person refuses, the captainship position may be delayed for years.

Furthermore, the village community may not accept a nominee and oppose the decision. In such case, the district commissioner (DC) intervenes by visiting the community and assessing the reasons for rejection of the candidate. On the other hand, when a nomination is not accepted or is delayed by the government, it causes stagnation in the performance of the captainship tasks. For example, the captain would not receive the stipend and the resources for fulfilling the function (there are cases where a person in a position has done work for years and eventually passing away without ever receiving a stipend).

Another challenge occurs when the appointment is delayed because of conflicts between *běēs* associated to power struggles (it usually happens when large families are involved). Lastly, conflicts may also emerge when the appointment of a captain is done top-down through national politics.

Responsibilities

The person in the position of head captain or village captain has the following responsibilities:

Procure the social and economic wellbeing of the villagers

- Ensure food availability for the village
- Guarantee that the needs of the village for water and electricity are met
- Make sure that there is school education for the children of the village
- Take care of the needs of the sick people and the elderly (e.g. if they need help with farming)
- Oversee the fair distribution and allocation of monetary resources of the village or donations received by the village

Listen to different views and keep the community together

- Mediate and provide advice during conflict between villagers or between other relevant parties
- Be open to listen to and solve problems within the village
- Facilitate reaching consensus during decision making processes

Maintain order in the village and rule compliance

- Inform violators of rules about their behavior
- Take corrective action in case of criminality and misbehavior
- Impose fines or other penalties if needed

- Ensure that members of the village comply with the rules of the village and other general rules of the Saamaka community
- Ensure the safety of community members especially children and youth

Manage external affairs relevant to the village

- Stay up-to-date of political, social, economic, and cultural developments that have an impact on the village
- Make arrangements so that relevant, reliable and up-to-date information reaches the community
- Take part in meetings with the paramount chief (Gaama)
- Calls general village meetings or meetings with members of the community outside the village
- Be the central focal point with outsiders and the central government on behalf of the village

Enforce Saamaka traditions

- Facilitate cultural and spiritual activities for the community
- Precede regular offerings of reference to the Gods and spirits
- Say prayers for villagers

Additionally

- Delegate tasks to the assistant captains (Basias)
- Perform other duties assigned by the head captain or the paramount chief (Granman)

Human qualifications for the job

To be able to comply with these responsibilities, captain should meet the following minimum requirements:

- Aptitude to communicate respectfully with members of the village
- Ability to keep impartial during conflict and disputes between his own family and other villagers
- Have in-depth customary knowledge about social, cultural, tribal, and spiritual aspects of the community (e.g. the history of the village, the founding families, etc.) especially in communities with diverse cultures such as more westernized Saamaka villages
- Be well informed about traditional protocols of contact, communication and collaboration with outsiders visiting the village and with the national government
- Apply diplomacy during local and external communications while using the appropriate channels
- Have the trust of the villagers and be always available for them
- Be always willing to help and collaborate with everyone equally
- Under no circumstance gets into personal conflicts





Removal from the function

Since the captain function is hereditary and for life, once sworn, it cannot be reversed. Therefore, the removal of traditional captains who abuse their power is seldom done. Nevertheless, it is possible to punish a captain who is not functioning properly through, for example, expulsion from the village or from the community or by not being allowed to perform the duties.

Challenges in the performance of captain responsibilities

In general, traditional authorities perceive a **lack of support from the central government** (e.g. from the DC). This takes the form of delays in the attention to problems that require government's intervention. Similarly, top down decisions and rules applied in the Saamaka territory are often in disagreement with customary norms, rules and practices. This exacerbates wariness by the communities as well as local and external conflicts.

Further, **miscommunication** between the captains and assistant captains leads to conflicts and poor performance of their duties. This is now a more common problem than in the past given all the external influences present in the Saamaka territory. In addition, an increase in **moral corruption** is visible within the community members, including traditional authorities, which results in customary rule breaking and mutual **distrust**. This is leading to 'civil' disobedience and **disrespect** of the traditional authorities, making it difficult for them to perform their duties.

Lastly, **loss of Saamaka cultural traditions** (which started with the introduction of the church) is translating into the increasing involvement of central government politics within the traditional authority system. In addition, the growing importance of money and the start of gold mining has triggered a **change in the values and aspirations of young Saamaka** community members. Further, their abuse of drugs and the increasing disrespect for elders and traditional authorities by the youth, is seen, for many Saamaka authorities, as one of the most current pressing challenges in the fulfillment of their duties.

Assistant captains

The assistant captain (basja) works under the supervision of the head basjas and captains. The tasks of female and male basjas as well as the tasks of the head basjas tend to be the same but might differ in certain areas according to traditional gender roles within certain communities. All duties are performed in coordination with the captain. Traditionally the person in the basja position has been the first line of communication between the villagers and the authorities.

Selection process

The internal selection process (nomination and appointment) of the basja is similar to that of the captain. In general, a captain is allowed four basjas, two male and two female. As the community grows, multiple captains and assistant captains can be appointed. In large communities where more basjas are needed to assist, candidates are chosen from bëë's that have not yet basja representation.

Challenges in the appointment process

There are power struggles within some families with assistant captains and therefore, some families refuse to nominate family members for the position of *basjas* often without explaining it to the traditional authorities. In these cases, the authorities need to look for new candidates to nominate which may take some time. When not suitable candidates are found in the traditional way, other community members who are not nominated (according to the traditional way) for the position are appointed.

Responsibilities

Basjas perform assistant duties including:

Communication and reporting

- Inform villages about meetings to be held
- Report messages from the community to the captain
- Communicate messages from the central government and other parties to the community
- makes public announcements of news and activities regarding the village and the villagers
- Makes emergency announcements when needed
- Makes death notice announcements through the whole village

Preparation and facilitation during community meetings

- Organizes the annual village meeting (bakajai, mindi jai, tapajai kuutu) together with the other traditional authorities
- Ensure that women and men's opinions (gathered during group discussions or gwa se) are equally heard during community meetings

Assist contact with outsiders

- Be the liaison person between the captain and other local and external parties
- Represent the village during meetings with the national government
- Notify the captain about the arrival of visitors
- Welcome visitors and guide them through protocols of contact

Monitoring duties

- Observe and monitors the wellbeing of village members (by paying visits to them) and consult with the captain when there are anomalies

Provide help to villagers in disadvantage

- Provides support to vulnerable village members (e.g. the elderly, handicapped and sick)

Assist preparation of rituals and ceremonies

- Makes necessary preparations for spiritual and cultural activities
- Provide the guidelines for ceremonial practices
- Assists with cooking (only female basjas) for certain public activities





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- Appoint community members to take part in hunting parties for cultural and or spiritual events
- Take part in mourning rituals and gatherings
- Supervises the management of the ceremonial pole (faaka pau)
- Say prayers at the ceremonial pole (faaka pau) (e.g. for the sick and others in need)
- Buy and acquire the things needed for cultural and religious events

Ensures harmony in the village

- Take the necessary measures to ensure peace and order within the community
- Call villagers to account for incidents
- Perform arbitrators tasks
- Mediate between conflicting parties and provide help in looking for solutions
- Prevent hostility within the village
- Enforce local social rules and agreements

Mentor activities and training

- Mentor new assistant captains to strengthen their operations
- Supports with initial training to new assistant captains

Village maintenance

- Help clean the village and surrounding areas
- Remove weed and garbage from important communal areas
- Maintenance of the meeting halls and prepare them for meetings

Human qualifications for the job

- Be charismatic and always available to listen, help and collaborate with community members
- Be able to communicate respectfully with members of the village
 - Ability to keep impartial during conflicts resolution (especially when members of his/her family are involved)
 - Have communication and diplomacy skills
 - Be peaceful
 - Have the trust of community members
 - Have principles and is consequent with them
 - Be a role model for the community
 - Knowledgeable about cultural and spiritual matters
 - Can deal with tolerance any criticism and insults

Challenges in the performance of responsibilities

The challenges for the *basjas* are similar to those of the captains. However, some particular challenges for the *basja* function include insults and aggression by community members that are unsatisfied with the job of the *basja*. Additionally, internet and social media is posing

challenges to the exercise of their role. For example, there is a customary rule that death notices are to be only announced by the assistant captains and it is inappropriate that this news are shared before the official death notice announcement. Yet, it is often more common that death notices are announced by regular community members through social media so there is no strict compliance of the customary rule.

The elders

The elder group or *Gaansëmbë u köndë* is an unofficial position (not recognized by the central government) within the ranks of the traditional authorities. The person in the position of elder advises the traditional authorities, regulates traditional activities and helps to advance social and religious welfare.

Selection process

The captains and members of the community observe and decide whether a person has a certain experience and knowledge to perform an advisory role within the community.

Responsibilities

Gaansëmbë u köndë have the following main duties:

- Provide advice to traditional authorities in relation to different traditional matters
- Listen during local community meetings but also in meetings with other villages or with outsiders
- Support traditional authorities with knowledge and enforcement of customary rules
- Assist (through observations of behavior) the selection of candidates for traditional authorities or youth leaders (*Hedima u kijoo*)
- May arbitrate cases and issues within the community
- Help keep harmony and peace within the village
- Lead prayer vigils for the sick and others in need
- Pay attention to the youth and the children in the village
- Help prevents pollution of the village and its surroundings

Human qualifications for the job

- Knowledgeable about social, cultural, traditional, spiritual and tribal aspects of the Saamakans (e.g. the history of the village, the founding families or *bëë*, clans territories, etc.).
- Ability to communicate respectfully with members of the village
- Capacity to remain impartial during conflict mediation (especially if it involves his or her family members)
- Under no circumstance gets into personal conflicts

The youth leader

The youth leader or *Hedima u kijoo* is also an unofficial position within the ranks of the traditional Saamaka authorities. Yet, even though the youth leader is not an official member of





the traditional authorities, in cases of the absence of the captain or the basja the youth leader can serve as a replacement.

Selection process

A person (woman or man) becomes a youth leader because of the traditional knowledge hold. When members of the community observe that someone (mostly young adults and adults) have certain knowledge and skills such as playing and singing Apinti (a ritualistic singing and drumming), performing funeral rituals, and running meetings, they can be accepted as a youth leader. When the need arises to appoint a youth leader, the elders are informed that a candidate needs to be found. The elders then assess, through observation, a suitable candidate that is well behaved and that gets along with the local authorities. Based on this assessment, a young community member is appointed as youth leader.

Responsibilities

The person in the position of youth leader performs various supportive duties including:

- Provides assistance to villagers in different matters including cultural and spiritual activities such as saying prayers
- Supports villagers with farming and boat building activities
- Collaborate with communal services especially during mourning and death rituals
- Shares knowledge with villagers on how to conduct certain cultural and spiritual activities
- Stays abreast of the current issues within the community
- Have an advisor role to villagers and local authorities (on youth matters)
- Encourage and supports the youth through the promotion of activities such as sports and social events
- Help distribute donations (such sports or educational materials) among the youth of the village
- Help mediate conflicts and issues with the youth of the village upon request of the village captain
- Serves as communication channel between the village captain and the youth

Human qualifications for the job

The youth leader should have similar human qualities as the elders, including mediation skills, diplomacy and charisma. Likewise, as the elders, the youth leader should have knowledge about social, cultural, traditional, spiritual and tribal aspects of the community. He or she are also role models for all the Saamaka youth.

Traditional decision making procedures

Decision-making is based on consensus following [days] of active discussion in community meetings or *krutus*. When a decision needs to be made at the village level, traditional authorities seek first to reach consensus among themselves, then with the *Gaansëmbë u köndë* (elders) and with the *Hedima u kijoo* (youth leaders). Once their advice and opinions have been gathered and consensus about matters have been reached with them, a *krutu* is then held to inform the

decision in plenary with all the villagers. The village captain opens the meeting and hands it over to the *basja*. The *basja* communicates the decision to the meeting participants in details. Afterwards, the participants break into discussions groups (*gwaa se*) to analyze the decision that was presented and form their opinion about it. Each group chooses a person to present, in the presence of all meeting participants, their opinion about the decision being discussed and the other persons within the group may add to the intervention of their representative. Community members may agree or disagree with decisions. If there is no consensus about the issue being decided, the *krutu* is suspended and further *gwaa se* take place until consensus has been reached. A challenge nowadays is that community participation in meetings is decreasing as people get busier and busier looking to earn money through paid jobs or with their own businesses. Then when decisions are made, community members complain because they were not consulted or involved. Saamaka communities may gather once a year (i.e. bakajai, mindi jai, tapajai kuutu) to discuss matters that need attention and community members get the chance to present concerns about the leadership of the village.

Conflict resolution

Conflict resolution procedures are as follow: The villagers involved in the conflict seek to find an agreement through the mediation of an elder of the *bëë*. If this does not help, one of the parties involved may take the issue causing conflict to the captain. He in turn hears separately the points of view of the other party. After hearing both parties separately, the captain discusses the conflicting issues with the *basjas* and afterwards the *basja* calls for a *krutu* with those involved. The parties in the wrong usually get a fine consisting of paying with bottles of rum, *pangies*² or gasoline (or through other means). When there are large conflicts between villages or between clans (usually about the use of forest areas) these are taken to the Granman. Traditional authorities may also seek help in the Bestuursopzichter (BO)³ for resolving conflicts where the government has a stake (e.g. fuel for the electricity generator, inappropriate use of guns, among other things).

Traditional leadership capacity

Leadership capacity is critical to strengthening local voices and pursue environmental sustainable choices and actions. Such capacity is enabled or constrained by the presence or absence of local capitals or assets, which provide the resources or means to take action. Categories of capitals that provide authorities with effective leadership capacity include natural assets as well as social, human, cultural, institutional and financial capitals (Bennett et al., 2018).

² Traditional cloth

³ An administrative officer in charge of observing what happens at the village levels and reporting this to the district commissioner.





Based on this, we provide in this chapter, an overview of the capitals that Saamaka traditional authorities currently have available.

Natural resource assets

The Saamaka territory is enriched with forest, natural medicines, wild fruits, game, minerals, sand, water, fish and biodiversity. Over 76 percent of the Saamaka territory is covered by forest (Table 1). Other land cover type include non-forest vegetation (5.5%), shifting cultivation (7%) and deforestation associated to gold mining (1.6%). There are two protected areas, Copi Nature Reserve and Brownsberg Nature Park, covering 2.6% of the entire area. Figure 2 shows the location of these land use cover.

Forest is the most valued natural resource in the area (followed by fish, see Ramirez-Gomez et al., 2017) and therefore its access is regulated by customary rules and laws (see cultural capital). Saamaka members that want to work in the forest – to harvest timber, do logging or goldmining- need to have permission from their traditional authorities who will indicate also the forest areas they can access. Community members working in the forest must also ensure that their practices are appropriate and do not cause damage to the forest or creeks. Traditionally, forest needs to be allowed to regenerate. If the Saamaka village has a community forest, there is a committee, preceded by the traditional captain, in charge of the decisions about this area and its sustainable management. Although community forest are issued for the purpose of commercial logging, these areas contribute with the 25% of national timber production (SBB, 2019). Since Saamaka communities lack the skills and capacity to do logging on their own, they rent out their logging rights to logging companies. This means that logging inside community forest is being done by third parties in an unsustainable way (and often the wood is sold outside legal markets)⁴ which is increasingly causing degradation of forest and exhaustion of commercial species.

Despite customary rules regulating the use of natural resources, the natural assets present in the Saamaka territory are being rapidly degraded due unsustainable logging practices, gold mining, water pollution and overharvesting. Similarly, Fish and game have been also depleted in nearby areas due to overexploitation and the use of unsustainable methods (Ramirez-Gomez et al., 2017). Hence, Saamaka communities are relying on smaller fish with less nutritional value or have to travel longer distances to obtain them. Dealing with depletion and degradation of the nature resources has become an important challenge for traditional Saamaka authorities. Not only it is difficult for them to regulate access to resources by Saamaka community members who are increasingly involved in a cash economy without consideration of customary nature resource rules but also, nature degradation is compromising local livelihood diversification, food security, sustainable income opportunities and health.

Table 1 Land cover in the Saamaka territory

Land cover	Area (Km ²)	%
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⁴ See SBB, (2019) for more details

Forest	12,540	76%
Non-forest	904	5.5%
Shifting cultivation	1,167	7%
Deforested	257	1.6%
Reservoir	1,567	9.5%
Protected areas	426	2.6%





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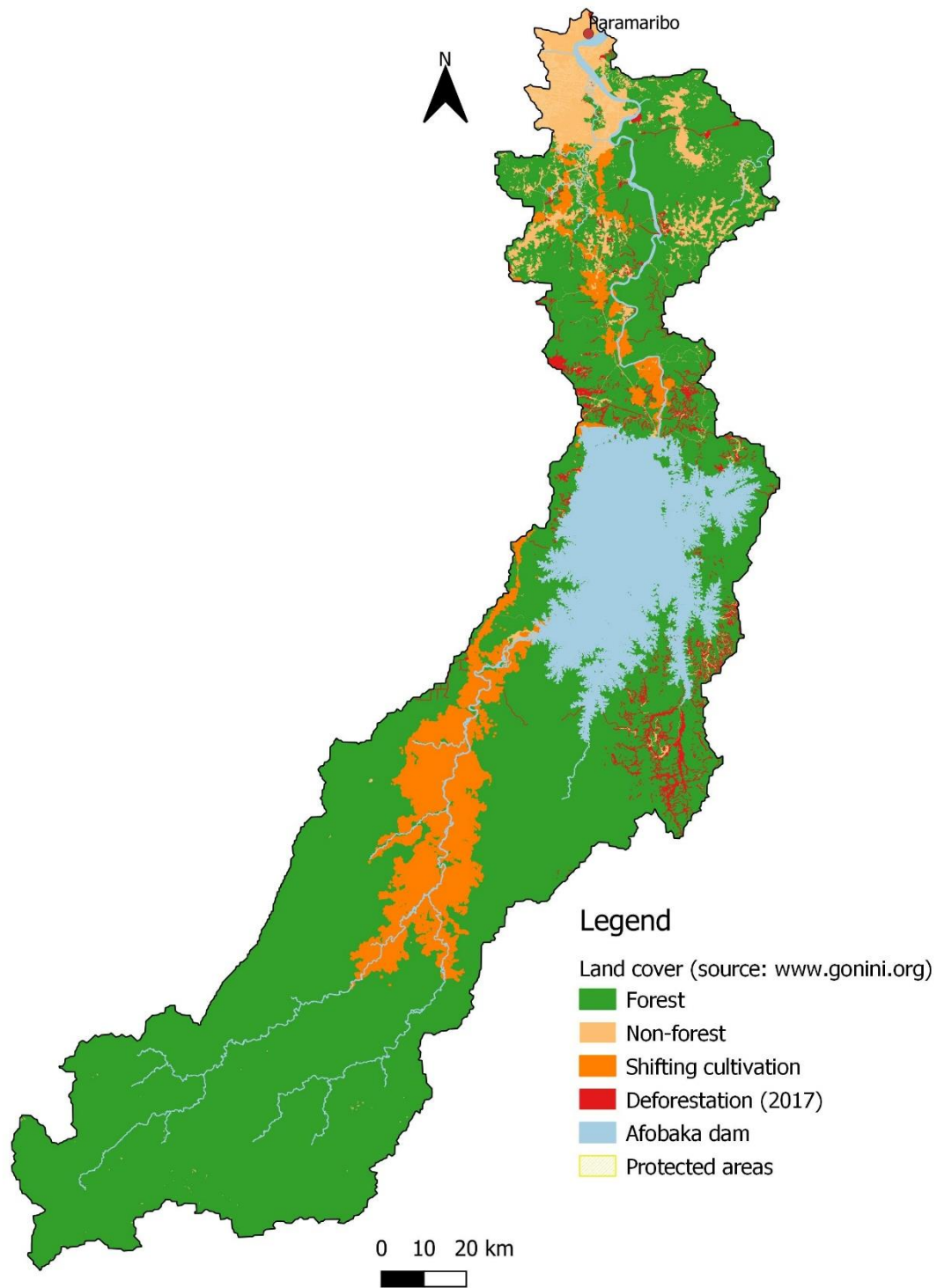


Figure 4 Overview of forest extent and other land uses within the Suriname River Basin

Social capital

For traditional authorities, having a strong social capital in their communities means that there are solid social ties to facilitate coordination, trust and cooperation and ultimately enabling communities to act collectively (Sanginga et al., 2007). Clan relations is one of these ties binding community members together. Each clan is entitled to a forest area. There are difference in the size of these areas; clans that were settled in earlier (centuries ago) got *de facto* rights over a larger forest area whereas clans that settled in later got *de facto* rights over a smaller forest area. In time of need, there is cooperation between clans. For example, clans with limited access to forest may ask permission to other clans to access their forest areas to harvest resources and this permission is usually granted. This was also the case during the transmigration process in the 1960's⁵ where many villagers lost access to the forest areas where they had customary access. Hence, some displaced clans got permission to do farming in the forest of other clans. Despites relationship of cooperation in the past and during the transmigration process, the building of the Afobaka dam have had a tremendous impact on kinship relations as the displaced communities no longer functioned within a system of clan ownership of land and the kinship, social and economic relations that are embedded in that system (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2007).

Moreover, the introduction of the church has eroded clans [and community] relations due to differences in worldviews. In addition, the intrusion of commercial logging and gold mining have been creating clan conflicts over forestland as there were no before. These land uses are also causing profound changes in community relationships. Hence, another important current challenge for traditional authorities relates to dealing with a social capital in erosion, seen as increasing community disunity, individualism and poor cooperation among community members.

Institutional capital

This section focuses on Saamaka community based organizations. These organizations are crucial to traditional authority agency, especially with the changing Saamaka worldviews. *"We have to cooperate with our organizations otherwise the responsibilities are too heavy for the authorities and in this way we can develop our area better..."* said a traditional authority during the interview. In addition, these organizations help traditional authorities liaise with the outside world and are crucial to achieve social, cultural and economic development in the villages. Yet, a challenge for traditional authorities is the discontinuity of the work of these organizations. The lack of continuity of financial resources make them unstable and because of this, people lose motivation. At the same time, they have little capacity to take on the lead in project design, fund raising and implementation, so they are still dependent on outside help (which is often for just for short-term projects). Traditional Saamaka authorities commented during the field work for this studies that because the work that NGO's do in Saamaka area is still top down and the

⁵ The impacts caused by the Afobaka dam and reservoir on the Saramaka people: <https://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2010/09/surinameiachrsaramakaaffidavitgoo dlandmay07eng.pdf>





financial resources are mainly for the NGO project administration in the city, local Saamaka organizations have little opportunity to learn skills and develop.

Further, it is more and more the case that Saamaka people have less time to actively make part of these organizations as they are increasingly involved in paid jobs and other cash economy activities. Table 2 presents a list of some of the formal and informal Saamaka organizations mentioned during the interviews.

Association of Saamaka Authorities

The Association of Saamaka Authorities (VSG) was created in the year 2000 to represent the 12 Saamaka clans (lös) about tribal rights recognition processes. One of these was the filing of a complaint before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) related to intrusive logging activities by the Government without local communities consent. In 2007, the IACHR ruled in favor of the Saamaka people and against the Government of Suriname (IACHR, 2006). Currently VSG supports Saamaka communities with the legalization of customary land rights.

Women associations

In each village there is a women association, which usually undertakes activities around the planting, harvesting and in some villages, the local selling of agriculture products. They also organize for the sewing and selling of *pangies*. Women's organization provide support during funerals by coordinating related activities. Often they assist the captains in the collection of donation from the villagers. They can also be of support to traditional authorities in welcoming guests when they visit villages. Traditional authorities value and benefit from the support of women's organization in the fulfilment of the captainship tasks. However, bottlenecks arise when the organization membership declines associated to the limited time that Saamaka women nowadays have to dedicate to the activities of the organization (i.e. in the last years and due to changing lifestyles, women are more engaged in income generating activities while their interest in participation in village matters is less of a priority). Another challenge is when the leader of the women association retires or passes away because it is difficult to find new leadership as young people (including young adults) move to study or in search of better economic opportunities, to the city.

Youth groups and football associations

In almost every village, there is a youth group. The group is usually in charge of organizing village parties, sports and cultural activities. In villages where there is tourism, some tourist get involved in the activities of the youth group, especially football. These activities motivate the youth and therefore traditional authorities appreciate this support, as there are few external organizations involved with the Saamaka youth. Youth groups receive the care and support of the *hedima u kijoo* (see description of the youth leader function).

Village committees

Each village having a community forest concession has a committee established to manage these areas. The committees' main objective is to administrate the income obtained from the

concession and make sure that benefits are distributed and fairly invested in benefit of the whole community. Village captains are the head of these committees and they are in charge of appointing committee members making sure that all village *běēs* are represented. The committees are also in charge of keeping communication with logging companies who become lessees of the community forest. As such, the committee is the one to formalize agreements, receive payment and check that logging operation takes place in the agreed manner. One challenge for traditional authorities here is the limited skills to deal with the paperwork related to this process and the lack of skills for finance administration.

Other groups

These include groups promoting art-work, culture and history of Saamakan as well as other groups organizing the work of villagers around gold mining, tourism and economic development. Some examples include Totomboti Foundation situated in Pikin Slee, which promotes the development of Saamaka art-work and the selling of handcrafts. Another example includes Association Macamboa in Nieuw Kofiekamp, which groups Saamaka youth working in gold mining⁶. Other groups, associations and local foundations are listed in table 2. A bottleneck with the sustainability of these groups is the lack of interest of the youth to take over the leadership as well as the financial bottlenecks to have continuity in the activities (as many of these are linked to projects by outside organizations and when the project finishes, the activity of the group or organization ceases).

Table 2 List of associations and groups mentioned during the interviews*

Name of association or group	Type	Focus	Village (mapa)
Association of Saamaka Authorities (VSG)	Association of Saamaka head clans and leaders	Advocacy for community rights	All
Uma Fa Ten	Women association		Tapoeripa
Totomboti	Cultural group		Piki Slee
Konde hati			
Konde Poolo			
Mauw ku Mauw			
Denki mi Libi	Women organization		Tjaikonde
Oe sa fiti			
Association Macamboa	Youth association	Support to Saamaka gold miners	Nieuw Koffiekamp
Klaasfolo	Youth organization	Organization of village festivities and recreation	Klaaskreek
Association Meh Sa wei		Receiving of guests	Kajapaati
Kala Foundation			Jaw Jaw
Lobie Association			Jaw Jaw

⁶ This Association has gotten a gold mining area within a concession of I am Gold. Members of this association can legally mine there.





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Linpa group	Lespaansi
Bundru	Geengestonoe
Geengestonoe Foundation	Geengestonoe
Fiti Seeka	Geengestonoe
U Sa Doo	
Hebi Peëta	Women organization
	Klaaskreek

*Table with some information gaps

Cultural capital

This section focuses on the cultural processes, practices and knowledge that are central to Saamaka's identity and that are crucial in their management of nature. The cultural capital frames Saamakan's authority capacity to rule the use of natural resources among community members. Such rules are enshrined in religious and cultural beliefs (or taboos) and while these have no legal backing, the beliefs have been strong enough in the past to make people comply with them. Some of the cultural practices concerned relate to trees, forest, wildlife and farming systems. For example, in some traditional villages, Tuesday no work is done and Wednesday farming or going into the forest (Baka se) and creeks is forbidden. Moreover, the cultural tradition restricts hunting in certain seasons, also the cutting of young trees. There also strict prohibitions to enter, misbehave or have productive activities in certain forest areas (Price and Price, 2017). Rituals, libation and prayers at ancestor shrines are closely tight to nature resource management in each area of the Saamaka territory. However, these practices are being largely replaced in Christianized villages (Fig 5).

Traditional land tenure

The Saamaka territory is divided over twelve clans and each clan protects its own area from unauthorized and inappropriate exploitation. Each clan enforces management rules within its territory. The boundaries of clan territories were agreed between traditional leaders in the past and this knowledge has been transmitted through generations. Individuals from other Saamaka clans are allowed to hunt within other's clan territory as long as permission is asked to traditional authorities and only when it is done for their own consumption or other cultural or spiritual purpose. Villagers also need to request permission for collecting plants in the territories of other clans and such requests gets usually granted. Permission to harvest timber or for shifting cultivation is usually restricted to clan members and extended family or bëë. In addition, timber harvesting can only take place in designated areas. However, customary rules for harvesting timber are vanishing, especially downstream as forest areas overlap with roads and community forestry concessions. Furthermore, traditional authorities expressed during the interviews that more and more conflicts arise between villages because community members from one clan harvest resources in another clan without consulting or asking for permission.

Human capital

Human capital is another important asset providing traditional authorities with capacity to perform their task and fulfill their responsibilities. It is related, among other, with the education level, skills and the demographic factors (e.g. age) of themselves and their communities.

Education

From the 141 traditional authorities interviewed, 33% have not attended school, 33% have completed basic primary education, 16% completed an intermediary level situated between the end of basic primary education and the beginning secondary school (i.e. VOJ in the Surinamese system), 6% attended secondary school and 12% hold other type of education such training and courses to obtain technical skills. In the past, the most important for traditional authorities to be able to perform their task was to have customary knowledge about traditional rules, laws and practices. Nowadays, they acknowledge that western knowledge is crucial to be able to deal with pressing outside matters. This has put Saamaka authorities in disadvantage with outsiders and even with the youth of their own communities who have attended secondary school. This is because educated youth are losing credibility in the capacity of traditional authorities and believe they know better than captains do and *basjas* who have not attended school or that have a lower education degree.

Moreover, since there are no secondary education opportunities in the area, young people that want to continue with higher level of education (after basic primary school) need to move out of the area and go to Paramaribo, the country capital. Many of these young educated community members do not return to the area. Often, the youth that stays (i.e. that do not continue with secondary school) look for paid job opportunities mainly within the gold mining and logging sector. Drugs and alcohol abuse by Saamaka youth was one of the most mentioned challenges for interviewed traditional Saamaka authorities.

Skills

For traditional authorities having to be involved in administrative paper work, finances and legalities is a challenge of these modern times. More and more, traditional authorities struggle to have the skills and capacity to understand documents that need to be signed by them (e.g. agreements with the government or private logging companies). They also struggle to understand the implications that may have for them, for the villagers and for the forest, any signed agreement with outsiders. In addition, they often lack proper knowledge on finance administration, which they need nowadays that they receive income from renting out their community logging rights. The lack of appropriate skills puts them in disadvantage when they are dealing with outsiders and it is inciting poor credibility that villagers may have on the skills that traditional authorities have to deal with important matters.

Age

In terms of age, 44% of the traditional authorities interviewed are older than 60 years old, 40% are between 40 and 60 years and 16% between 20 and 40 years old. In the case of their





communities and according to census data from 2012, 13.4% are above 60 years old, 16.1% between 40 and 60 years, 18.5% between 20 and 40 years and lastly, 52% of the community members are below 20 years old (Table 3). The Saamaka authorities interviewed worry about the future generation of traditional leaders as many young people (>20 years old) either leave to Paramaribo or are more interested in earning money and have little interest in traditional affairs and community matters. However, not only the youth, the population between 20 and 50 are also more and more engaged in paid jobs outside their villages. This has become a bottleneck for traditional authorities because it is difficult nowadays for them to find [volunteer] support from the youth and adults to help the old people in the villages as well as support for other village matters. *Villagers do not have time anymore in this world, which is making it difficult for us to do our jobs well*, several traditional authorities commented.

Table 3 Population by age in the upper Suriname River area (Based on census data from 2012)

Population by age	Total	Male	Female	Percentag
Under 20 years	9,357	4,526	4,831	52%
20 – 30 years	1,526	380	1,146	8.5%
30 – 40 years	1,776	434	1,342	10%
40 – 50 years	1,707	382	1,325	9.5%
50 – 60 years	1,190	266	924	6.6%
Above 60 years	2,398	790	1,608	13.4%
TOTAL	17,954	6,778	11,176	100%

Financial capital

In this group are the financial (e.g. income, wealth or poverty) and infrastructure resources available to traditional authorities to perform their tasks. In terms of income, 47% of the authorities interviewed said that their villages have no source of income while 34% of the villages have⁷. Most of the village income in the latter case is generated from renting the space for internet antennas, from tourism and income from renting out forestry rights to logging companies. The amount of income is not high (on the contrary) and usually these funds are to be invested in, for example, village infrastructure improvements but some remain in a village fund that is used to finance village events. Lack of financial resources is a bottleneck for many traditional authorities, as they do not have the necessary resources to do their job. For example, often they struggle to find the money to buy gasoline for the boat so that they can move around their territories, attend meetings with the *Granman* and with other traditional authorities as well as to attend official meetings in the city. Funds are also needed to pay for some work in the village. Villagers are responsible to provide monetary contributions to a village fund but it is difficult to count with this contribution since most people use the little income they obtain to purchase western goods or services such as education expenses (boarding school etc), pay for transportation, clothing, among other [modern life] expenses.

⁷ There is no data for 19% of the responses

Furthermore, multidimensional poverty, indicated by the lack of access to sanitation, drinking water, electricity, among others (CEPAL, 2013) is a pressing issue for communities. In the Saamaka territory primary education is not optimal and the lack of secondary education in the interior forces young people to leave the area. There is no permanent electricity but power plants, which need gasoline, and often the government takes long time to send it so villages stay for weeks without power plant. There is not drinking water, no sanitation and health care is suboptimal. The lack of basic service has become a persistent bottleneck for traditional authorities because part of their responsibilities is to secure the wellbeing of their communities but in practice, they feel powerless to demand the government to fulfill these basic needs (although they have asked it many times). Their “inability” to get the villages proper basic services, is negatively affecting their credibility and trust.

In terms of infrastructure resources, in almost every village there is a meeting room (kuutu gangasa) however no always in optimal condition. In general, there is poor infrastructure for village activities and training. For example, when some funds become available women and youth centers begin to be built but often funds fall to short and these buildings remain unfinished. Traditional authorities also miss radio communication, computer, internet, telephone, printer and a literate secretary to assist traditional authorities with outside matters.





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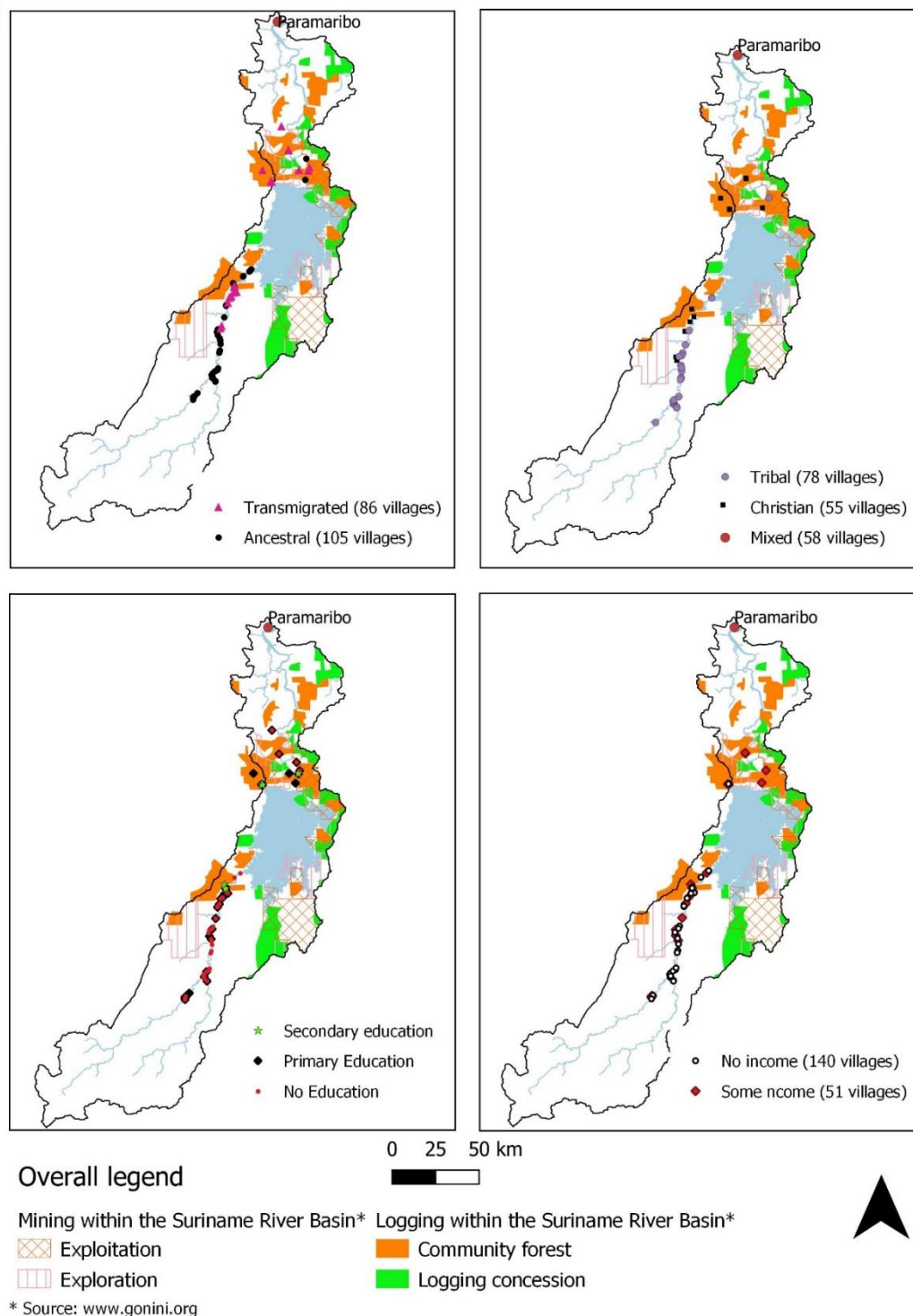


Figure 5 Spatial overview of the type of villages

Bottlenecks challenging the work of traditional authorities

Saamaka authorities identify a number of bottlenecks in their daily work. Some of these have been mentioned across this report. Other specific ones are listed here. Some bottlenecks are experienced by all traditional authorities interviewed but others are characteristic of certain sections of the basin. The latter are presented in table 4.

General issues

Official accreditation

Official accreditation of traditional authorities goes through a bureaucratic process that takes long, even years. There have been cases in which traditional authorities never get officially recognized. This has implications for the work of the authorities. Not only they do not receive their stipend but they also have not the official recognition they need to get enough credibility and respect among their villagers and government officials. Furthermore, by not having official accreditation they do not have their traditional authority uniforms, which make them outstand as authorities in official events. Having uniforms plays a role in the appropriation and motivation of their work, help influence recognition, and respect by the villagers and outsiders.

Poor cooperation between villagers

A bottleneck for traditional authorities is the lack of unity among community members and the lack of time and willingness to participate in communal matters. Villagers nowadays are more interested in making money and this is making them think and act individually rather than in community. Locals do not have same time to participate in *Krutus* as they had in the past. As a result, few people attend *krutus* unless it involves money-earning opportunities. In addition, in the past, villagers (e.g. the youth) would do voluntary job to help captain and *basjas* in their duties, for example with cleaning or with any other practical work. However nowadays, villagers are too busy with paid work to have spare time to help the village authorities except if there is a payment in return (which is also an issue because the funds available to the authorities is limited). This is making the practical tasks of the captain and *basjas* more difficult to achieve.

Neglect of the authority status

Money is determining the relationship with the captain. If villagers have money and material means, they do not always acknowledge the authority status of the captains because they feel they do not need any one to help them or tell them what to do. Similarly, there is neglect of authority by the youth. The young community members do not want to be ruled by anyone, they do not know traditional manners and rules and therefore many of them do not recognize the captainship role. Education level also plays a role. Young people that have attended secondary school for example feel they know better and look down at the skills and capacity of traditional authorities with less education.





Decline in trust

One major bottleneck is the decline in trust and respect towards the traditional authority. More than 70% of the traditional authorities interviewed perceived that the trust from their villages declined in the last 15 years. The education level of the authorities might be one reason among the [educated] youth but other reasons relate with the tools that traditional authorities have available to deal with modern problems and issues. Therefore, when a villager comes with a problem and the authorities cannot help them, the disappointment is increasing. Some of these problems related to lack of basic services in the village, unemployment, deterioration of natural resources, river pollution, among other.

Communication is another issue causing distrust. Channels to communicate with people (outside *krutus*) are not always effective and messages are distorted or do not arrive. This has become a source of misunderstanding and conflict between traditional authorities and villagers because the latter often feel they do not know what the captain is doing. Similarly, villagers are not always equally informed about the management of village income and this has awakened issues of distrust towards traditional authorities.

Moreover, a reason of decline of trust in traditional authorities has to do with outsiders breaking promises to help and the authority gets the blame. Lastly, traditional authorities interviewed also perceive that villagers (especially the elders) tend to distrust authorities who are relatively young as they are believed not to have the traditional knowledge that elder Saamaka authorities used to have.

Poor cooperation among authorities

There is also the generalized perception among the interviewees that traditional authorities along the watershed do not work any longer in unity but isolated and there is certain competition between them. For example in the past, traditional Saamaka authorities could join efforts to protect a piece of forest and water against certain threat but nowadays and since the appearance of community forest concessions, local authorities tend to work more individually. This has deteriorated cooperation, there is no an “unified voice” which is increasingly weakening credibility within and outside the community.

Loss of traditional knowledge

Another bottleneck in the exercise of traditional authorities is the loss of traditional Saamaka knowledge, know-how, skills and practices that have been developed, sustained and passed on from generation to generation within the community. These rules have been one important mechanism for traditional authorities to make villagers comply with social and cultural norms. However, more often, villagers no longer have time for rituals and traditions and many beliefs and taboos are neglected. For example, if a libation is needed, villagers do not find any more the time as people are busy finding money. Enforcement of traditional rules are also watering down, more and more villagers do not respect them as these may interfere with individual economic objectives. This is especially the case among the youth.

Another factor watering down tradition has been the attendance to high school. Traditionally the elders passed on wisdom and traditional knowledge to the youth by spending time together (the youth and the elderly). This is less the case because the youth move out to Paramaribo, the city capital, to attend higher education levels. Moreover, the outmigration of young Saamaka community members impairs the traditional practice of observation of the elders towards the youth. This practice (which usually takes the elders years of observation of community members from childhood to young adulthood) has been used for generations to see if a young community member has the appropriate behavior and qualities to be trained in traditional knowledge systems. Nowadays, if the observation takes place, it might be that the suitable candidates for the transfer of knowledge moves out to the city.

Lastly, internet is increasingly contributing to watering down traditional practices such customary communication processes among other. For example, important messages would be spread before official announcements by traditional authorities, which is considered inappropriate according to internal protocols. Chats and social media also distort messages and spread fake news. Overall, the misuse of technology, internet and social media among community members, is outpacing the capacity of traditional authorities to deal with this challenge.

Disempowerment of local authorities through top-down approaches

There are also communication bottlenecks with the government. Government have little knowledge of the local issues, procedures and protocols and therefore decisions are made in ways that conflict with traditional management. Similarly, there is a generalized feeling among traditional authorities that outsiders (i.e. government, private companies, NGO's) have a top-down approach in their interventions. For instance, decisions about the Saamaka territory are discussed and agreed in Paramaribo and informed to the communities in *krutus*. On the other hand, projects that get designed by outsider and merely presented to the authorities who have just to agree but have no participation in the formulation process. Moreover, the government place observers (*Bestuursopzichters* -BO's) in the villages and they act as they have more power than the traditional authorities do. There have been cases in which villagers even call these people first before reporting the *Basja* if there is a problem.

Differentiated bottlenecks

Interview responses showed that not all bottlenecks are the same across the basin but depending on the presence or absence of some economic forces, roads and land uses, the bottlenecks vary. For this reason, we classified responses into four groups based on the similarity they share in terms of bottlenecks (Table 4).

Group 1: Asigoon, Tapuripa, Wakibasú 1 and 2, Kadju, Balensula, Kaasikiiki (Klaaskreek), Marchallkreek, Nieuw koffiekamp, Njun Ganze (Nieuw Ganze), Njun Lombe (Nieuw Lombe), Compagniekreek, Boslanti, Deepada (Drepada), Makambi, Koinaköndë, Djankaköndë.





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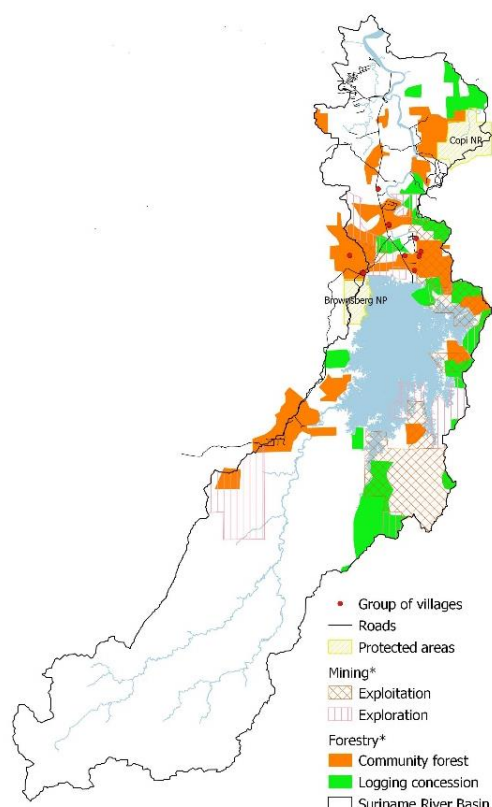
Group 2: Abenasitonu, Amakaköndë, Pambooko 1 and 2, Kapasikee, Gengesitonu, Gunsi, Baikutu, Jawjaw, Kaajapaati, Lesipaansi 1 and 2, Bekioköndë, Duwatra, Bannavooköndë, Pokigoon, Piki Pada, Biudumatu (Birudu).

Group 3: Bendikwai, Futunakaba, Gaantatai, Gujaba, Heikununu, Masia, Pada Lafanti, Botopasi, Tjaiköndë, Tutubuka (Nieuw Aurora), Kambulua, Dan, Piki Seei.

Group 4: Akisiamau, Godo, Asindopo, Dangogo 1 and 2, Daume, Bofokule, Begoon, Ligorio, Bendeköndë, Penpen, Semoisi, Kajana, Sitonuku, Bendiwata, Godowata, Deboo.

Table 4 Bottlenecks faced by traditional authorities in each section of the basin

Location	Main bottlenecks
	Mercury and cyanide pollution affects food and drinking water sources and there is poor government response about this issue
	Gold rush is changing attitudes and values in Saamaka youth (e.g. Young people do not engage in communal activities if there is no gold or money earning involved).
	Transmigrated villages have no further area to expand and for this reason there are persistent conflicts about borders
	Lack of hunting grounds (almost all forest around is a land use concession to private companies)
	No areas to expand traditional farming activities
	In the forest areas available for the communities, timber and non-timber forest products are almost completely degraded
	Conflicts between captains about access to gold resources
	Contested claims between traditional land tenure, gold mining and logging (e.g. some villages are located inside a mining concession)
	Poor communication with the government who often grant permission to extract resources (i.e.



* This information has been extracted from www.gonini.org in March 2021. It is here to provide an overview of the mining and forestry activities occurring inside the Suriname River Basin. For an accurate extent of these land uses beyond the basin borders, check www.gonini.org

timber, gold, sand) without properly informing traditional authorities and the communities

Government not respecting the law restricting economic land uses (i.e. logging and mining) within 5 km radius around villages

Insufficient tools, skills, knowledge and power to deal with powerful actors like gold mining , logging companies and the government

Lack of transparency of community forest concessions lessees regarding log harvested (and insufficient knowledge and skills in traditional authorities to deal with it)

Safety and corruption issues around gold mining and logging

The youth's abuse of drugs makes it a difficult group to handle

Location	Main bottlenecks
	There is increasing interest of community members in commercial logging as a main economic activity and less interest in earning income from traditional livelihoods. As a result villagers want to do logging everywhere and it is becoming more difficult to enforce traditional forest management rules
	Lack of transparency of community forest concessions lessees regarding log harvested (and insufficient knowledge and skills in traditional authorities to deal with it)
	Increasing conflicts between traditional authorities regarding overlapping logging activities in different villages territories
	Little means to enforce the 5km rule
	Internal and external corruption issues around logging concessions is exacerbating distrust and incredibility in traditional authorities in general both by locals and outsiders
	The villages closer to the lake are from the Brokopondo district (right in the border with

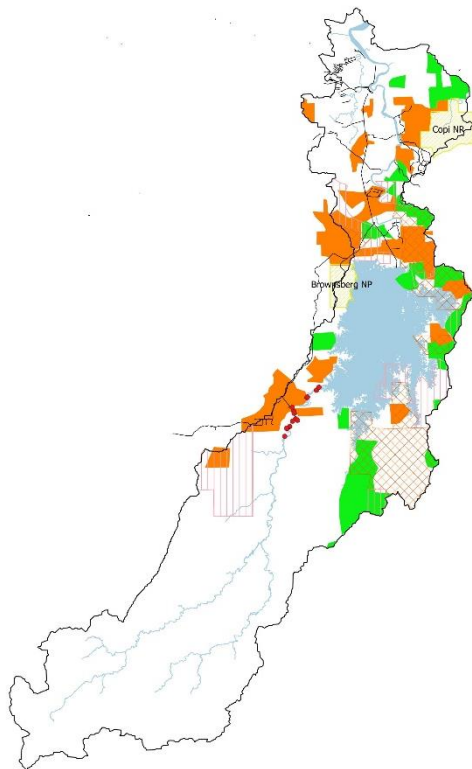




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Group 2



Sipaliwini district) but often the Brokopondo district government forget them and because they are no Sipaliwini district, these villager are left out of Sipalwini government interventions (these villages have no forest nor faming land)

The indifference of the youth in relation to traditions and village matters makes it difficult for traditional authorities to enforce rules and norms among them

Outmigration of young Saamaka members leave aged population without the capacity to grow food on their own which is creating

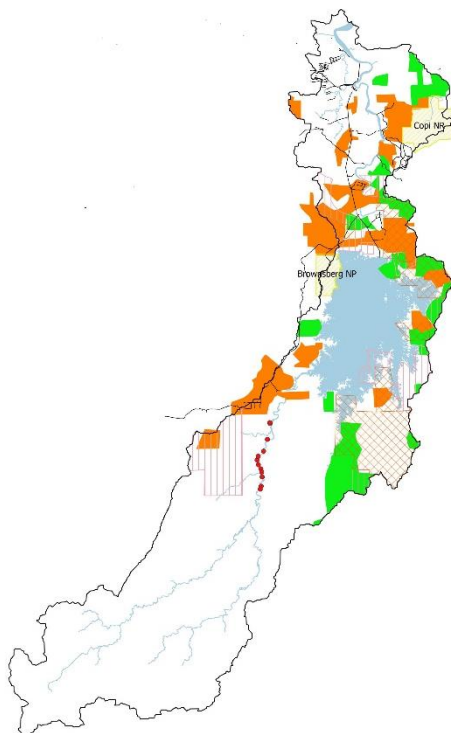
Poor recognition and respect by the government for traditional land use zoning and as a result, top-down land use allocation continues triggering internal conflict (e.g. between clans)

Degradation of forest and its resources due to overexploitation and increasing use of unsustainable practices

River pollution from garbage

Location

Group 3



Main bottlenecks

Pressure from the locals and outsiders to economically develop the area

Outsiders and locals working without permission in the forest (e.g. poaching, logging, fishing)

Indifference of the youth in relation to traditions and village matters

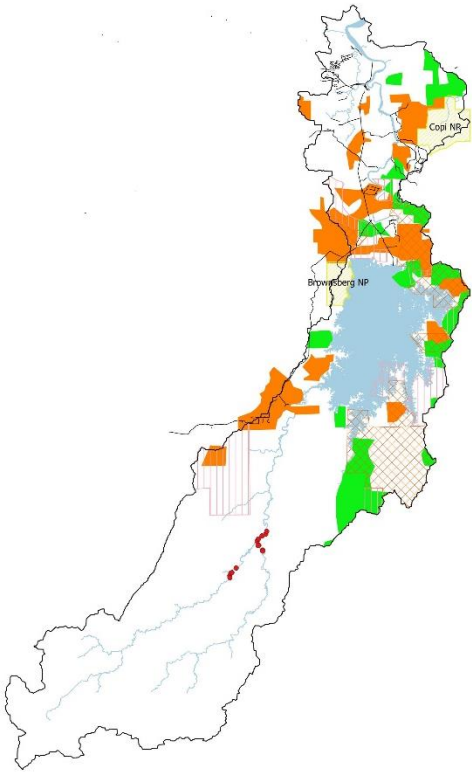
Increasing interest in western commodities pushes villagers into a monetary economy

Lack of economic income opportunities for the villagers pushes them into unsustainable natural resource use practices

Population growth (due to local migration from upstream) put pressure on land and resources and challenge the control on social issues

Weak compliance of traditional rules and disrespect for the decisions of traditional authorities, especially by the youth

River pollution from garbage

Location	Main bottlenecks
<p data-bbox="469 757 558 790">Group 4</p> 	<p data-bbox="810 611 1356 752">Poor presence of government and development organizations leave traditional authorities with little means and known how to solve problems and undertake development initiatives</p> <p data-bbox="810 761 1356 831">Important messages and news often do not reach the communities</p> <p data-bbox="810 840 1356 943">Unfulfilled promises from the government affects the villagers' trust and credibility in traditional authorities</p> <p data-bbox="810 952 1356 1055">When equipment is donated to the village, there is little to none training on how to use and benefit from the donation</p> <p data-bbox="810 1064 1356 1245">The village has many traditional sources of income, but there is none known-how to make money from them. This increases occupation of villagers in harmful activities or in jobs outside the village</p> <p data-bbox="810 1254 1356 1357">Changes in lifestyles to more westernize ways has increased disrespect for traditions and customary norms, especially by the youth</p> <p data-bbox="810 1366 1356 1435">The youth do not want to engage in community work unless there is money involved</p> <p data-bbox="810 1444 1356 1585">The passing away of elders who hold the traditional knowledge is leaving traditional authorities without the advisors on important matters</p> <p data-bbox="810 1594 1356 1736">Increasing conflict between villagers (and between clans) about rights to forest lands (this conflict has been exacerbated since the expansion of logging in the area)</p>





Conclusion and way forward

This report has synthesized the general features of the Saamaka traditional authority system and it has provided an overview of the major challenges and bottlenecks experienced by local authorities in their function. Having put on paper these concerns is the main value of this document according to traditional authorities interviewed. This is because they feel their voices are becoming weaker locally and national and as such, they have less capacity to pursue lasting solutions to critical challenges. Below, we compile some of the actions that, according to Saamaka leaders, could help enable an effective leadership response to pressing change.

Reinforce knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of traditional authorities

To begin, some traditional authorities acknowledged that often they do not know well what are their roles and responsibilities. Because these are not on paper, they ignore many of their tasks (especially the young authorities). Traditionally, the elders guide new traditional authorities but a point is being reached in which the elderly are less and less available or that authorities do not have the time to sit and learn from them. Hence, it is important to, on the one hand, write down the task descriptions (as it is being done in this document) and on the other hand, it is necessary to reactivate a process of peer to peer coaching (as there were in the past).

Develop western capacity in Saamaka traditional leaders

Further, traditional Saamaka authorities feel the need to have skills that allow them to peer with the outside world. First, they see the need to have the tools to record or take notes during meetings with outsiders so that they can register what is being said and agreed. They also feel the need to be able to communicate in the western way, through e-mails for example. Since literacy is an issue among most of traditional authorities, they suggested to have a *secretariat* with literate people who can assist them with computers, e-mails, letters, among other tasks (including information management, finance administration and paperwork).

They also would like to have technological skills, like for example GPS so that they can better monitor their land and have a more effective response capacity (usually they have to ask for help in Paramaribo when there are anomalies in their forest and it can take long before help arrives).

Generation of village funds

The lack of village funds is an important bottleneck for traditional authorities. Without the financial resources, traditional authorities do not have the resources to invest in social, cultural and environmental development of the villages. Moreover, they lack the means to help villagers in need, nor have they the income to cover transportation expenses and better possibilities to

pay for certain services. Therefore, they acknowledge the urgency to create opportunities for the villages to generate sustainable income so that they can have the financial capital to invest in prosperity (without having to wait on donations from outside). Some sustainable source of income can be generated through community enterprises. Couple with this, is the need to have in place a benefit sharing mechanism so that benefits from communal enterprises can, on one hand flow in a transparent way into the village fund and on the other hand, that some profit can be distributed fairly among the villagers. This would increase the trust that villagers have in traditional authorities (currently villagers tend to think that all traditional authorities get the money from projects).

Focal communication points and acknowledgement of protocols of contact

Internal and external communication is another important challenge or bottleneck for traditional authorities. It is common that communication is influenced by conflicts, so if the messenger has a conflict with the recipient of the message, this does not deliver it. As a result, not only messages do not flow appropriately but also these may get distorted (especially if internet and social media is used). Therefore, one suggestion from traditional authorities is to have several focal communication points (not only one per village) to avoid the distortion or the loss of messages.

Further, communication with outsiders is not easy due to the lack of understanding of communication procedures in both directions, outsiders communicating with the traditional authorities and these communicating with outsiders. In the case of outsiders communicating and approaching the Saamaka authorities and communities, traditional authorities highlight the need to have a code of communication in paper or a protocol of contact defined and known, so that outsiders can use it when making contact with the communities. This would help ease relationships and it would make collaboration more effective. Further, traditional authorities would like to receive training or are get better informed on the way they should approach outsiders so that local authorities are better heard.

Develop social, cultural and conservation leadership in the youth

The indifference of the Saamaka youth in community and traditional matters and their increasing interest in moneymaking has made the youth a difficult group to lead. This is exacerbated by the abuse of drugs and alcohol. Therefore, one important action is to develop alternatives that positively influence youth perspectives and that inspire a future generation of Saamaka leaders.

Strengthen social bonds

The lack of equal income opportunities in the villages has eroded community relationship, which has translated into poor cooperation, conflicts and competition. For this reason, traditional leaders believe that local social bonds could be strengthened by creating fair and sustainable income opportunities for the villagers, including the youth. Moreover, the interviewed leaders emphasized, again, the necessity to develop, (through different leisure and ludic programs) a sense of collectivity and cultivate a culture of cooperation in the younger Saamaka generations.





Develop capacity in community based organizations

Local community based organizations (CBO's) are seen as critical to support the work of Saamaka leaders, however, CBO's have little capacity and their work is intermittent as well as dependent on outsiders. To become strong and independent, local leaders encourage external NGO's (often the main partners of CBO's) to give CBO's the possibility to manage financial resources, prepare and present financial reports, coordinate implementation of the project and write project reports. These activities are usually done by the NGO's while strengthening their capacity. On the contrary, local organizations remain weak and reliant on external support. Alternatively, local leaders suggest NGO's to have more a monitoring and assistance role rather than a leading one.

Reinforce the transfer and use of traditional knowledge and practices among community members

Less and less people follow traditional practices and their respect for traditional knowledge has decreased. Since traditional knowledge and practices are crucial ways to sustainably manage the area, it is important to reawaken its use and belief. One way to do this is to connect both traditional and western knowledge systems. For example, according to Saamaka tradition, the strangler fig tree (*Ficus* sp.), locally known as *Katu* is sacred and therefore cutting it down is forbidden. Yet, locals do not believe in that tradition any longer. But if instead, a western language would be used highlighting the importance of the tree as keynote species and the different tangible benefits communities can get from their conservation; could help regain awareness of the importance of this tree.

Coupled with the reinforcement of traditional knowledge and its applications is the need to prevent that Saamaka youth leave to the city to continue education. A feasible alternative could be to design a distant learning system that requires Saamaka students to be semi-present (for a week or two) at school in the city capital and not permanently (usually Saamaka students attend the boarding school for local communities in the city which keeps them apart from their families and their traditions). Moreover, it is necessary to develop long lasting education programs that encourage children and youth to learn traditional arts and get formation on traditional knowledge, norms and customs.

Address land border disputes

Across the Saamaka territory, there are land border disputes that need to be addressed. These have to do with the scarcity of area to expand farming activities, fishing and hunting grounds. In the lower watershed, border disputes are triggered by the scarcity of land associated to the land tenure system imposed by the transmigration program. Land disputes are also triggered by conflicts with commercial logging and gold mining concessions. In the upper watershed there are increasing land disputes between clans due the traditional land tenure system (some clans have more some less forest area). The main reason for these disputes between clans is the increasing economic value of forest in the area. Addressing this requires that the commercial

land use allocation system imposed by the government is aligned with the traditional land use tenure system of the Saamaka communities.

Annex

List of villages that were part of this study

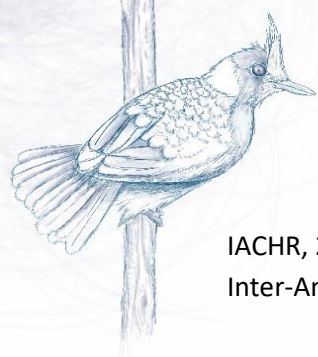
Abenasitonu (Abenaston), Akisiamau, Amakaköndë, Asigoon, Asindopo, Baikutu, Balensula (Balingsula), Bannavooköndë, Begoon, Bekioköndë, Bendeköndë Bendikwai, Bendiwata, Biudumatu (Birudu), Bofokule, Boslanti, Botopasi, Compagniekreek, , Djankaköndë, Duwatra, Futunakaba, Gaantatai, Gengesitonu, Godo, Godowata (Godowatra), Gujaba, Gunsi, Heikununu, Jawjaw

Kaajapaati, Kaasikiiki (Klaaskreek), Kadju, Kambulua, Kapasikee (Kapasikele), Koinaköndë, Lesipaansi (Lispaansi), Ligorio, Makambi, Marchallkreek, Masia, Nieuw koffiekamp, Njun Ganze (Nieuw Ganze), Njun Lombe (Nieuw Lombe), Pada Lafanti, Pambooko 1, Pambooko 2, Penpen, Piki Pada, Piki Seei, Pokigoon (Pokigron), Semoisi, Sitonuku (Stonuku), Tapuripa, Tjaiköndë, Tutubuka (Nieuw Aurora), Wakibas 1, Wakibas 2.

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