

ANALOG FORESTRY IN THE ATRATO RIVER BASIN

Presented by: Fundación Amigos del Chocó - AMICHOCÓ

Partners: Fundación ESPAVE

Main component: conservation, income generation, food security

Other components: capacity building

Place: municipality of Bojayá in the Colombian Chocó Bioregion

Duration: 24 months

CONTEXT



The Chocó Bioregion has a total area of 71,000 square kilometers and it is considered one of the world's 25 biodiversity hotspots, holding 20% of the world's identified plants in just 1.4% of its surface¹. Over the last decade this strategic ecosystem has been threatened by economic and political forces that have caused irreparable damage to both its landscape and its people. In Colombia, the Chocó Bioregion holds the highest rates of unsatisfied basic needs² as well as the highest rates of cultural and natural diversity. This paradoxical mix is the result of irresponsible and uncontrolled land exploitation practices, corruption, violence and institutional abandonment.

Over 98% of the people that live in the Colombian Chocó Bioregion are Afro-Colombian or Native American; both have collective property rights over their territories and share a close and powerful bond to the land. The destruction and degradation of this ecosystem risks the survival of these ethnic communities by threatening their traditional income generating activities (agriculture, fishing, and hunting), and their cultural identity.

Located in the Atrato river basin, Bojayá is one of the most vulnerable municipalities in the Colombian Chocó Bioregion. Unfortunately known for the massacre that took place in its municipal capital of Bellavista ten years ago, 95% of its population has UBN (higher than the departmental average of 79%) and its sole contact with the rest of the country is through the Atrato River, which leads to either Vigía del Fuerte or Quibdó.

The people of Bojayá live primarily of the land; agriculture, fishing, hunting and lumber are the main productive activities. Approximately 50% of the Atrato River Basin territory is humid forest with abundant natural and mineral resources and it's considered one of the most important ecosystems in the region due to its high endemism and abundance of natural and mineral resources³. Nevertheless, it is also one of the most isolated and vulnerable regions; the municipalities along the High Atrato river have failed to include themselves in the regional development dynamic and their only commercial ties are with nearby Quibdó, Riosucio and Turbo.

The municipality lacks a minimum communication infrastructure for commercial and trade activities. There are no roads that connect it with any major city, and the Vigía del Fuerte airport which only has charter

¹Ayala Mosquera, Helcías José, *Diagnóstico Situacional de la Minería Artesanal y en Pequeña Escala desarrollada por Afrocolombianos en Territorios Colectivos de Comunidades Negras en el Chocó Biogeográfico*. Instituto de Investigaciones Ambientales del Pacífico – IIAF, 2005. ISBN 958-97824-5-0.

² According to the 2005 census, 79% of the population of the Colombian Chocó bioregion has unsatisfied basic needs.

³ As well as other areas in the Chocó bioregion, the Atrato river basin is rich in mineral resources like gold and platinum which have attracted legal and illegal prospectors that have caused great degradation and destruction.

flights is the only way out of the region. Bojayá is connected by a 4 hour boat ride on the Atrato to Quidbó and the river its main source of communication and transportation.

The social, economic and historical conditions of Bojayá require an intervention that addresses the relationship between poverty and the environment. The environmental assets are an important means of survival for the rural communities which share property rights over the land; this means that the appropriate management of the natural resources may generate social inclusion and democratic processes. Through this project an opportunity will be created to foster the sustainable use of the forest resources and its biodiversity to recue poverty and have a more equitable development.

Fundación Amigos del Chocó – AMICHOCÓ

AMICHOCÓ is an environmental NGO devoted to fostering the sustainable use of natural resources and improve the quality of life of the people of the Chocó Bioregion through the implementation of productive environmental education and communication and capacity building projects; articulating grassroots organizations with national and international communities.

Our organization is renowned for its capacity to work directly and in alliance with grassroots organizations; over the years we have developed an ongoing strategy in which all our projects are channeled through a local organization. This empowers the beneficiary communities and organizations, and allows them to develop the skills necessary to assure the initiative's sustainability once the project is finished. Additionally, it's a non invasive approach that doesn't interfere with the communities' social and governing dynamics, making them and the project the lead players. We have worked in the Chocó Bioregion for over a decade, and we have come to understand and appreciate the people's idiosyncrasies as well as the social and political structure of the Afro-Colombian communities. We have the ability to design and implement projects that incorporate the communities' needs and dreams while providing alternatives to their development.

AMICHOCÓ has been working for over ten years on productive social and environmentally responsible initiatives with Afro-Colombian communities in the Chocó Bioregion. Along with two grassroots organizations and another local NGO, AMICHOCÓ created the Oro Verde program, a pilot initiative that provides alternative market access to artisanal small-scale miners who work their land under social and environmental principles. Oro Verde certifies responsible mining practices and provides miners with privileged access to green and fair market niches that are willing to pay an economic premium for the environmental and social services of the brand. To date, over 700 artisan miners have benefited from the program.

We have also implemented analog forestry projects in the Colombian Chocó Bioregion; in 2006 we paired up with Fundación Existir and brought the Analog Forestry project to the municipality of Tutunendo; AMICHOCÓ's first Analog Forestry initiative. As a result of the project eleven staff members of Fundación Existir developed the necessary skills and knowledge to implement analog forestry projects and three family productive units began to actively work on their analog forestry parcels. Later on AMICHOCÓ implemented Analog Forestry as a complement to the Oro Verde program in the municipalities of Tadó and Condoto. Over sixty artisan miners and their families were trained in analog forestry and twelve greenhouses were built and used. <http://www.amichoco.org>

Fundación ESPAVÉ

Fundación ESPAVÉ is an environmental NGO that has been working in the Atrato region for over fifteen years. ESPAVÉ was created to provide technical support to development initiatives that implement sustainable use of the natural resources available on the collective territories in the Chocó region. Since its beginnings this organization has been developing such initiatives with the communities of Bojayá and Vigía del Fuerte. Not only does ESPAVÉ have the technical expertise regarding the appropriate use of the forest's resources, but they also have the communities' support and trust.

AMICHOCÓ and ESPAVÉ have had relations for over a decade; the founding members of both organizations are ASHOKA fellows and they share a common mission to protect the Chocó Bioregion and its people. In this project AMICHOCÓ and ESPAVÉ will execute the project's activities together; ESPAVÉ will focus on the technical aspects regarding analog forestry and AMICHOCÓ will focus on capacity building and management aspects. <http://www.espave.org.co/>

PROPOSAL

Analog Forestry is an environmental initiative that will provide 20 afro descendent families from the Atrato river basin, in the Colombian Chocó Bioregion, an opportunity to increase their income and protect their collectively owned land. The project seeks to implement a strategy along a 24 month period to restore degraded areas, provide food security, and foster environmentally friendly production and commercialisation schemes in three rural communities in the municipality of Bojayá.

BENEFICIARIES

The target population of this project is 20 afro Colombian families from the rural communities of Opogado, Napipi and Puerto Conto in the municipality of Bojayá. These families live in very precarious situations, all of them are low income, their territories are being threatened by third parties who wish to take advantage of the natural resources they hold and because their communities have so little access to the rest of the country they constantly face food shortages.

According to the 2005 census made by the national statistic agency (DANE) 96.3% of the population of Bojayá have unsatisfied basic needs, additionally, 65% of the homes do not meet the necessary income levels to provide for their expenses. Furthermore, these families come from many years of violent conflict and are at risk of losing their cultural identity and heritage. Each family has approximately 5 members and most of the head of the households is between 25 and 40 years of age.

Project stages

Capacity building and training on analog forestry: The first stage of this project focuses on providing the beneficiary families with the skills necessary to develop their own analog forest. These workshops will be divided into two topics: Introduction to Analog Forestry and Implementation of the Technical Aspects of Analog Forestry. The first workshops will give the families general information about analog forestry, forests and their importance, natural and anthropogenic systems and physiological description of the forest. It will also include a fieldtrip to one or more plots of land, and a discussion about the topics and group presentations. The second set of workshops will focus on the practical aspects of the implementation process. It will explain in detail the different steps that need to be taken in order to grow an analog forest (mapping and ecological valuation, species inventory, parcel and implementation plan design, design and construction of the communal greenhouses and planting the species in the plots of land) and it will provide technical insight as to the importance of protecting the environment, and the relevance of biological corridors, among others.

Information gathering and systematization: The training phase of the project is followed by information gathering activities. These activities include the development of a detailed environmental and ecological inventory of the area where the analog forests are going to be developed. The data collected will serve as baseline for the project and as the main source of information for the development of the implementation plans.

Design and implementation: Once all the relevant information is gathered and assessed the technical staff and the beneficiaries will design the implementation plans, these will include, what species will be planted, where the plots are going to be developed, the specific structure and organization of the plots and the design

of the greenhouses. The twenty families will actively participate in the design of the intervention plan and will co-develop with our team the specific timeline of their development of their plots.

Construction of infrastructure and implementation of the analog forests: Each family will participate in the construction of the greenhouses and in the adaptation of their plots of land to harbor analog forests. Our technical team will be present providing technical assistance and guidance and evaluating and monitoring the project's development. During this phase, the families will have the opportunity to apply all the skills and training obtained during the first phase. Plot maintenance, planting and seed recollection (most seeds will be collected by the families from the nearby forests; only those species that are not found in the native forests and have been identified as necessary in the previous phase will be bought) are the main activities and responsibilities of the families during this phase; additionally, the greenhouses will be looked out for and our by both the families and our technical team.

Market research: Parallel to the previous stages described, the project will work on identifying potential markets for the products from the analog forests; we will structure a commercial chain, develop market opportunities and foster alliances to assure the commercial sustainability of the project. We will take advantage of AMICHOCO's experience in the investigation of green and fair markets to develop a first draft market proposal for the products from the analog forests of the forty beneficiary families. The analog forests will become productive from the third year on (depending on the species that are planted, but 3 years is the average growth time), and by then the marketing and commercialization area will be completely developed and ready to begin commercializing products in specific market niches.

Monitoring end evaluation: Monitoring and evaluation activities will be developed throughout the project. Initial, follow up and final meetings will be held with the beneficiary communities and our technical team will continuously assess the project's execution in the field. From our management offices the project Director will monthly review and control the project's timeline and financial execution and inter organization meetings (AMICHOCÓ and ESPAVE) will be held every 3 months to evaluate the project's general impact on the communities.

SUSTAINABILITY

This project will provide the beneficiary families with the skills and training necessary to continue working on their analog forestry parcels after the 24 month implementation period. Furthermore, the implementation plans will be designed with the community so that their collective vision is considered in future plans and so that the project will be incorporated into the daily lives of the beneficiary families.

All materials and seeds used in the project will come from local sources, allowing the beneficiary families to acquire them in their own communities and local markets and thus creating a cost and logistic wise sustainable model. Additionally, technical assistance will be made available to all the families involved in the project during the 24 month implementation period and beyond. Fundación ESPAVE has a permanent presence in both municipalities and will continue to support the project's success after the 2 year implementation period.

Finally, the commercial area of AMICHOCÓ has over ten years of experience in the identification and penetration of specialized market niches and will provide its expertise for the development of a market investigation for the products of the analog forests grown in this project. This will be very useful for the families, which will start commercializing their products after 3 to 4 years depending on the species grown.