If you’ve ever been involved with development projects south of Lethem in Region 9, you’ve probably heard of the South Central People’s Development Association (SCPDA). And if you haven’t, it’s time for an introduction.

The South Central People’s Development Association (SCPDA), founded in 1992, is a non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to securing and sustainably managing Wapichan traditional lands in Guyana and improving the livelihoods of the people in these communities. This would be done through support for income-generating activities and natural resource management, and focusing increasingly on issues and projects with potential implications for livelihood and food security of the area.

The organization currently serves 17 communities in the south part of Region 9, and is based in Shulinab Village with a sub-office in Aishalton Village. Staff and board members are made up of local residents and volunteers who are dedicated to improving their communities, and believe in SCPDA’s goals to reduce poverty and empower and uplift the lives of the people in South Central and South Rupununi, Guyana.

SCPDA staff
SCPDA’s staff is made up of several prominent leaders in Region 9. Kid James of Aishalton Village, former Project Director of SCPDA, manages projects in the 17 communities that SCPDA serves, and raises funds for the organization’s projects. He is often sought out to provide advice to Village Councils (community leaders), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), and District Toshaos Councils (a group of elected village leaders) on issues affecting their communities. Kid is trained in project management and dealing with indigenous community issues. He is currently working with USAID on the development of marginalized youths.

Nicholas Fredericks of Shulinab Village, SCPDA’s Field Coordinator, handles logistics and writes proposals for SCPDA’s projects in the region. He is a valuable resource with his experience in conservation, eco-tourism, community development, GIS mapping and ranching. In addition to his field coordinator duties at SCPDA, he currently serves as Treasurer on the Shulinab Village Council, Chairman of the South Rupununi Conservation Society (SRCS), Chairman of the Shulinab Parents Teachers’ Association (PTFA), and most recently, the Area Coordinator for the Guyana Bureau of Statistics’ 2012 Population and Housing Census in the South Rupununi.

SCPDA’s current staff includes 10 members. SCPDA’s Fundraising and Public Engagement Advisor, Samson Esudu, a Ugandan currently living in Aishalton Village, is SCPDA’s Fundraising and Public Engagement Advisor. His role includes providing assistance to SCPDA with proposal writing, raising funds for projects, and public awareness. He also assists village councils and CBOs in the area with preparing funding proposals for submission. Samson has experience in grant writing, strategy formulation, community development and youth development. He is currently working on SCPDA’s 10-year Strategic Plan which will provide the framework for all of SCPDA’s future projects.

Each staff member of SCPDA puts high importance on working for, with, and through Toshaos (local leaders), Village Councils, and the District Toshaos Councils of South Central and South Rupununi to conceptualize, create, facilitate, monitor, and evaluate projects which benefit communities in the area.

SCPDA projects
SCPDA’s previous projects include: Training youths to equip them with transferable skills (e.g. computer skills) and/or skills for self-employment (e.g. brick making).

Promoting and improving nutrition and hygiene standards by establishing communal vegetable gardens. Developing programs tar-
While ancient farming, hunting, and social traditions remain in use among indigenous tribes of Guyana, for many years they were ignored by the wider society and often dismissed as primitive practices. There are now efforts being made to support the development of sustainable environmental practices however, the world has turned to ancient indigenous traditions to adapt to today's new natural environment as well as develop new sustainable practices.

Fishing traditions
According to barima.com, the fact that some of the plants Amerindians use for fishing can also be used as medicines has caused researchers to look into their curing properties, particularly in certain types of cancer. Fishing using poisonous plants is a practice among many different cultures worldwide. Guyana’s Amerindian tribes make use of a wide variety of plants for catching fish, along with the common arrow and bow for spear fishing. The most used substance, the website goes on to state, is the deadly poison ‘pika’ which is extracted from the root of the barbasco plant (Cordia morremia). Plants such as barbasco and cubé, are taken from the ground, smoked, and then treated with a strong chemical to make a usable poison.

Medicinal treatments
Using herbs or plants, along with animal parts and insects, to cure a variety of ailments have been part of indigenous tradition for millennia, now being investigated by scientists and researchers. Over the years, the village medicine man has been a powerful and important figure in traditional communities for his knowledge of herbal medicines and cures for injuries, diseases and ailments. Many of Guyana’s indigenous communities are no different as they still rely on such individuals in the absence of modern health care systems. The commonly known crab oil, made from the seeds of the crabwood tree, is widely used as hair oil, mosquito repellent and tonic.

Along with plants, insects are also used in medicinal treatments. One report noted that the Patamona tribe, without the availability of modern pain relievers, would use a small black, shiny insect; a person would put the insect on the wound to relieve the pain. For injuries like snakebites, the report stated that the Patamona would use a man’s teeth to draw the venom out of the individual's blood.

Sustainable indigenous practices survive over the years to prove beneficial for today's world

Malaria in particular was noted as a health issue and although the Makushi tribe was well aware of its existence, its knowledge of medicinal plants and cures for injuries, diseases and ailments was never lost. As the traditional ways of conveying indigenous knowledge through oral communication and experience are changing, the natural environment is lost when many new generations leave their communities, the documentation of Amerindian age-old knowledge of the land is vital to future generations. However, it is also important that there should be equal sharing of the benefits of Amerindian knowledge when modern science relies on such sources to develop future medicines. Exploiting indigenous knowledge is just as important as Columbus’ arrival in the New World proved to be for our original peoples.

A introduction to the work...

Toshao Henry Winter poisoning the creek (Photo taken from Journal of a Flying Priest) by Anthony Metcalf S.J)

Toshao Paulinus Albert of Potarinau Village working on Wapichan traditional lands

Working with other organizations
Although SCPDA focuses on the development of communities in the Southern Region of South Rupununi, the organization aims to work with other NGOs, aid agencies, government departments, and interested individuals to achieve its goals of improving the livelihoods of people in all of Region 9. SCPDA is currently working on its 10-year strategic plan and welcomes suggestions for potential projects and requests for collaboration on programs targeting the region.

For more information about the South Central People’s Development Association (SCPDA) or to get in touch with a staff member, please visit www.scpdaGuyana.org or email the organization directly at scpdaGuyana@gmail.com. For copies of plans, studies, and reports, please contact the organization directly by email with a letter of request.

The staff and executives of the South Central People’s Development Association (SCPDA) wish everyone a Happy Amerindian Heritage Month!

An introduction to the work...

Toshao Henry Winter poisoning the creek (Photo taken from Journal of a Flying Priest) by Anthony Metcalf S.J)