

Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Livelihoods in Guyana: an overview of experiences and potential opportunities

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Front cover: Rotational farming underpins indigenous ways of life, subsistence economies and food security in most Amerindian communities in the hinterland of Guyana. Background: Cassava field. Foreground: Grating of cassava roots as the first stage for processing food and drink.

Photographer: Tom Griffiths

Back cover: Alongside farming, Amerindian livelihoods and identity are grounded in far-reaching systems of land use and customary tenure spread across extensive territories, large areas of which remain the subject of outstanding land rights issues. Photo: Ayangaik Mountain and surrounding forest in the Upper Mazaruni (Region 7), which is part of the area where the Akawaio and Arekuna peoples are seeking legal recognition of the full extent of their ownership rights in a case pending before the High Court in Georgetown.

Photographer: Adrian Warren/www.lastrefuge.co.uk

Summary

This briefing summarises key findings of a rapid survey of recent experiences with income-generation initiatives among indigenous peoples in Guyana, including a review of possible alternatives to mining. The review finds positive experiences with community enterprises, including farm-based cottage industries supplying local markets and community tourism ventures that provide useful examples of job creation and income generation.

Securing sustainable local benefits from livelihood ‘alternatives’ proposed under new national climate protection and forest conservation schemes will require legal and policy measures (still lacking in June 2010) up-front to recognise and respect indigenous peoples’ land and resource rights, protect traditional livelihood practices coupled with robust frameworks for free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), good faith negotiation and local benefit sharing.

The study concludes that there is no single economic solution for creating sustainable jobs and income in indigenous areas: the most likely viable option for Amerindian communities is to develop a diverse set of enterprise activities based on farming, tourism, crafts and community-based natural resource management. Among other actions, initiatives must respect the right to FPIC, include measures to secure land rights, address market barriers, ensure strong institutions, build on local skills and resources, and support Amerindian visions for development in order to increase the likelihood of achieving sustainable outcomes.

The final part of the briefing contains a series of recommendations for follow-up by development agencies and others seeking to support sustainable livelihoods in indigenous communities in Guyana.



TOM GRIFFITHS

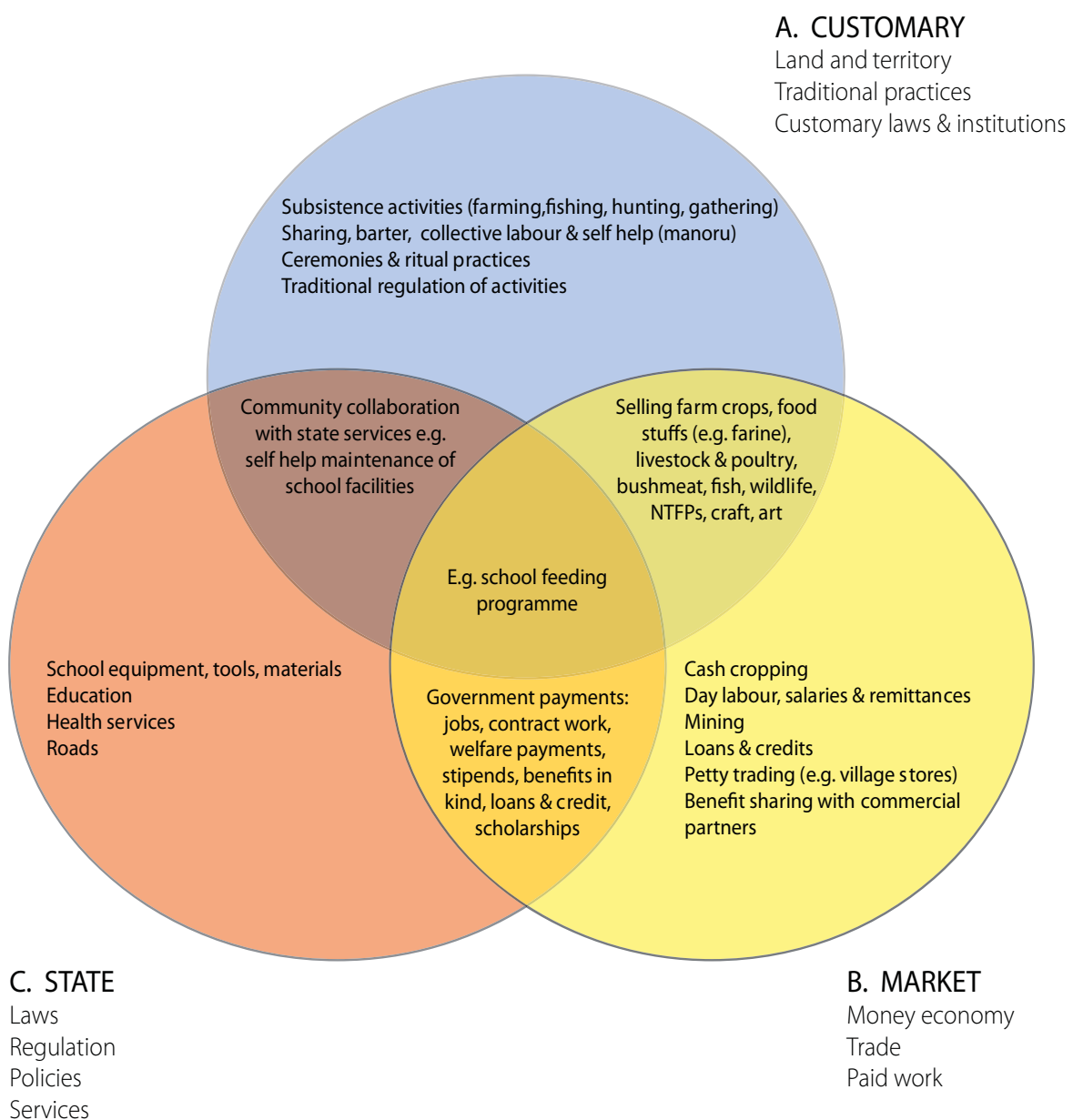
Farm-based cottage industries in Amerindian communities in Region 9 supply snacks to school pupils under a government-funded school feeding programme. This initiative has created a local market demand for farm crops and provided part-time jobs and income for women and community farming groups.

I Background

From 2000 to 2002, the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA), Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) and the North South Institute (NSI) carried out a participatory study on Amerindians and mining in Guyana.¹ Communities and Amerindian miners then asked APA and FPP to do further research on ways of generating incomes, including alternatives to working in mining.

This briefing is a condensed report of some of the key findings of follow-up participatory research carried out in Regions 1,2,7,8 and 9 during 2008-9.²

Figure 1: The indigenous mixed economy (adapted from Altman 2006)³



II How Amerindians make a living

Mixed livelihoods

These days, most Amerindians in Guyana have mixed livelihoods involving subsistence and cash-earning activities (Figure 1), though levels of integration and dependence on the market varies within and between communities and regions.

Customary systems of rotational farming coupled with hunting, fishing and gathering support food security and form the core of traditional ways of life among the Arawak, Carib, Wapichan, Makushi, Patamona, Akawaio, Arekuna, Warau and Wai Wai peoples. As well as providing the staple crop, bitter cassava, ground provisions, fruits and other foods, traditional multi-cropping supplies families with cultivated spices, fibres, dyes, medicines and ritual crops like tobacco. In addition to providing vital crops, traditional farming grounds are an important cultural space for transmission of ancestral knowledge and skills. Subsistence farming, hunting, fishing and gathering activities in the hinterland are often underpinned by extensive tenure and customary land use systems along with traditions of sharing, reciprocity and self-help work parties that support indigenous food and livelihood security.⁴

Money income stems from private family and community enterprises, employment with the non-Amerindian private sector, as well as jobs and economic activities directly or indirectly funded by government agencies. On average only 1 to 10% of households in Amerindian communities have members with full-time salaried jobs (teachers, health workers, etc.). In most cases, 'you have to be an all-rounder' to make a living, by working in a range of subsistence and cash-earning activities, including sales of raw and processed food crops, livestock and fish, forest products and crafts; petty trading; and occasional work as labourers, drivers, boatmen, tourist guides and NGO project workers (Tables A–G).



SCPDA

Farine (toasted cassava) is important in food security and subsistence. Surpluses are sometimes sold to local markets in villages and local towns.

Rising costs of living

Community members report that the income from selling produce and labour is generally not keeping pace with the cost of fuel and other imports, and it is getting harder to pay for education and household necessities. In many areas, the lack of job opportunities obliges men to migrate to mining or logging camps within Guyana or in Brazil and Venezuela to find paid work, while women often migrate to towns and cities to find work in domestic service. Amerindian miners stress that despite health and other risks, they do mining work as no other jobs are available and the activity can sometimes offer opportunities to ‘earn fast’²⁶ (see Table F).

Damage to lands and subsistence resources caused by mining and logging interests has pushed people to depend more on store-bought foods. As people move away in search of work, they leave fewer people and less time for subsistence activities, so there is less food sharing and reduced food security. In some areas, like the NW District, some families now have to pay for farm help. Changes in family priorities and dietary tastes, the desire for consumer goods and the prestige of having more money also play a role in increasing demands for cash incomes.

Box 1: Amerindian lands ‘squeezed’⁶

- large-, medium- and small-scale mining concessions and exploration permits are superimposed on traditional lands in Regions 1, 2, 7, 8, 9 and 10
- communities complain that the reckless methods used by miners and loggers have caused resource scarcity, ill-health (e.g. malaria) and violation of individual and collective rights
- paved highways are planned between Guyana and Brazil (Bonfim–Lethem–Linden–Georgetown road) and Guyana and Venezuela (Ciudad Guayana–Georgetown Road) – under the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA)⁷
- new low-carbon development proposals include plans for roads, large dams and ‘high-end’ industrial agriculture, which risk undermining indigenous livelihood systems, fragmenting Amerindian territories and opening up traditional lands to large-scale development⁸



Livelihoods threatened

Some Amerindian leaders are concerned that their traditional lands are increasingly being occupied by mining and logging interests and are under pressure from top-down infrastructure projects that threaten to undermine livelihoods and increase poverty (Box 1).⁹ The situation is made worse by insecure Amerindian land and territorial rights in many areas, including communities in Regions 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9 – with many communities still awaiting fair resolution of territorial claims and satisfactory attention to requests for land title extension.

Some communities and many minor settlements and homesteads have no title at all while Amerindian hunting and fishing grounds, vital for secure livelihoods, often remain without legal land title.

Communities that participated in this research also point out that national development and livelihood programmes fail to understand indigenous land and resource use. They note that inappropriate and imposed models of development can themselves undermine indigenous livelihood systems.

‘There is still an underlying prejudice against shifting cultivation . . . [at the same time] government agencies still hold the outdated view that Amerindians ‘do not use the land’ if it is not cultivated. These agencies are unable to ‘see’ non-agricultural land and resource use . . .

‘Some donors do not understand Amerindian culture and economy, and are likely to make interventions without any prior diagnosis . . . so what is done is superficial and does not make a difference, or can even cause conflicts. This is especially the case where projects employ consultants from the coastal region – where people have little respect for traditional or local knowledge.’

Community member, Santa Rosa village, 2009

Amerindian livelihoods, lands, forests and waters are under pressure from expansion from small-, medium- and large-scale mining operations across Guyana.



Amerindian visions of development

Amerindian leaders that took part in this study explain that they want vibrant communities supported by secure land and territorial rights that protect their customary economies and diverse and extensive land-use systems.¹⁰ They point out that economic initiatives in their communities need to value and build on the richness of indigenous food and farming systems and protect Amerindian ways of life, including rotational farming, hunting, fishing and gathering. They caution against top-down development assistance that seeks to change or ‘transform’ indigenous customary economies.¹¹

Under their vision of progress, ‘development’ goes beyond improving incomes and living conditions: it is also about maintaining an intact and healthy territory, increasing social unity, food security and self-sufficiency, improving local skills, health and education, better access to information and strengthening Amerindian identity.¹² All leaders interviewed stress the need to provide local employment for young people to halt their drift away from the communities. Secure rights to lands and territories are central to indigenous concepts of well-being and security.

‘We depend on our traditional lands to obtain almost everything we need for craftwork and construction. Here we find our housing materials, clay to make pots, and weaving fibres. Most of us go to the bush to collect these materials. We do not have to spend money on these things. That is why we love our land.’

Wapichan elder, Baitoon, 2005

Box 2: Economic and market barriers

- high transport costs in the hinterland (especially for heavy goods)
- low productivity and high labour inputs
- quality control difficulties: foods, drinks and crafts
- high storage and preservation costs
- complex legal requirements and paperwork (live trade and live exports)
- competition with cheap imported goods
- lack of information on prices/markets
- poor marketing
- weak or absent prior feasibility studies
- poor packaging and weak branding (e.g. indigenous cosmetics and medicines)
- limited bank and credit services in the interior
- migration of skilled people and professionals (brain drain)
- weak financial and business management skills
- conflicts with outsiders over rights to land and resources on untitled lands (e.g. miners, loggers)
- insecure legal title and property rights (over untitled traditional lands and customary resources)

III Experiences with income-generation initiatives

In an effort to keep people in the community, create jobs and income, and find alternatives to harmful activities like mining, some Amerindian communities in different regions of Guyana are already involved in various income-generating community-based enterprises based on farming, forestry, craft and tourism. The North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDDB) and some villages in the NW District are also experimenting with benefit-sharing agreements with conservation organisations and private companies. Tables A to G summarise experiences and lessons stemming from some of these activities.

One key finding is that livelihood initiatives can often struggle to make a reasonable income due to limited market demand and high costs for fuel and transport in the hinterland, among other barriers (Box 2). Communities note that promising initiatives have often faltered due to a lack of marketing support and absence of prior feasibility studies. Expectations have been raised, but have been dashed when project and donor finance stop and technical and market difficulties have caused initiatives to fail.

‘Iwokrama did the training part of the project, but did not do enough to help the beekeepers to secure a market for their honey. If the project was to start all over again, it would be essential to get the marketing right and prepare the community much better.’¹³

Others point out that economic projects in Amerindian areas often fail when they have been devised by outsiders or ‘transplanted’ from other regions without ensuring community inputs, commitment and ownership over the initiative.

‘Development must be based on the wishes of the people. Just bringing ideas from outsiders won’t work. Government agencies, NGOs and donors need to interact directly with the people so we can manage our own affairs – we have shown that we can do it, but let us make mistakes! Let us look at community proposals and see what can work.’¹⁴

Crabwood oil and soap, and agroforestry products (neem oil, neem cream, coconut oil soap) are being developed by women in the Makushi Research Unit under The Bina Hill Institute in Region 9. This initiative is still at the pilot stages and seeks to supply local markets and tourist outlets.



Table A

Farming and agroforestry



TOM GRIFFITHS

Cassava is a staple crop central to indigenous farming systems and is used to make a variety of drinks and foods including beer, wine, bread, farine (toasted granules), starch and cassareep (sauce/seasoning). Some indigenous peoples use traditional plants (pictured) to aid fermentation of cassava for making 'parakari' drinks.

Income-earning activities

- sale of surplus subsistence crops and local foods e.g. cassava, cassava bread, farine, ground provisions, fruits (widespread)
- small-scale rearing of livestock for subsistence with trade in surplus: chicken and pork (widespread) and beef (Region 9)
- cash cropping e.g. peanuts, rice (Region 9) and pines (Region 2)
- community-based cottage industries e.g. peanut butter factories supplying school feeding programme (Region 9) and making of cocoa sticks (Region 1)¹⁵

Experiences and lessons

- well planned, community-based farming enterprises can generate useful incomes as well as social benefits, e.g. peanut butter cottage industries and the school feeding programme in Regions 9 have generated part-time employment and improved nutrition among school children¹⁶
- women have demonstrated good skills in financial management and have been a key part of successful business ventures
- replicating a farming project in another community won't work unless the social, economic and environmental conditions are right (e.g. people must have 'ownership' over the initiative)

Success factors

- build on existing crops, local farming knowledge and skills
- process crops to add value
- good technical support and training
- strong demand, including local markets and state-sponsored markets (supplying schools, etc.)
- good business planning, bookkeeping and reinvestment of profits
- meet local needs/involving all sectors of the community, including youth, women and elders
- long-term support from committed bilingual Amerindian/local coordinators
- all elements for sustainability in place (see Boxes 3, 4 and 5)

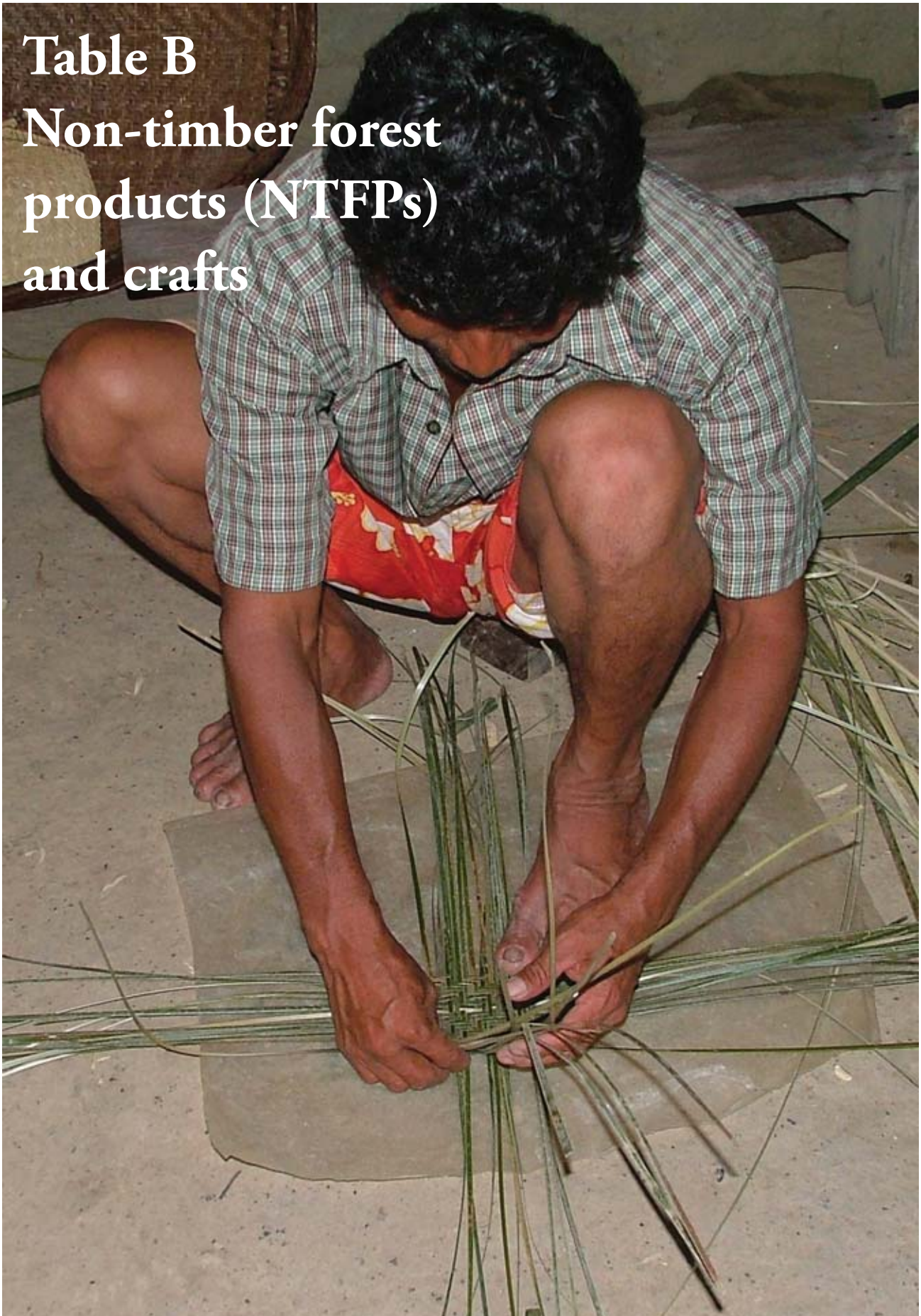
Challenges

- insecure tenure over some farming grounds (e.g. in Regions 7, 8 and 9)
- climate change/El Niño
- low prices and price swings for raw crops
- competition from cheaper imports
- high transport, fuel and freight costs
- labour intensive and low productivity
- high costs for organic certification
- difficulties with quality control e.g. casareep
- difficulties supplying large orders due to limited production capacity (requires forward planning, investment, technical back up and solid organisation)
- widespread transnational and local rustling hamper development of cattle businesses (Region 9)¹⁷
- cash cropping without adequate fallow periods can degrade forests and soils (requires ample land base and reserve bush)

Opportunities

Many Amerindian communities see their farming skills, the diversity of traditional crops and knowledge as a cornerstone for sustainable self-determined development¹⁸ (see Recommendations)

Table B Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and crafts



TOM GRIFFITHS

Bush plants and animal parts are used for a range of foods, drinks and medicines as well as providing materials for Amerindian crafts.

Income-earning activities

- extraction and petty trade in bush foods and medicines, including heart of palm, wild cashews, honey and crabwood oil¹⁹
- extraction and trade in craft materials including nibi, kufa and mokru²⁰
- sale of finished crafts, including kufa furniture, balata figurines, tibisiri mats and containers and woven items (sifters, cassava presses, baskets, embroidery and traditional jewellery), leatherwork (Region 9)

Experiences and lessons

- incomes are modest and seasonal, unless backed by value-added processing and robust marketing
- risk to producers increases with market distance²¹
- past initiatives have often faltered due to market barriers (Box 2) and weak marketing e.g. production of honey and crab oil
- full-time work to produce high-quality crafts can generate reasonable returns if backed by effective marketing (e.g. family balata craft businesses in Nappi Village), while part-time commercial work may generate modest supplementary incomes (note: full-time work raises sustainability questions)
- over-harvesting of the heart of the manicole palm for trade has reduced the number of these palm trees in the NW District

Success factors

- sustainable harvest methods under customary laws and/or scientific guidelines
- value added to NTFPs by processing
- good quality control
- good marketing back-up

Challenges

- lack of legal title over gathering grounds on traditional lands
- adequate legal protections for traditional knowledge and innovations do not exist (e.g. risk of bio-piracy)
- labour-intensive extraction and poor processing
- risk of exploitation (profit capture) by outsiders
- quality control difficulties
- changeable markets and seasonal price swings²²
- weak market demand
- high transport costs and distance from markets
- ineffective branding
- competition from cheap imports e.g. honey
- poor business design and management e.g. disregarding community priorities and social/labour organisation
- over-harvesting or destructive extraction methods can harm useful forest resources e.g. nibi vines
- damage to vines and other resources by industrial loggers

Opportunities

- indigenous peoples possess in-depth knowledge of traditional medicines, foods and fibres that may have commercial potential
- community-based research and pilot initiatives to develop, market and trade 'new' NTFPs harnessing traditional knowledge (but effective protections for traditional knowledge must first be put in place, and feasibility studies and robust market development are essential)
- use of community-based internet marketing (with adequate investment, training and technical back-up)

Table C Wildlife harvesting



TOM GRIFFITHS

A significant number of Amerindians in the interior are engaged in part-time trapping of reptiles, parrots, and songbirds like the Towa Towa bird (*Oryzoborus angolensis*), pictured. However, incomes are normally modest and profits are often captured by middlemen.

Income-earning activities

- fishing and sale of dried and salted fish (widespread)
- trapping and sale of live song birds, parrots, reptiles, spiders, etc. (widespread)
- bush meat sales (widespread, but localised and small-scale)
- collection of ornamental fish (localised)
- harvest of live orchids (NW District)

Experiences and lessons

- trapping wildlife is labour intensive and only yields modest monetary returns (the traders make the profits)²³
- management plans, a three-year moratorium and quotas on arapaima harvests agreed by Makushi fishermen in the North Rupununi have helped raise numbers and early harvests have been successful
- weak marketing of arapaima means that potential increased benefits have not yet been realised
- an NRDDDB-Iwokrama pilot project using the Catch per Unit Effort (CPUE) method has proven that wild ornamental fish can be harvested sustainably and fish sales have the potential to generate significant income

Success factors

- sustainable harvesting rules are agreed collectively
- technical back-up for safe transport of live specimens
- good legal and administrative support (licences and other paperwork)

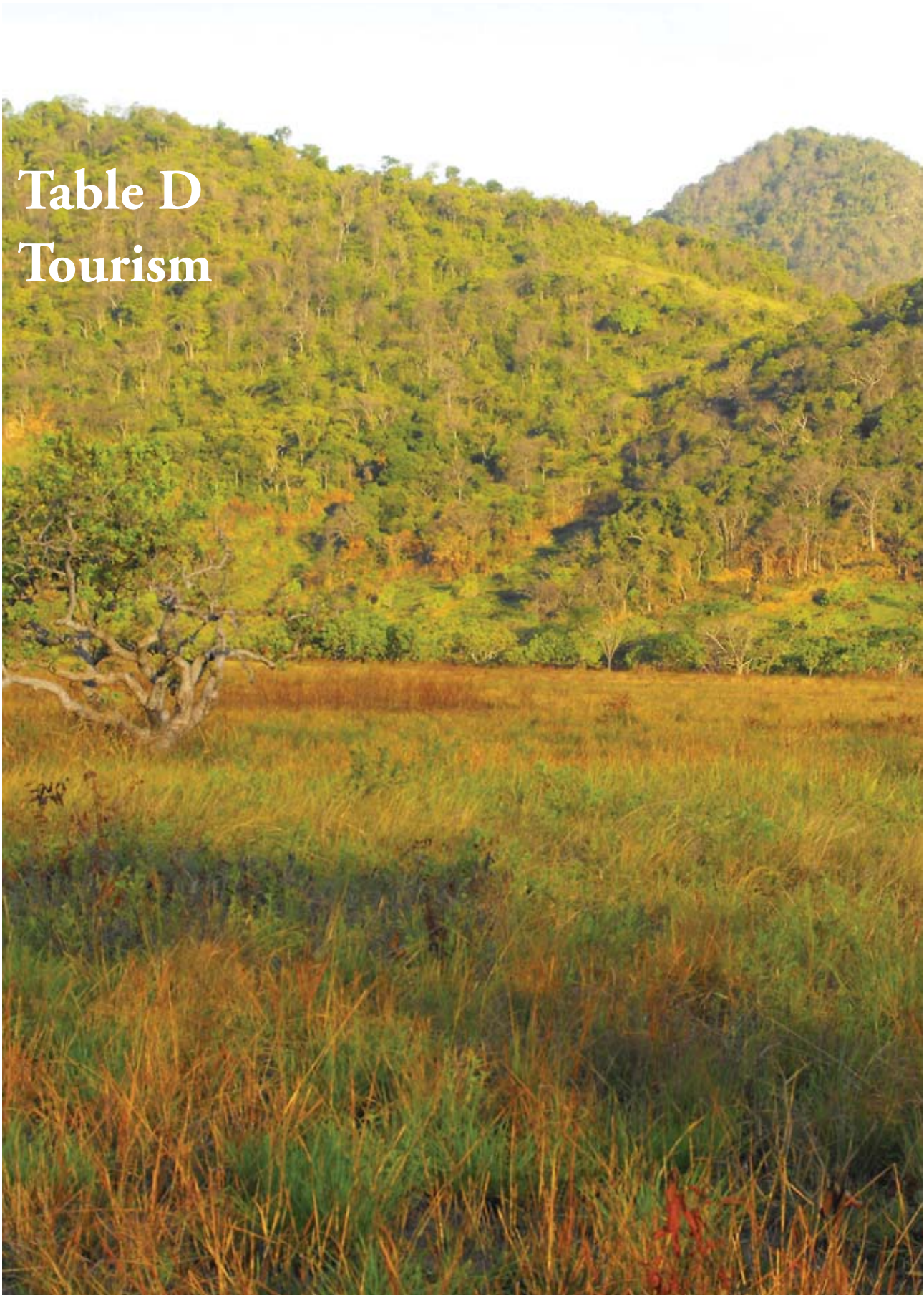
Challenges

- lack of legal title over waters and wildlife habitats can hamper effective community management
- mining and logging are harming fishing grounds and wildlife habitats in many areas due to pollution of waterways, deforestation and disturbance of wildlife, e.g. noise of machinery
- more mouths to feed with influx of miners and loggers
- poaching and illegal wildlife trade causes a local decline in some species e.g. Brazilian poachers equipped with jeeps and guns (Region 9)
- introduced fishing and hunting methods can damage the resource base e.g. use of seine nets, etc.
- loss of traditional systems of managing wildlife in some communities (people becoming careless)
- lack of scientific information on the abundance and ecology of specific species
- ornamental catfish tend to have long life cycles and relatively low spawning rates
- high transport and administrative costs
- trade in wildlife can come with a lot of red tape
- safe transport of live animals needs a large amount of planning and logistical/technical support
- CITES trade and export quotas are limited for many plant and animal species
- climate change

Opportunities

- some potentially commercial species like the black caiman are today locally abundant on Amerindian lands (special CITES measures required) e.g. South Rupununi
- proven sustainable harvest techniques already exist for parrots, orchids, etc. Interested communities could be trained in sustainable management methods
- communities have customary laws on careful resource use and are developing village rules and territorial management plans for the conservation and sustainable use of wildlife, e.g. Region 9

Table D Tourism



TOM GRIFFITHS

The traditional lands of indigenous peoples feature stunning landscapes with potential for tourism, but developing sustainable community tourism can pose many challenges for Amerindian communities.

Income-earning activities

- community tourism, with emphasis on wildlife and adventure tourism (localised over last 10–20 years)
- work as tourist guides, cooks, drivers etc. for non-Amerindian and/community enterprises (localised)
- sale of crafts, traditional food and other goods to tourists

Experiences and lessons

- tourism businesses owned and run by communities and based on secure property rights, solid organisation and training with good marketing can draw significant visitor numbers and create worthwhile part-time jobs and income after several years of investment and effort e.g. Surama Village Tourism enterprise
- package tours to a network of communities are still being developed by some Amerindian villages, but with only modest benefits so far²⁴ (e.g. North Rupununi)
- work as guides, cooks, cleaners, boatmen etc. for non-Amerindian businesses can provide modest incomes and local employment (e.g. Iwokrama), but communities prefer to own and control their own lands and tourism ventures
- not all Amerindian communities want to commercialise their cultural practices or 'sell' hospitality²⁵
- experience in other countries shows that marketing by indigenous organisations can help attract visitors and improve revenues, e.g. the Mexican Indigenous Tourism Network (RITA)
- tourism is better seen as just one of several activities to help generate income and create jobs

Success factors

- secure land and territorial rights (sound legal basis to set rules, negotiate contracts and make agreements etc.)²⁶
- benefit sharing within and between communities
- communities agree mandate and rules for the business
- good marketing and links with tourism networks
- good training to ensure provision of quality service
- good leadership, long-term planning and commitment
- inclusion of social and cultural aims (e.g. revival of traditional knowledge) as well as economic objectives
- joint ventures with outside tourist interests are based on good faith negotiation and flexible agreements

Challenges

- lack of legal title over traditional lands (often containing sites of major interest to tourists)
- national development policies based on agribusiness, logging and medium- to large-scale mining can harm the tourist trade
- high transport costs limit tourist numbers
- negative social, environmental and cultural impacts of tourism
- over-optimistic income projections can raise high expectations that cannot be met
- disagreements over revenue sharing (can cause conflicts)
- so far mostly dependent on *ad hoc* grants/NGO support
- violation of cultural heritage sites by visitors and others, e.g. damage to petroglyphs by extractive workers

Opportunities

- outstanding tourist attractions are found on traditional lands of Amerindian peoples (wildlife, diversity of landscapes, and cultural activities)
- sustainable community-based tourism can rejuvenate traditional knowledge/skills (local foods, crafts, story telling etc.) and stimulate local market demand

Table E Community-based timber harvesting



TOM GRIFFITHS

Spin-off activities from small-scale sustainable timber harvesting, such as the sale of roof shingles, can boost incomes.

Income-earning activities

- small-scale harvest and sale of lumber
- community-owned forestry ventures selling to local markets (localised and limited) e.g. Makushi Yemkong Forest Management Inc (MYFMI)
- local joinery workshops and small-scale furniture making e.g. Surama Village

Experiences and lessons

- community-based timber ventures have potential to generate income, but high levels of start-up capital and training are needed causing long delays in turning a profit e.g. Makushi Forestry Enterprise
- village leaders highlight the need for higher-level forestry training to reduce dependency on outside professionals and consultants
- not all Amerindian communities wish to sell lumber or sawn timber and some already have Village Rules restricting lumber use to community construction projects and subsistence work e.g. some villages in the South Rupununi

Success factors

- social objectives are central to the enterprise (e.g. secure communal land rights, food security and protecting traditional resources) and are as important as economic goals
- integrated *multiple use* approach to forest management (e.g. lessons from community-based forestry in Mexico)²⁷
- collectively agreed community rules and effective community monitoring and enforcement of local plans
- process into furniture, boats and other items to add value

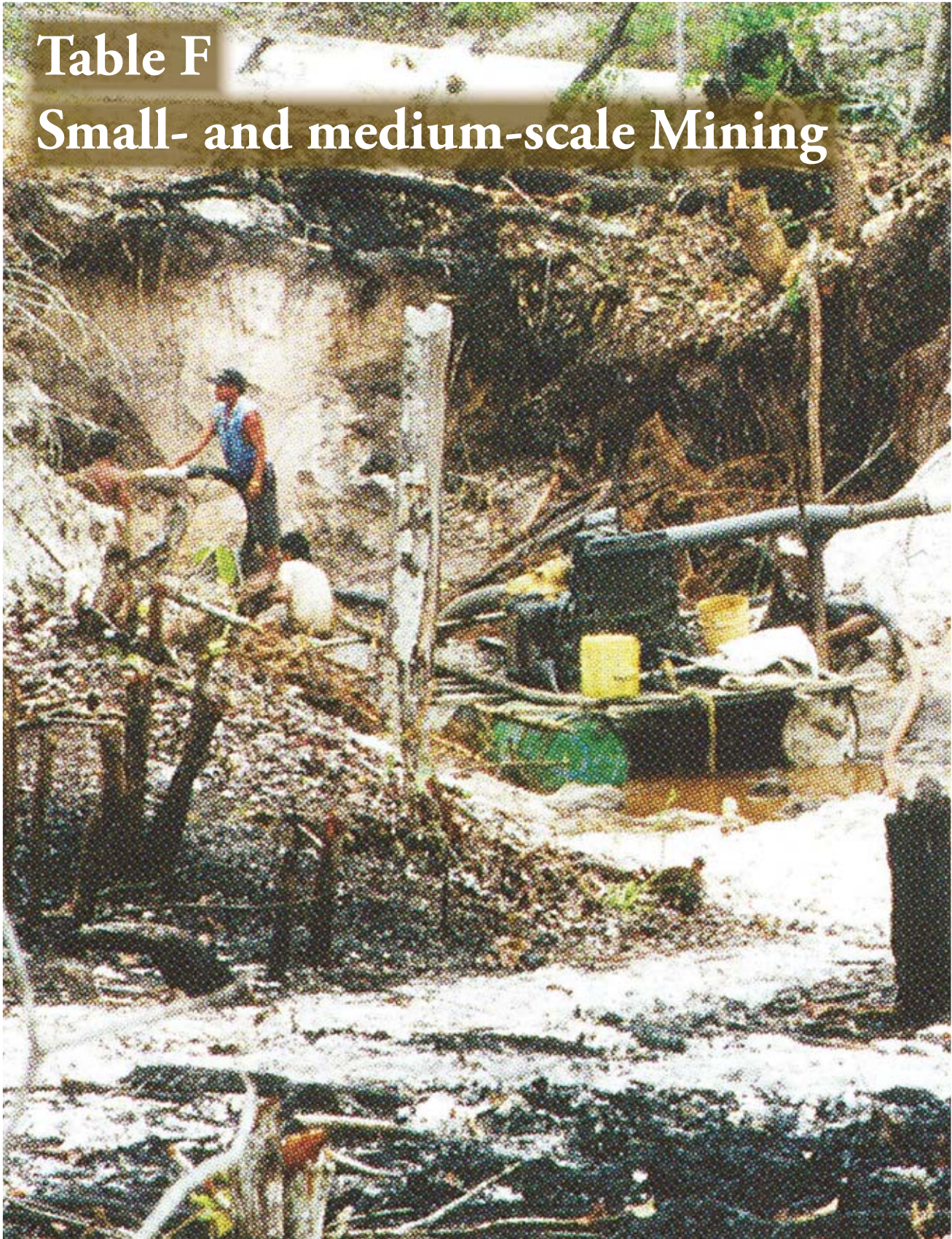
Challenges

- a narrow focus on lumber extraction in forest management can undermine other livelihood/cultural values and cause internal conflicts
- potential damage to community non-timber resources, e.g. contamination of creeks and fishing grounds
- heavy start-up costs and very high transport costs
- international timber certification is costly and may create dependence on trained foresters
- difficulties in obtaining necessary permits and licences
- forest management plans are costly and technical
- export licenses can be costly and onerous
- much training and investment (inventories) are required before a business can turn in a profit
- in many areas (outside Region 9) significant time is needed to re-stock community forests that are already logged-out of commercial species

Opportunities

- training in tree spotting, geographical positioning system (GPS) mapping, and reduced impact logging (RIL) methods is available through the Guyana Forestry Commission's Forestry Training Centre
- local forest management standards for low-impact logging may satisfy national markets²⁸
- local small-scale timber processing to make furniture and other 'spin-off' products for local markets²⁹

Table F Small- and medium-scale Mining



UPPER MAZARUNI AMERINDIAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Amerindians engaged in mining explain that mining work is often the only option available to them for earning a reasonable income. Some communities are adopting rules to prohibit all mining on their lands apart from traditional artisanal mining; others (e.g. in Region 7) are seeking support to adopt low-impact mining methods.

Income-earning activities

- traditional artisanal mining (bucket, sifter and panning without chemicals (widespread))
- work on land dredges and pit mining (ventures normally owned by non-Amerindian interests)
- community-owned land dredges (localised in Region 7)

Experiences and lessons

- large-scale mining, as well as medium-scale mining with dredges, and pit mining is causing serious damage to the environment and Amerindian communities³⁰
- youths and women are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and low-paid jobs in mining camps
- use of toxic chemicals and destructive mining with dredges has a spiral of negative impacts causing ill-health (e.g. mercury poisoning, malaria, typhoid, dengue, diabetes, etc.) and resource scarcity that pushes people towards increased dependence on store-bought foods³¹
- incomes from mining can be twice that of a school teacher and up to 20 times that of a trapper³²
- Amerindian leaders stress that high health, environmental, social and cultural costs of mining often outweigh the cash benefits³³
- some 'big men' with business outlets and mining interests control local market prices
- mining causes local price inflation – which means that cash is worth less, so people have to pay more for basic goods – not only affecting miners but also everyone in the area³⁴

Challenges

- limited environmental regulation and ongoing violation of Amerindian rights³⁵
- mining concessions are issued to third parties by the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) on traditional Amerindian lands without the knowledge of or free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of affected communities, as required under the Amerindian Act (though FPIC only applies to small- and medium-scale mining on or near to titled lands)
- corruption of community leaders by mining interests
- piecemeal support for training in low-impact mining
- weak/unaccountable management of community dredges
- no local or national standards yet agreed for low-impact community mining
- low-impact mining standards such as those developed by the Association for Responsible Mining (ARM)³¹ require revision in order to fit current mining practices in Guyana
- securing benefits through trade in 'green gold'³⁶ would take several years and need long-term commitment by interested communities and their allies, e.g. setting up an effective marketing body

Opportunities

- low-impact and non-mercury techniques do exist and could be trialled in Guyana, if supported by robust training, monitoring and technical back-up³²
- methods such as 'analogue forestry' (replanting of native species to assist natural forest regrowth) can enable land and forest restoration after mining is completed
- some communities in Region 7 have expressed interest in developing low-impact mining³⁷
- potential allies have offered to partner with committed Amerindian communities and indigenous NGOs (such as the Amerindian Peoples Association) to support them to develop low-impact mining businesses
- Amerindians have craft/artistic skills that could be adapted to make unique ethical jewellery items (using locally mined 'green gold')

Table G

Benefit-sharing agreements



TOM GRIFFITHS

Under the right circumstances, equitable benefit sharing with tourism ventures may help communities to build up their own tourist businesses. The Canopy Walkway in the Iwokrama Reserve (pictured) is maintained through a contract with local Amerindian villages.

Income-earning initiatives

- benefit-sharing agreements are being tested by Iwokrama Reserve and the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRRDB) e.g. sharing of jobs and tourist user fees; joint ownership of Iwokrama Timber Inc (ITI) and agreements with a private logging firm to form Iwokrama Sustainable Timber Inc (ISTI)
- strategic partnerships among Amerindian communities in the NW District with the firm Amazon Caribbean Ltd (Amcar), which buys and ships organic pineapple chunks and juice as well as canned heart of palm to markets in Europe (Regions 1 and 2)
- partnerships with tourist and travel agencies e.g. Surama contract with Community Tourism Services (CATs)

Experiences and lessons

- the sustainability of the recent Iwokrama benefit-sharing agreement with NRDDDB and Kurupukari (Fairview Village) for joint logging operations remains unproven
- intended beneficiaries in the communities remain unclear on how local benefits are to be shared under agreements⁴⁰
- approximately 70% of the Iwokrama Reserve's full- and part-time employees are members of Amerindian communities (around 50 people), though most posts are lower paid jobs as cooks, cleaners, boatmen, mechanics, tourist guides or rangers
- community farming enterprises have effectively used partnerships with outside business interests to cover start-up and organic certification costs and create jobs e.g. pineapple processing in Mainstay Village (Region 2)⁴¹
- some communities have had bad experiences with logging companies that have broken agreements to share local benefits and protect the environment, e.g. Akawini (Region 2)
- some Amerindian communities prefer not to invite outside companies on to their traditional lands

Success factors

- terms of agreements negotiated and agreed through public meetings and based on community-consensus
- respect for the principles of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and good faith negotiation
- access to independent legal and technical advisors
- flexible agreements with fair exit clauses

Challenges

- existing national legal frameworks for protection of traditional knowledge and collective land and resource rights are currently weak⁴²
- outside company/partner may seek to dominate the management and control of the business
- dependency on outside professionals and technicians
- trust and fair deals can be difficult to secure and maintain
- distribution of benefits may be undermined by corruption and fraud

Opportunities

- links with outside partners can help create demand for Amerindian goods and services, and provide training, financial and technical support

Are there any positive experiences?

Yes: this study has documented promising outcomes in several income generation initiatives, including the community-based peanut butter factories and tourism activities (Region 9). Both these cases confirm that, with the right preconditions, community business ventures can generate worthwhile income and create part-time employment in Amerindian villages.



Use of appropriate technology (roasters, shellers, cleaners, grinders) has been central to helping achieve increased output and good quality control in cottage industries in Amerindian communities.

Employment and income potential

User-group initiatives like women's groups and cottage industries are found to create between six and a dozen part-time jobs on average with useful (though relatively modest) increases in income levels. These cottage industries are also reported to have an additional multiplier effect in the indigenous economy by generating local market demand for crops, labour and local skills and crafts (Table A).⁴³ Larger community tourism ventures built up over many years such as the Surama village, can provide several dozen part-time jobs for community members, although day-visitors on package tours may provide only moderate visitor fees for the Village Council and occasional income for a few people in the community (Table D).



The 'Helping Hands' women's group in St Ignatius produces a range of snack products for sale to community schools and local markets, including salted peanut and cashew nuts, cassava bread, biscuits and peanut butter.

Box 3: Key elements of sustainable income generation

Economic: market demand exists; costs can be covered and reasonable returns generated; sound marketing and business management; potential to become self-financing without external grants.

Social: promotes social unity, increases family stability, reduces migration and avoids conflict. Local values, ways of life, traditional practices and community institutions are respected; people's skills and capacities are increased through ongoing training activities.

Environmental: damage to land, natural resources, habitats and ecosystems is avoided, minimised or can be repaired; renewable resources are used when possible.

Legal and institutional: property and other rights legally secure; legal personality obtained; compliance with laws and regulations (including tax rules); needed technical and institutional support provided by official agencies, NGOs and/or private sector.

Technological: tested and reliable technology is used (amenable to local repair and service).

What makes income generation sustainable?

Community leaders and support organisations explain that sustainability means cash-earning activities that generate reliable income while protecting the environment, ensuring food security and promoting social cooperation (Box 3).

‘Sustainability and protection of our resources have to be a key goal. We must think about reserves and the future: how will we maintain and increase our resources? If we do not maintain our resource base in the long term, we will be less secure. How can we use resources sensibly?’²⁴⁴

Making time for subsistence and food security work is also seen as vital:

‘We know that if we are involved in cash activities, we have to keep the balance between business and traditional work. People need time to attend to the family and subsistence. So we see that you cannot overdo the business side. There has to be a balance.’²⁴⁵

Robust design and planning

The need for baseline information on existing livelihoods and market feasibility studies are highlighted as a key to effective planning for sustainable income generation work. Communities and development NGOs point out that the more successful livelihood initiatives in Amerindian communities have been built on early actions to address social, economic, environmental, institutional and technical sustainability issues as part of the design and planning of the commercial activity (e.g. Box 4).

Box 4: Sustainability strategy for farm-based cottage industries (Region 9)

- address community priorities and needs in project design and planning
- tailor training programmes to community needs
- strengthen community managerial and business skills
- promote transparency, cooperation and community benefit sharing in business organisation
- use applied research to test and validate technologies
- ensure information sharing through efficient communications systems
- establish local system for skills and technology transfer, including using local Amerindian specialists familiar with the people, their language, economy and way of life
- reduce costs, improve quality and increase productivity
- add value through processing of raw products
- identify and develop niche (specialised) markets⁴⁶



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Benefit-sharing agreements with large logging companies are yet to prove worthwhile for Amerindian communities in the North Rupununi and questions remain over the sustainability of large-scale operations.

Effective organisation

Good organisation, fair benefit-sharing and accountability to the wider community are also considered vital for building sustainable business ventures (Box 5).

‘You have to get the business organisation and management of community development projects right. Leaders and communities need to look at the accountability and governance arrangements and community members must agree on financial management before they start a community enterprise. Good management capacity and strong community institutions are essential.’⁴⁷

Participants in this survey emphasise that mismanagement is a major factor in business enterprise failure in Amerindian communities. A further problem is that people drift away from business ventures where immediate returns are not forthcoming. A key challenge is considered to be the need for solid training in business management and project oversight.

The study documented various types of governance, legal and institutional arrangements being used to organise income generation activities, including:

- **family-based self-employed businesses** e.g. balata artisans, Nappi Village
- **community-owned enterprises** run by sub-committees in Village Council e.g. Surama tourism business
- **user groups and associations** formed under the Friendly Societies Act e.g. farm-based cottage industries
- **cooperatives** (less popular today due to complex rules of the Cooperative Society Act)
- **community-owned private companies** managed by a user or worker group e.g. Makushi Yemkong Forest Management Inc
- **project committees** run by community-based NGOs e.g. South Central Peoples Development Association (SCPDA) Small Livestock Programme



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Nappi artisans in Region 9 report that previous NGO-led initiatives to establish a community-based balata craft enterprise failed due to lack of respect of local leadership and governance systems. The artisans have now reverted to trading through small-scale family businesses.

Box 5: Good practice in governance of community-run enterprises

- business organisation is based on community consensus
- community members have a strong say in organisation and decision making
- collective agreements are made up front on benefit-sharing and how profits are to be used
- rules and plans are adopted to avoid conflicts (address inequality etc.)
- business managers keep good financial records and are well-trained
- accounts and status of activities are regularly reported to groups involved and to wider community
- profits are invested back into the business and the village
- the running of the venture does not depend on just a few individuals

Some leaders consider that community enterprises are best run and are more accountable when they are set up as sub-committees within the Village Council.⁴⁸ Other community business ventures, like the peanut factories in Region 9, have found that setting up a non-profit organisation under the Friendly Societies Act is a good option for organising a group business. Advantages include relatively quick registration, exemption from tax and import duties as well as requirements for a group mandate that can help establish collective rules that promote cooperation, benefit-sharing and sustainable use of resources.⁴⁹

People who took part in this study emphasise that there is no single 'model' for the organisation of income generation initiatives, but that each community or group of communities needs to identify its own preferred set-up for organising economic activities. In some cases, the most workable approaches involve a mix of community, user group and private enterprises.



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Community craft income-generation initiatives have found that making high quality products is not enough: it is also essential to have fair and effective arrangements for business organisation and marketing

IV Potential future opportunities

Forest and climate schemes

Emerging conservation and climate policies at the global and national levels *may* offer future income and in-kind benefits for indigenous peoples, *provided that* fair and effective rights and benefit-sharing frameworks are first put in place. Amerindian communities are unlikely to receive significant direct benefits from Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) where they do not have secure ownership rights over their traditional lands.⁵⁰ REDD+ could deliver significant local benefits if it helps to resolve outstanding Amerindian territorial claims, safeguards subsistence economies and rewards historical and present indigenous forest protection practices.

So far, however, there are no solid guarantees for recognition of untitled traditional lands. This is a major issue because such lands make up a large part of the ancestral forests belonging to indigenous peoples. Amerindian lands and livelihoods are also under threat from associated climate policies for the expansion in building of large hydroelectric dams and roads under low-carbon development plans (Box 1).

Both the APA and some communities have raised specific concerns and presented constructive proposals on rights and benefit sharing, but these have so far been largely overlooked in REDD+ plans submitted to the World Bank.⁵¹ At the same time, benefit-sharing options contained in present government proposals for LCDS and REDD+ remain vague and the potential risks, costs and benefits are undefined (Boxes 6 and 7).

Box 6: Forest and climate schemes

- draft national low carbon development policies seek to ‘transform’ Amerindian economies, but what this might mean in practice is unclear⁵²
- communities that ‘opt-in’ to Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) are promised ‘a share of forest compensation payments’, but concrete benefit-sharing rules under LCDS/REDD+ plans are not yet defined
- potential livelihood impacts, risks, costs and benefits have not yet been assessed
- clear government commitments made in 2009 to protect traditional farming have been withdrawn in 2010 in later versions of the LCDS
- community-level consultations on REDD+ are still pending (June 2010)
- problems with carbon trading (carbon offsets) have not been discussed
- risks remain that Amerindians may suffer unjust restrictions on traditional resource rights where they do not have title to their land⁵³
- mechanisms to clarify and secure tenure and carbon rights, protect livelihood rights, address territorial claims and agree procedures for FPIC are required before forest and climate schemes are implemented
- local benefits may be modest unless critical rights issues are addressed⁵⁴
- apparent back-sliding by the World Bank on commitments to protect indigenous peoples’ rights and fully apply safeguards in its funding for REDD+ in Guyana continue to cause major concern (June 2010)

Low-impact mining

Less harmful methods for the extraction of gold and other precious metals that do not use toxic chemicals and promote land restoration may offer more sustainable options for Amerindian communities that have become dependent on mining (e.g. Region 7). For instance, certified community-produced gold offers income premiums of between 5% and 10%. Potential incomes could be higher if this gold were crafted locally in communities for the ethical jewellery market. Experts advise, however, that setting up these initiatives would require major investments of time, effort and resources, meaning that returns may not be secured for several years (Table F).

Box 7: Payment for Environmental Services (PES)

- PES schemes in Guyana remain at the pilot research stage⁵⁵
- concrete benefit-sharing activities have not yet started (June 2010)
- PES initiatives in the Iwokrama have been criticised for failing to involve communities and lacking measures to respect the right to FPIC
- PES schemes and carbon trading are proposed by conservation NGOs as potential funding for the Konashen Community-owned Conservation Area (COCA) in the South of Guyana, but it is not clear to what extent the Wai Wai landowners have been involved in developing these proposals⁵⁶
- large areas of Amerindian traditional lands (containing watersheds, etc.) still lack legal title
- national legal protections for FPIC are still lacking over untitled traditional lands
- significant future benefits would largely depend on secure Amerindian collective property rights over their traditional territories containing extensive land, watershed and ecosystem resources⁵⁷



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With guarantees for full respect for land, territorial and resource rights, future PES schemes could offer benefits for indigenous peoples in Guyana.

V Conclusions

There is no single silver bullet for Amerindian communities to reduce poverty and provide economic alternatives to damaging activities like mining. At the same time, there is proven potential to generate useful income and part-time employment in the hinterland through the development of a package of different commercial activities within a community according to local priorities and available resources (farm crop and food processing, wildlife harvests, crafts, ecotourism, etc.).

Past livelihood initiatives have often failed because they were not designed jointly with Amerindian communities, were not based on prior feasibility studies, lacked adequate technical, financial and marketing support or suffered from weak organisation and leadership. This survey concludes that a combination of key elements can increase the likelihood of achieving sustainable outcomes, including:

- secure land rights (sound land base and legal basis for planning and investments)
- support for community visions and priorities for development
- ongoing training, bottom-up planning and actions to tackle market barriers
- training of a group of people
- solid organisation, good bookkeeping and accountability to the community
- building on existing traditional knowledge, skills, practices and local resources
- sound technical and institutional back-up
- niche markets and unique branding
- attention to non-monetary objectives (e.g. protect subsistence resources, revive traditional skills, etc.)



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Securing land and territorial rights is an essential precondition for self-determined development

VI Recommendations

After a review and discussion of the study's main findings, Amerindians attending a workshop held in March 2010 on indigenous peoples' rights and national development policies compiled the following recommendations:⁵⁸

Land tenure and livelihood security

1. give priority to securing title and legal control over the full extent of the lands, waters and resources traditionally owned by indigenous communities and to which they have rights in international law, including hunting, fishing, gathering and farming grounds (to uphold rights and secure a land base for subsistence and community development)
2. protect subsistence livelihood resources and traditional livelihood practices

Self-determined development

3. support communities to make their own development plans based on their visions
4. build on the diversity local circumstances, preferences, skills, cultures and resources in different communities and regions
5. ensure effective community participation in the *design*, management and implementation of all livelihood, development and conservation programmes targeting Amerindian areas
6. make sure that the management and control of livelihoods projects and programmes includes indigenous leaders and experts freely chosen by the communities
7. uphold the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for all external proposals and decisions that may affect their rights, lands and interests

Livelihood initiatives

8. support different activities to help build a diverse livelihood and income base
9. carry out feasibility studies jointly with community researchers to assess the viability of possible economic ventures identified by beneficiary Amerindian communities
10. support the development of village-based craft centres with long-term technological and marketing back-up e.g. basketry, leatherworking, woodworking and furniture workshops
11. support the setting up of a national Amerindian craft centre and marketing office controlled and managed by Amerindians (paying fair prices for indigenous crafts)
12. assist in development of community-based research centres to pilot appropriate technology, test business initiatives and set up cottage industries for processing, preserving, packaging and marketing of farm crop, livestock and bush products e.g. casareep, cotton etc.
13. provide long-term financial, technical and marketing support to Amerindian communities that are keen to test new mining methods, including development of a new small-scale community-based standard for low-impact mining

Communications

14. improve communication facilities within and between Amerindian communities, including provision of sustainable satellite internet connections and reliable information technology (IT) equipment (backed by adequate training, maintenance agreements and options for subsidised tariffs)

Training and capacity building

15. invest in training of indigenous mappers and surveyors for land demarcation, territorial monitoring and use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
16. provide grants to train Amerindian professionals in law and in the natural and social sciences
17. enable continuous training of community members in marketing, business planning and management, IT and appropriate technology, research methods and bookkeeping
18. urgently facilitate detailed community-level training on possible livelihood risks and opportunities from future Payment for Environmental Services (PES) and REDD+ schemes (advantages, disadvantages, options, etc.)
19. provide more information to communities in mining areas about 'green gold' and low-impact mining methods and technologies



Working with women's groups and ensuring balanced participation has proven to be important for sustainable livelihood initiatives in the hinterland

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