SUSTAINABLE VALUE CHAINS AND LIVELIHOODS PROJECT

One hundred and seventy two million hectares of the Brazilian Amazon—thirty four percent of the biome’s surface area in Brazil—are under protected status as multiple use conservation units or as indigenous lands. Multiple-use protected areas include Extractive Reserves, which are established by the Brazilian government to protect access to land and resources by traditional, forest-based communities. Indigenous lands are established under a constitutionally driven process of land-rights recognition. The traditional, often geographically isolated communities that occupy these areas depend on fishing, extraction of non-timber forest products, and manioc cultivation for income, as well as on family agriculture, hunting, and gathering for subsistence use. These protected areas are the main source of high-value, internationally traded products such as Brazil nuts, açai fruit, and pirarucu fish, which sustain not only the producer communities, but also processing industries in Amazonian cities and retailers in southern Brazil. As such, they now represent the Brazilian Amazon’s best chance for a sustainable, forest-based economy.

With support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is partnering with the Chico Mendes Biodiversity Institute (ICMBio) and the National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI) to improve production practices and technologies for community-produced timber, Brazil nuts, açai fruit, and pirarucu fish; to foster fair, transparent sales contracts; and to explore new or niche markets that can provide higher values and stable contracts to producers and to the organizations that represent them. The project prioritizes building capacity of community, association, and cooperative leaders for effective governance and financial management. To ensure the success of this five-year program, USFS relies on the advice of USFS experts, US and Brazilian academic partners experienced in community-based work and sustainability, and Brazilian non-governmental organizations with a strong track-record in the support of community production and institutional strengthening.

ICMBio and FUNAI have prioritized a subset of conservation units and indigenous lands for direct support by the project. Communities in these areas receive training in association and cooperative management, including social governance, legal responsibilities, and financial management, as well as technical training in best production practices to meet legal harvest restrictions and food safety requirements. Partner organizations help identify reliable companies interested in purchasing the products and stand by the associations and cooperatives as they negotiate contracts. Productive activities on indigenous lands are organized differently than on multiple use conservation units, and serve a distinct socioeconomic purpose. Most indigenous communities engage in market economies to some extent, but all maintain subsistence-based livelihoods guided by cosmological and spiritual bonds to the environment. USFS respects this cultural perspective and relies on guidance from FUNAI in the selection of communities and practices supported by the project.

The project is unique relative to other community-based forest production projects in that it (1) successfully integrates indigenous and non-indigenous participants and ICMBio and FUNAI staff in strategic planning and implementation, and (2) focuses on all links of the value chain and rather than just the production level. These integrative approaches were deliberatively pursued from the start of the project, when three multi-stakeholder strategic planning workshops were implemented to diagnose challenges to equitable value chains and to propose participatory, consensus-based approaches to resolve these challenges.