



Municipalities in Europe – Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon

Indigenous Peoples in all the world's regions are among the population groups most severely affected by climate change. To a very large extent their existence depends on an intact environment. Mostly they live in ecologically sensitive areas; yet they themselves contribute less than anyone to climate change and the associated threat to their living space.

Exploitation of natural resources such as timber, gold, ores, oil and gas is destroying the basis of their existence and also their chances of adapting to climate change. Additional threats to their traditional way of life are national development programmes, the influx of landless farmers, urban expansion, and

the siting of large-scale agricultural enterprises, for instance for the production of soya. Over the last two decades, Indigenous Peoples have responded by becoming politically organised and forming networks. Like climate protection at local level, the Partnership between European municipalities and the Indigenous Peoples of the rainforests is a keystone of the Climate Alliance's work. The basis for the Partnership is shared responsibility for the conservation of the earth's atmosphere and the associated protection of the rainforests – in short, active global climate protection. The destruction of forests worldwide is responsible for over 20 % of global climate change.

The form that the Partnership was to take, initially laid down in the Climate Alliance Manifesto of 1990, was defined in more concrete terms by the Climate Alliance Declaration of 2000, which outlines the municipalities' areas of responsibility and scope for action.

The Climate Alliance Partnership

Climate Alliance member municipalities enter into partnerships with indigenous communities, supporting projects designed to foster sustainable use of resources or to strengthen organisational structures.

On the political stage, the Climate Alliance campaigns for participation by indigenous representatives in international processes (e. g. in issues of climate change and biodiversity) wherever these affect the interests of Indigenous Peoples. For example, climate protection mechanisms agreed on by the industrial nations, such as the "Clean Development Mechanism" (CDM), must respect indigenous rights. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) of 1992 was intended not just to publicly acknowledge indigenous understanding of plant characteristics, but to protect that knowledge from unfair commercial exploitation. The Climate Alliance is also campaigning actively for European nations to sign up to ILO Convention 169, which protects a broad spectrum of indigenous rights.

The Climate Alliance supports campaigns and initiatives launched by the indigenous partners for protection of tropical forests, for instance in response to new threats to specific regions, but also in connection with longer-term processes of dialogue. The European Secretariat of the Climate Alliance, located in Frankfurt am Main, coordinates cooperation with the indigenous partners. It raises funds to help indigenous representatives to participate in the international political processes; it organises indigenous discussion forums as needed, and provides research support to both sides of the Partnership. It cooperates with governmental and non-governmental institutions in supporting indigenous organisations. It also provides active support for project collaboration, by sharing in the preparation and delivery of indigenous organisations' projects funded by member cities and municipalities. Contributions from associated Climate Alliance members are used 100% for the project work.

In a number of European countries, the Climate Alliance's national coordinators have taken on responsibility for supporting regional or local projects initiated by the indigenous partners in the Amazon region.

Some examples of projects

Long-term Regional Partnership

Since 1993, member municipalities in Austria have been helping FOIRN (Federation of Organisations of Indigenous Peoples of the Upper Rio Negro) to implement a locally run, culturally and ecologically appropriate regional development programme on the upper Rio Negro in north-western Brazil. 1998 brought an important success in the form of State recognition of an area of 110,000 sq. km. as an indigenous region. This is a major precondition for the cultural survival of the Indigenous Peoples living here, and at the same time contributes to the protection of the rainforest and the climate.

There have also been successes in the fields of indigenous education and health, and in communications and recognition of rights. A string of improvements followed from the locally-run fish-farming projects – which are serving as models to other regions – and the marketing of basketwork, ceramics, pepper and other products. Since the initiation of the Partnership, Austrian municipalities have raised almost 2.7 million euros.

Climate Alliance Austria; www.klimabuendnis.at

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Securing Land Rights

The North-South Cooperation programme pursued by Luxembourg's Climate Alliance members is coordinated by ASTM (Third World Solidarity Action). From a list of project ideas supplied by ASTM, the municipalities select a project in Latin America, Africa or Asia that they would like to support. The projects adopted then become the focus from which ASTM builds up adult education in the municipalities concerned.

Current projects are "Building Effective Counter-Publicity in the Oil Regions of the Ecuador Rainforest", "Sustainable Development on the Danyi Plateau, Togo" and "Integrated Rural Development (with Construction of Biogas Plant) in India". Other major topics such as the rainforests, Indigenous Peoples, and everyday life and customs are addressed in the educational programmes undertaken with children and young adults, e. g. the interactive exhibition "Klima, Kanu, Quetschekraut".

ASTM; www.astm.lu

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Project "Green"

For this project, the Berlin-based artist Michael Arantes Müller has created one hundred panel paintings each one metre square, which come together to make up a huge tapestry. Proceeds from sales of these artworks to European cities, municipalities and institutions go to support a social and medical project focused on indigenous midwives in Brazil.

European Secretariat of the Climate Alliance; www.gruenprojekt.de

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Solar Lamps

In collaboration with the Programme for the Training of Indigenous Teachers (FORMABIAP) and the Peruvian national Indigenous Peoples' organisation, AIDSESEP, which monitors the training in progress, a workshop has been set up for local assembly of mobile solar lights and solar modules. The aim, for the longer term, is to displace paraffin as the sole source of energy and light.

Other concerns are to support the FORMABIAP training programme and to ensure that the over-arching theme of resources use plays an integral part in the training programme for indigenous teachers. The Programme for Training Bilingual Teachers of the Peruvian Amazon is an educational institution dedicated to identifying and supplying the educational needs of the indigenous children living in the Amazon region. The children are seen as a new generation that needs to be helped – though with due regard to principles of autonomy and self-determination – to learn about its collective rights and the protection and sustainable use of its land.

European Secretariat of the Climate Alliance; www.klimabuendnis.org

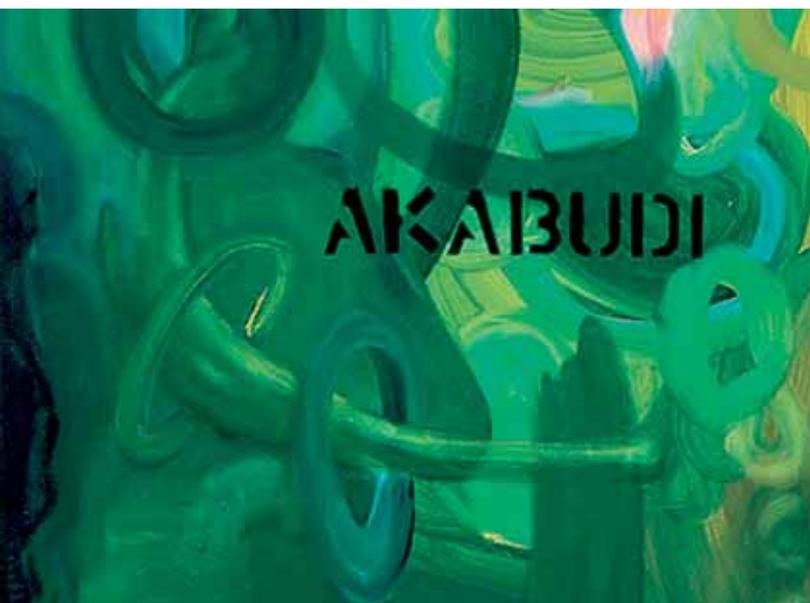
Contact: Thomas Brose, t.brose@climatealliance.org

Institutional support

Progress in developing and strengthening indigenous organisations is an important lever in winning recognition of indigenous rights, and this in turn means that it is also an effective way of protecting the rainforests and the climate. With this link in mind, the Climate Alliance has supported the growth and further development of a number of indigenous organisations in Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela.

Europäische Geschäftsstelle Klima-Bündnis; www.klimabuendnis.org

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What is the Achievement to Date?

For over 15 years now, European municipalities have been giving support to the Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon. Successes have been recorded at regional, national and international level. In certain national constitutions, the rights of the indigenous population are now more firmly enshrined than before. Large tracts of land – in Brazil, for instance – have been legally made over to the indigenous communities.

There are now indigenous mayors and indigenous members of national parliaments. In 2000, the United Nations established a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Forum advises the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), one of six UN bodies charged with responsibility for economic, social and development issues. The Permanent Forum sits once a year and submits recommendations for UN programmes and projects. It coordinates activities and helps to generate greater sensitivity to the situation of Indigenous Peoples. In 2007 the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Nevertheless, the destruction of the rainforests on which the Indigenous Peoples depend for survival is continuing and accelerating. The need for strenuous combined efforts for conservation remains urgent. We therefore renew our appeal to member municipalities within the Climate Alliance, to participate in other local initiatives and to private sponsors, asking them to contribute funding and donations in support of projects benefiting the indigenous partners. Even small contributions are a help, as they can be pooled to provide funding for important projects.

If your municipality or action group would like to support one of the North-South Cooperation projects, we will be delighted to send you further information on projects currently under way.

Please send your enquiry to the European Secretariat of the Climate Alliance in Frankfurt am Main.
Contact: Silke Lunnebach; s.lunnebach@climatealliance.org

Information and Education

Within the Climate Alliance's overall priorities, an important counterpart to the project cooperation work going on in the Amazon region is the effort being put into information and publicity work in Europe. The aim is to sensitise the northern populations to concerns that matter deeply to the Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon. These concerns include biodiversity and how to protect it, the impact of climate change, issues surrounding oil production, and the safeguarding of indigenous rights. We research and publicise these themes in collaboration with other institutions active in the information and education fields.

Black Gold from Green Forests – Oil in the Amazon Region

The Amazon is currently a place where more and more fresh finds of oil reserves are being made, and more and more production licences awarded. The losers by this process, apart from the rainforest ecosystem as a whole, are the Indigenous Peoples on whose traditional settlement lands the oil is found and extracted.

They are either expelled from their lands or forced to live in an environment polluted by mineral oil. Climate Alliance aims to demonstrate the close linkage that exists between excessive energy consumption, destruction of the rainforests, imperilment of the very survival of Indigenous Peoples, and climate change. Information is distributed via a dedicated home page, printed publicity material, lectures and talks carrying an admission charge, and art projects for municipalities and schools.

European Secretariat of the Climate Alliance; www.erdoelinamazonien.org
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Ch@t der Welten – Oil in the Amazon Region

A new internet project entitled "Ch@t der Welten" has been piloted in 20 specially selected schools in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia. The dedicated website featured both an open-access information area and a restricted-access workshop area with links enabling project users to access a large number of information centres and databases. This environment permitted the schools to communicate with each other and/or with partners in the Amazon region, directly or online. Representatives of the oil industry, of governments and of indigenous organisations participated in this project and were available for consultation.

The pilot project has now been successfully completed. Similar projects, some with a different content focus, are planned, and some of these will run in other German states.

European Secretariat of the Climate Alliance;
www.learn-line.de/angebote/chatderwelten
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Indigenous Peoples

By dint of years of persuasion, the indigenous organisations have succeeded in having the term “Indigenous Peoples” accepted as the proper designation in preference to discriminatory terms such as “natives” or “indios”, thus underlining their right to recognition as “peoples” possessing their own territory, their own history and culture, and the right of self-determination and self-definition.

There is no official or universally valid definition of Indigenous Peoples. Their common aspiration is the preservation of the specific cultural, linguistic and social characteristics that distinguish them from their respective national populations. The sole international agreement guaranteeing the fundamental rights of “Indigenous and tribal peoples” is ILO (International Labour Organisation) Convention 169 – to which, however, only 18 countries have become signatories (as of September 2007).

COICA

COICA (Coordinator of Indigenous Organisations of the Amazon Basin) is the umbrella organisation serving the indigenous organisations of the Amazon basin. This region is home to a total indigenous population of about 1.5 million, belonging to more than 400 different peoples. COICA was founded in the Peruvian capital, Lima, in 1984. Its membership consists of the respective national organisations of the Indigenous Peoples of nine Amazon nations. The umbrella organisation bundles and articulates their aspirations and interests. One plan for joint action is the “Amazon Indigenous Agenda” (AIA). Its central themes are sustainable human development, land rights and natural resources, the aspiration to dedicated legal systems and education, and the strengthening of indigenous structures and organisations.



Further information is available from www.coica.org.ec

Indigenous Rights – the Key to Survival

For Indigenous Peoples, survival depends on the recognition and implementation of fundamental rights within the framework of national legislation. Only a few decades ago, indigenous people were still regarded as “savages” in need of civilisation, or as “children” in need of a benevolent guardian. In our day, Indigenous Peoples enjoy recognition, at least legally, as fully equal citizens of the country in which they live. The COICA member organisations also campaign for the establishment of collective rights for the Indigenous Peoples. The prime objective is unconditional recognition by national constitutions of their existence as peoples in their own right. Many Latin-American nations have now officially declared themselves multiethnic and multicultural in character and have enshrined this fact in their constitution. In some nations the indigenous organisations shared in the process of rewriting the constitution, and a number of their demands were met.

One crucial factor is the recognition of indigenous territories and the securing in law of titles to land. This is where the future of the Indigenous Amazon Peoples will be decided one way or the other: for unless they own sufficient land they will not, as peoples, survive. Territory is important in helping to constitute identity, and is regarded as the necessary foundation on which social, cultural and political development can take place. The focus is therefore not so much on the purely material value of land as on its cultural and social importance.

“One of the fundamentals of our identity is the spiritual bond with our territories. Legal security is fundamental, but it needs to be backed by national policies guaranteeing that security.” (COICA Indigenous Agenda)

The legal recognition of indigenous territories is accordingly the fundamental requirement for the guaranteeing of autonomous development as called for by the indigenous organisations.



COICA Member Organisations

Peru	AIDSESP (Indigenous Association for Development in the Peruvian Rainforest)
Ecuador	CONFENIAE (Confederation of the Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon)
Colombia	OPIAC (Organisation of the Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon)
Bolivia	CIDOB (Confederation of the Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia)
Brazil	COIAB (Coordination of the Indigenous Organisations of the Brazilian Amazon)
Venezuela	ORPIA (Regional Organisation of the Indigenous Peoples of the Venezuelan Amazon)
Surinam	OIS (Organisation of the Indigenous Peoples of Surinam)
Guyana	APA (Amerindian Peoples Association of Guyana)
French Guyana	FOAG (Federation of Amerindian Organisations of French Guyana)



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Contact and further information

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The Climate Alliance is an alliance of more than 1,400 European cities, towns and smaller municipalities – in 17 European countries – that have entered into a Partnership with the Indigenous Peoples of the rainforests. In this cooperative undertaking, the Climate Alliance's most important partner is COICA. The Partnership has been in existence since 1990, with two aims: it seeks to mobilise the potential of the member municipalities to exert influence for the protection of the Earth's atmosphere; and at the same time, it supports the Indigenous Peoples in their struggle for legal recognition and the protection of their territories. The common goal is the conservation of the global climate. To this end we work to reduce climate-damaging emissions in the North, we help protect the rainforests in the South, and we support COICA and its member organisations in their political activity. Climate protection measures introduced by the municipalities are intended to bring about a marked reduction of consumption of fossil fuels in particular, most notably of oil. We rely heavily on individual and local commitment and on members coming up with a wide range of initiatives at local level.

We see our collective effort as forming part of the modern endeavour to make development sustainable and to definitively establish a just relationship between North and South.



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Building Bridges to the Amazon Region

The Climate Alliance Programme of North-South Cooperation