

**Indigenous Engagement in REDD:
Developing a project with the Surui in the Southwest Amazon of Brazil**

International negotiations on reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD) have so far largely left indigenous and forest-dwelling peoples on the sidelines, despite the fact that they own some 22% of the world’s forests.

In countless places, indigenous peoples have been demonstrably good stewards and guardians of their forest territories, maintaining the land while surrounding areas succumb to agroindustry, pasture, logging and mining. An international REDD regime would ideally provide recognition, support and financing to empower indigenous peoples to maintain their forests. However, many indigenous leaders and their allies from civil society and government are openly skeptical or critical of REDD and carbon markets as inimical to their interests. Addressing these concerns and crafting a framework for REDD that enables and reaffirms local peoples’ interests is a key challenge for international negotiations and the development of policy and markets.

The Katoomba Incubator has been working with the Surui people of the southwest Amazon to assess possibilities for using carbon finance to restore deforested lands within their territories through native-species reforestation and to protect the 240,000 hectares of ancestral lands still covered by intact tropical forest from illegal logging and expansion of the agricultural and ranching frontier.

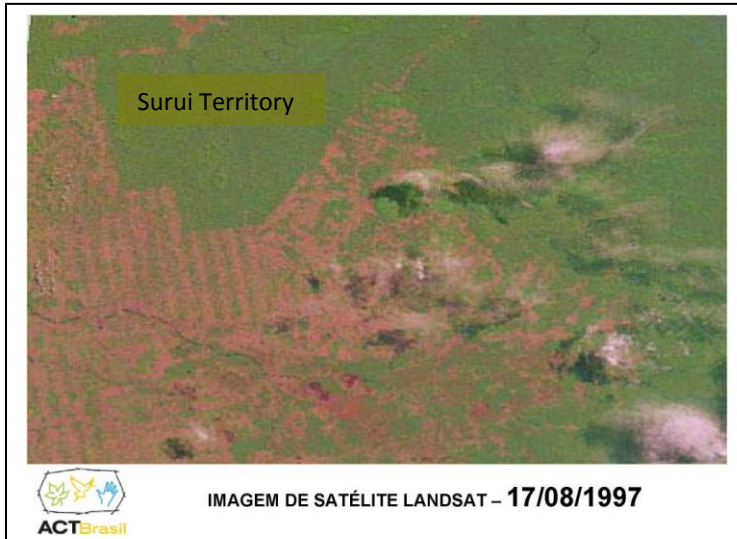
The Surui and carbon

The Surui Indians, a tribe with approximately 1,000 members, made contact with Brazilians of European descent for the first time only 30 years ago. The four villages of the Surui tribe lie in the Amazon Rainforest in the state of Rondônia in western Brazil (see map 1). In the 1980s, the federal government instituted incentives for the exploitation of what was then a practically unexplored region, subsidizing roads and economic development. The result was an onslaught of timber and agricultural operations in the region leading to drastic deforestation. The Surui territory was demarcated in 1983, and as of now the developmental pressures are increasingly pushing at the border. Although protected by Brazilian law in practice, these forests are under continued threat.



Figure 1 SOURCE of THIS MAP?

Local and Global



In late 2007, Almir Surui, the internationally-recognized leader of the tribe, approached Forest Trends to seek support in developing a reforestation project to restore portions of Surui ancestral lands through the use of carbon financing systems. Technical studies have begun, together with partner organization, Amazon Conservation Team and others. A key starting point has been a legal assessment conducted with Baker

Mckenzie to determine legal rights over carbon of indigenous peoples in Brazil.

This exploration of carbon finance by the Surui and the work to date with Incubator support has generated a great deal of interest within Brazil as other peoples and organizations grapple with carbon issues.

On February 19th, Forest Trends and the Katoomba Group co-organized a seminar with FUNAI to present the Baker & McKenzie conclusions, present an overview of carbon markets from their logic to basic requirements for project design and implementation, as well as give an update on the Surui Carbon project. The seminar, which was attended by around 100 people and extended from 9 am to 6 pm, was hosted by the President of FUNAI, Marcio Meira, and included most of their senior directors and regional administrators for the Amazon region. In addition, there were several guests such as representatives from USAID, GTZ, The Nature Conservancy, Instituto Socioambiental, IDESAM, ACT, Rede Povos da Floresta, COIAB, and several indigenous peoples representatives, including Almir Surui, Ailton Krenak, Alvaro Tucano, Francisco Apurinã, Julia Yawanawa, among others.



Chief Almir Surui presenting the Surui Carbon Project during FUNAI seminar

The experiences and knowledge generated from the Surui project will continue to inform national and international policy debate through the Katoomba conferences and other important venues.

Considering the replicability of the Surui project in other indigenous territories in Brazil, particularly in the Amazon, we worked with the lawyers at Baker & McKenzie to not only focus on the specific rights of the Surui, but to increase the scope of their analysis to reflect the rights of indigenous peoples throughout Brazil. Considering that indigenous ethnicities in Brazil share the same rights guaranteed by Article 231 of the Constitution revision of 1988, which acknowledged and established their right to permanently live on their traditional territories, including the exclusive use of the natural resources necessary for securing their cultural integrity and welfare, the conclusion on the carbon ownership rights of the Surui would extend to the other indigenous peoples throughout the country, who are divided in about 235 ethnic groups, with over 750,000 individuals speaking 170 languages.