

CLIMATE SOLUTION:

Large Scale Forest Conservation with Indigenous Peoples in the Threatened Brazilian Amazon

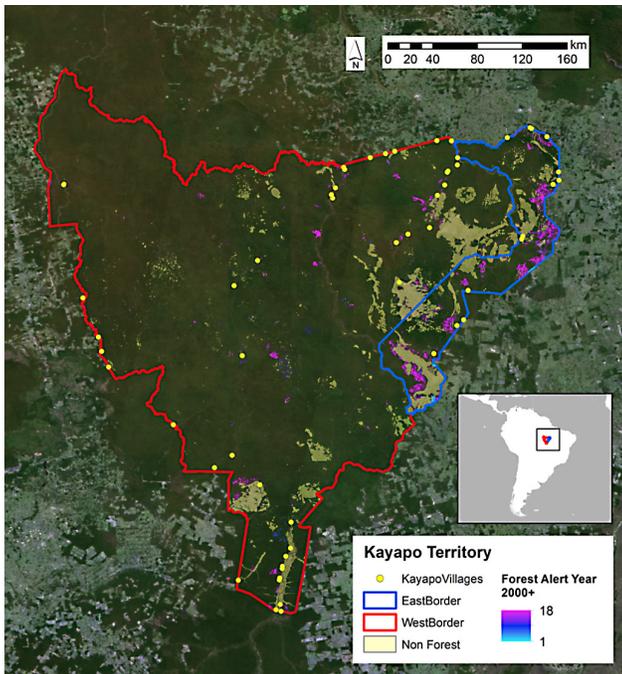


Figure 1. The block of five contiguous Kayapo territories (TI Kayapo, TI Bau, TI Mekragnoti, TI Capoto/Jarina, TI Badjonkore) from space. The non-forest in Kayapo territory is naturally occurring savanna-woodland on plateaus of Brazilian shield rock and rocky outcrops. The locations of communities with more than 50 people are shown. Red outlines 9.4 million hectares of Kayapo territory that is represented by a local Kayapo NGO and receives outside conservation and development investment. Blue outlines 1.2 million hectares of Kayapo territory that receives no NGO investment. Alerts indicate forest cover loss.

Type of action

Rights based conservation of primary tropical forest on an indigenous territory in the Brazilian Amazon.

Groups and organizations involved

Local indigenous NGOs representing the Kayapo: “Associação Floresta Protegida”, “Instituto Raoni” and “Instituto Kabu”; international conservation NGOs “Conservation International” (USA), “Environmental Defense Fund” (USA) and “International Conservation Fund of Canada”.

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Location

The south-eastern Amazon region of Brazil in the states of southern Para and northern Mato Grosso. Figure 1.

IN THE EARLY 2000’S THE KAYAPO PEOPLE OF THE HIGHLY threatened southeastern Amazon of Brazil forged alliances with conservation NGOs to help them build capacity to meet intensifying threats to their territories. Kayapo lands are located in the midst of one of the world’s most intense deforestation zones and agricultural frontiers. Infrastructure mega-projects, mines, intensifying illegal logging and gold-mining, and the proposed weakening of the constitutional rights of indigenous people threatens the forest recovery that Brazil had started to achieve in some areas. The Kayapo, as other Indigenous Amazonians, assert a fundamental interdependence between cultural identity and territory and, therefore, their struggle coincides with the mission of conservation NGOs to preserve biodiversity, natural ecosystems and carbon stocks. Indigenous grounding of culture and identity in territory are based in culturally distinct cosmologies and world views that include animals, plants, and other “natural” phenomena in the domain of culture and society. Indeed, sustainability of indigenous territories cannot be conceived in purely ecological or economic terms; rather there is also a question of the viability and vitality of cultures.

International conservation NGOs have committed long-term with the Kayapo to help them build capacity to protect their lands, constitutional rights and the primary forest ecosystems on which their culture and livelihoods are based. NGO projects combined with in-country governmental and other non-governmental agency support for Kayapo communities have developed scalable resource management and income generation projects with Kayapo communities as well as enabling territorial monitoring and control in the absence of government enforcement of protected areas and indigenous territories. International NGOs have helped Kayapo communities to set up and administer their own local indigenous NGOs that are critical to building capacity to manage their territories sustainably. From space we observe significant correlation between the rate of deforestation and fire events (hot spots) and the presence/absence of NGO investment with Kayapo communities such that more than nine million hectares of primary forest remains reasonably intact where Kayapo communities have local NGO representation and receive outside investment; whereas, 1.2 million hectares of the contiguous Kayapo territories that receives no NGO investment is heavily invaded and degraded (Figure 1).

Impacts of this action on...

Carbon emissions (mitigation)

Kayapo territories protect carbon stocks on 9.4 million hectares of mostly primary forest on the order of one billion tons.

Social and economic factors

The non-timber forests product and ecotourism enterprises being developed successfully by the Kayapo NGOs have great potential to continue expanding, diversifying and generating increasing sustainable benefits not only for Kayapo communities, but also for local townspeople. These enterprises have grown every year and now generate one half a million dollars per year for a population

of 6,000 Kayapo. The alternative to the NGO supported economic development and territorial surveillance programs is destruction by illicit predatory activity (logging, goldmining, land grabbing and ranching) of Kayapo forest ecosystems with all their sustainable development potential gone forever.

Biodiversity and ecosystem resilience

The 10,600,000ha Kayapo block of contiguous, ratified indigenous territories is of particular conservation value because of its huge size and interdigitation of closed canopy primary forest and central Brazilian savanna (cerrado). Most of the area is covered in primary forest. More than 9 million hectares of Kayapo territory

that receives outside support remains reasonably undisturbed as evidenced by healthy population densities of some of the most vulnerable and threatened vertebrate species found in Amazonian forests. Of critical conservation significance, Kayapo territory is likely large enough to allow for the recovery of ecosystem integrity through the regeneration of primary forest tree species, many of which require large intact areas to maintain viable populations. Kayapo lands and the contiguous 2.8 million-ha Xingu Indigenous Park to the south protect more than four hundred kilometers of the Xingu river from degradation by deforestation, pollution and over-fishing. This block of indigenous territory is the last large reservoir of biodiversity and carbon in the southeastern Amazon.

This action is transformational because...

It demonstrates that conservation and development investment with indigenous groups can empower and enable territorial and cultural preservation even in regions of high deforestation and lack of governance. This demonstration of successful large-scale forest protection by an NGO alliance with indigenous people is important because indigenous people of the Brazilian Amazon hold exclusive tenure rights to over 100 million hectares of mostly primary forest in the world's richest forest ecosystem. The same principles of project design with the Kayapo will apply to other indigenous groups: i) equitable benefits sharing, ii) income generation and territorial surveillance projects designed to fit with Kayapo culture and capacity, iii) support to set up and administer local indigenous NGOs, iv) long term outside commitment to subsidize development and administration costs of conservation based enterprise and territorial monitoring and control.

This action could be scaled up through...

...international philanthropy. Ideally, the governance situation in the Brazilian Amazon would improve such that laws would be enforced. Without significant external help and concern, will governance in the Brazilian Amazon improve within the timeframe adequate to save the Amazon forest from further fragmentation? There are already signs that the Amazon is approaching tipping points that could lead to severe ecological changes, and adversely impact regional and global weather patterns. Thus scale-up is essential.

The Kayapo project provides a successful conservation and development model that has resulted in protection of millions of hectares of primary forest in a high deforestation zone. On the Kayapo project, we have found that the sky is the limit as far as sustainable economic development based on non-timber forest products and services and the desire of indigenous people to protect their land and culture. The main limiting factor has been human resources to implement and administer programs as well, in some cases, programmatic funding itself.

Contact / For Further Information

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