

NEWSLETTER

COMMUNITY-BASED MAPPING AND RESEARCH ON CUSTOMARY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

March 2005

Since April 2003, the Forest Peoples Programme has provided funding and support for community territorial mapping projects and '10c case studies' in Venezuela, Guyana, Thailand and Cameroon. The activities have been carried out by partner indigenous organisations and community members. This 6-monthly newsletter is intended to update project partners and donors on the ongoing activities and progress in all project areas. Currently, the project is active in Thailand, Cameroon and Guyana.

Thailand

The mapping project in Chom Thong District in Thailand started in June 2003 with 10 Karen communities and 1 Hmong. Although the trainees picked up the technical concepts rapidly during the preparatory and training phases, the group found that the initial implementation was more difficult than predicted. During the last few months of implementation however, the mapping team and the cartographer felt increasingly confident with their roles and the technology, and started defining the areas they were mapping with more clarity. It was found that community workshops and information dissemination regarding the project to the communities was essential, both before and iteratively, during implementation. It was found that in Thailand, the community maps do not, as in Latin America, represent community territories, but rather smaller community areas of specific use and significance. The final maps of community land use were warmly welcomed by all concerned. The mapping project is now being carried forward with communities unable to participate in the first year.

In October and November 2004, FPP held intensive workshops with the '10c case study' trainees regarding the activities and implementation of the second phase of the project. Together the trainees and FPP developed a process and format for interviews and information gathering which is clear and understandable to all.



Training: Tracing the model map onto paper

Cameroon

The mapping project started in July 2004, in and around the Mekas area in southern Cameroon. Thirty two mappers, of which 16 indigenous Baka, were trained by the Centre for Environment and Development (CED) a Cameroonian NGO. The data collected by the trainees was then integrated into digital maps of the first set of land claims, which are due out early this year.

The project was carried out in a very inaccessible area, in which Baka remain subject to discrimination and abuse by ecoguards and neighbouring Bantu villages, as well as still having a low level of education. These were obstacles to be overcome during the mapping process. As the project wore on, it became clear that the Bantu of the area faced the same problems as the Baka regarding access to land and forest resources. The Bantu thus had a great interest in the project and joined in the mapping activities with enthusiasm, in the hope of using the maps for a land claim of their own. It is likely that a coalition between the two ethnic groups will result, with a shared common goal: access to land and forest resources.

The second set of land claim maps will be completed by mid 2005. The maps will then be used by the communities to deepen the analysis and lead to final maps of land use and of the communities' historical and cultural ties to the forest as well as a '10c case study', which will be finalised in 2006.

The current land claim maps lie within the Dja Wildlife Reserve, which is a World Heritage Site. They will be used by the communities to secure their rights in discussions with the Ministry of Forestry and Fauna (MINFOF) and conservation NGOs involved in the Park.

The second set of land claim mapping will be carried out in the eastern part of the Campo Ma'an national park. This will complement work CED is carrying out with the Bagyeli in the area.



Training of the community cartographers in the operation of GPS units

Guyana

In 2003, 11 Wapishana and 1 Wapishana/Macushi communities mapped their lands with the help of the national indigenous organisation, the Amerindian Peoples Association. The communities felt that by mapping the lands traditionally they own, occupy and use, they would be better able to inform and educate government agencies and other institutions about the ways in which communities relate to their territories and the significance of owning their lands.

There were concerns, particularly from the elders, that sensitive information may be made public through the maps, but these fears were allayed once it was made clear that only the information the communities agreed to make public would be placed on the maps. Overall, the mapping was successful, and communities feel a sense of ownership and pride at having taken part in the project.

Maps are now being validated by the communities in South Central and the Deep South sub-districts.

In early 2005, the communities started working on the '10c case study' element of the project, which is due for completion in July.



Members of Sawariwa'o village verify a South Central sub-district community map, February 2005

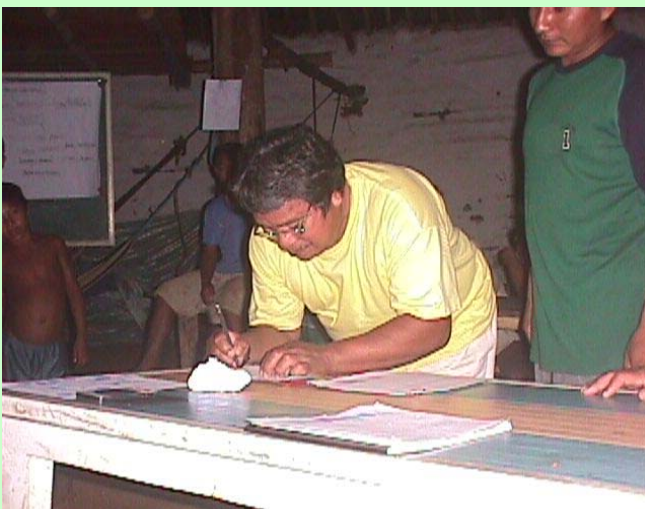
Venezuela

With the partnership of Kuyujani, the multiethnic association representing the Ye'kwana and Sanema peoples of the Upper Caura, community mapping of these communities territories was completed in 1998. In December 2004, the '10c case study' was completed. The case study demonstrates that their customary uses accord with traditional practices and are clearly 'compatible with conservation and sustainable use'. The main action the Venezuelan Government needs to take to be in full compliance with CBD requirements is to title their 'habitat'.

Following the reconfirmation of Chavez' Presidency in a referendum on August 15th 2004, the President publicly committed himself to recognising indigenous territories (referred to officially as *habitats*) in practice, the latter having been recognised by law in the Constitution of 2000. In May 2002, the territorial claim was made by the Ye'kwana and Sanema of the Upper Caura, based upon their territorial maps and a detailed legal study. It has since then been reviewed by the demarcation's commission and the Office of the Attorney General in November 2004, declared that there were no flaws in the legal claim. The indigenous peoples in question now only await the Ministry of Environment's approval before government formally recognises their territories in full.

In order to publicise the case, the map and 10c case study was presented at the World Conservation Congress by Ramón Tomedes, the indigenous co-author of the case study and Secretary of Kuyujani. The presentation was warmly received by all, and it became clear that such case studies are useful tools in the struggle for indigenous peoples' rights in conservation.

The case study is set to be published by the Experimental University of Guayana as a book in Spanish in March 2005.



The captain general of the Upper Caura signing the land claim (2002)

Forest Peoples Programme

1c Fosseway Business Centre, Stratford Road, Moreton-in-Marsh GL56 9NQ, UK
tel: +44 (0)1608 652893 fax: +44 01608 652878 email: info@forestpeoples.org