Highlights RREP 2023

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Gamir Village gathering

1. In short

In 2022, reNature started exploring the challenge of the Paiter-Surui transitioning to the modern world. With the help of partner Tewá 225, three key pathways for change emerged: 1) empowering local ambassadors, such as regenerative producers, to inspire, demonstrate, and mentor; 2) establishing a pilot farm featuring a multi-stakeholder model, knowledge platform, and capacity building center; and 3) fostering associations to connect producers and entrepreneurs across communities.

Recognizing the need for social collaboration, reNature's approach evolved in the Regenerative Regional Entrepreneurship Program (RREP).

The program holds promise in fostering long-term adoption of regenerative practices through education, technical aid, and financial access. The recent political shift in Brazil reinstates crucial policies for social well-being and environmental preservation, presenting favorable conditions for programs like RREP. Notably, the creation of the Ministry of Indigenous Populations and revitalization of the Amazon Fund signal renewed government support.

The baseline study based on the FAO TAPE methodology was finalized in 2023 and presented to the community. The study involved 50 producers from 2 cooperatives: 27 from Coopsur and 23 from Garah Itxa.

In December 2023, an agreement was reached with Coopsur to provide support for planning, preparing, and coordinating the Brazil nut harvest season. The agreed-upon financial assistance will facilitate the restructuring of Brazil nut operations, which have been on hold since 2022. Additionally, the cooperative intends to utilize the funds as working capital for procuring Brazil nuts from indigenous harvesters. It is anticipated that approximately 30 tons of Brazil nuts will be harvested, benefiting 39 indigenous harvesters.

The further development of RREP reflects a commitment to sustainable development amidst both local challenges and broader political shifts, emphasizing collaboration, adaptation, and respect for indigenous leadership and traditions.

Achievements in 2023

Participants FAO TAPE

50

Focus Groups

3

Participants in Workshops

56

Engaged Producers

39

Who are the True People?

Paiter Suruí youth with genipap body paint

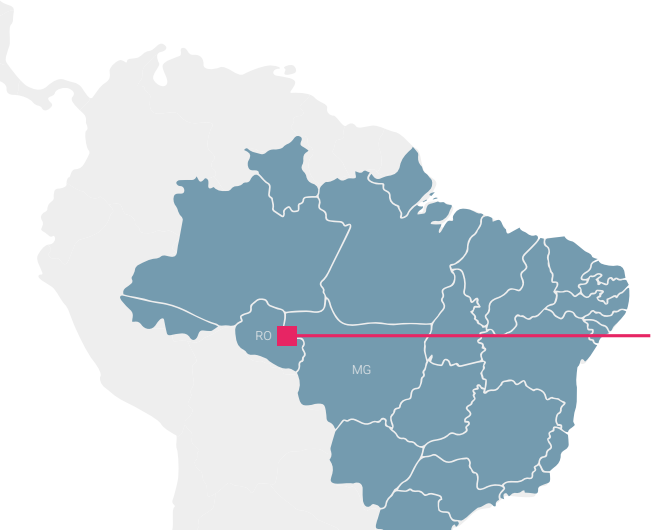
The Paiter, which means “the true people, we ourselves," are also known as the Suruí of Rondônia. They have faced significant societal transformations since their "official" contact in 1969, yet their warrior spirit persists, driving their ongoing struggle for territorial recognition and integrity. Despite challenges such as violence from programs like the federal integration programs in the 80s, governmental corruption, and unauthorized invasions by loggers and miners, the Paiter endeavor to preserve their cultural traditions. Their societal structure is deeply rooted in dualism, where divisions between village and forest, agriculture and hunting, and work and festival are integral, with exchange festivals and work parties serving as pivotal moments of interchange. Linguistically, they belong to the Tupi group and Monde language family.

The Sete de Setembro Indigenous Land, spanning over 248,000 hectares*, lies on the frontier between Rondônia and Mato Grosso, with access facilitated by numbered roads delineating the area's borders. Within the Branco River basin, the land boasts diverse forest coverings and a hot, humid tropical climate with distinct wet and dry seasons.

Elderly woman with traditional facial tattoo

The Sete de Setembro Indigenous Land population is around 1900 individuals residing in thirty villages strategically positioned along the access lines to safeguard against encroachment. Village populations vary, with some housing from a few dozen to hundreds of people.

* 248,000 ha is the size of New York City, Tokyo, and Los Angeles combined.



The Sete de Setembro Indigenous Territory

2. The Layout of the Program

2023, the first year of the project, the focus lay on the implementation of steps 1 and 2 and the planning and engagement of partners for steps 3 to 5. Step 6 will start after completing step 5.

The six steps explained in more detail:

1. **Creating a social basis** of local 'ambassadors 'in the form of regenerative producers, which provide inspiration, show proof of concept, share knowledge, and mentor new generations;
2. **Developing common goals** that link regenerative producers & entrepreneurs across communities;
3. **Designing a mentorship program** to become the anchor of RREP, gathering regenerative producers and youth around a knowledge-sharing platform, a capacity-building center;
4. **Fostering ideas** for a communal regenerative business ecosystem through the realization of multiple entrepreneurial initiatives that aim to monetize regenerative agricultural production, thanks to multi-stakeholder design thinking and collaborative methods;
5. **Translating ideas into business models**, meaning supporting the evolution of interest into investable projects;
6. **Connecting and presenting relevant business models** to potential funders and investors through a systemized investment facility.

3. Building a Stronger Network

The territorial diagnosis showed 33 indigenous organizations in the IT, including 20 associations and four producers' cooperatives. As mentioned in the previous report, the cooperatives are the most vital associative link across the territory. Coopsur was the most engaged cooperative in the first year of the project, actively participating in the design of the community development plan and the baseline study. Coopsur has 22 formal members and 77 other producers who have not been formalized. Garah Itxa was also involved in the project's first year, participating in the baseline study. Garah Itxa has 21 formal members and 60 other producers who have not yet been formalized. Coopsur will be the local partner for implementing the program's next steps, and its members will be the direct beneficiaries of the program.

During the first year of the program, several organizations have been approached, such as Forest Trends, - a non-indigenous third-sector organization with the longest-term relationship with the territory, Conexsus - a third-sector organization that works with institutional strengthening and access to credit for community organizations, such as cooperatives, and SEBRAE - the Brazilian Service for Support of Micro and Small Enterprises.

WHAT THEY SAID

Sobitxem Suruí

28 years,
coordinator of women artisans in Gamir Village

The heart of Paiter Suruí culture lies in our indigenous knowledge, our Tupi Mondé language, and our traditions —they define who we are. Women play a crucial role in our village's economic resilience through our crafts-manship, which we carry out with care and tenderness.

The challenge we face is accessing markets for our handmade products. We need support to establish sales channels and create our brands so our crafts can reach people worldwide.

4. Challenging Pathways to Regenerative Economy

The territorial diagnosis of the Sete de Setembro Indigenous Territory also offers valuable insights into the social, economic, and environmental dimensions crucial for transitioning to a regenerative economy among the Paiter-Suruí people. The analysis reveals a complex landscape characterized by strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities that influence the path toward sustainability and resilience.

Strengths within the Community

There is a cultural bias towards entrepreneurship, a strong tradition of agricultural activities, particularly in coffee, banana, cocoa, and Brazil nuts production, and a growing awareness of the importance of forest conservation. Additionally, some members have embraced regenerative practices, showing a willingness to adapt.

Persistent Weaknesses

However, significant weaknesses include a lack of knowledge about sustainable production methods among many producers, limited access to resources and processing machines hindering scalability and quality improvement, and dependence on external technical assistance for regenerative initiatives. Furthermore, internal conflicts and external threats from illegal activities such as logging, mining, and land invasion pose substantial challenges to community cohesion and environmental preservation.

Promising Opportunities

Despite these challenges, there are promising opportunities for progress. Producers' cooperatives present a platform for strengthening social cohesion and knowledge-sharing, enhancing cooperative maturity, promoting inter-cooperation, and attracting new members. Moreover, existing regenerative producers can serve as catalysts for spreading knowledge and best practices, while targeted technical assistance and market development efforts can further elevate product quality and value.

Community Empowerment

In navigating these opportunities, it is essential to prioritize community empowerment and self-determination, ensuring that initiatives are led by and benefit the Paiter-Suruí themselves. Collaborative partnerships between indigenous organizations, governmental agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders can provide critical support in realizing these objectives.
Ultimately, by leveraging strengths, addressing weaknesses, mitigating threats, and seizing opportunities, the Paiter-Suruí community can chart a sustainable path toward a regenerative economy that respects their cultural heritage, fosters environmental stewardship, and enhances socio-economic well-being for future generations.

FAO TAPE: Measuring Dimensions of Sustainability

The Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation (TAPE) is an innovative framework for consolidating global evidence on how agroecology supports the transformation to more sustainable agricultural and food systems.

TAPE can assess all production systems and agricultural sub-sectors: crop and livestock production, aquaculture, fisheries, and forestry. The tool is adaptable to local contexts and languages. It is flexible enough to be complemented with any other methodology or indicators to inform additional dimensions of sustainability not covered by the core criteria or to provide deeper analyses on a specific topic. It is designed to remain simple, requires minimum data collection, and covers different levels or assessment steps.

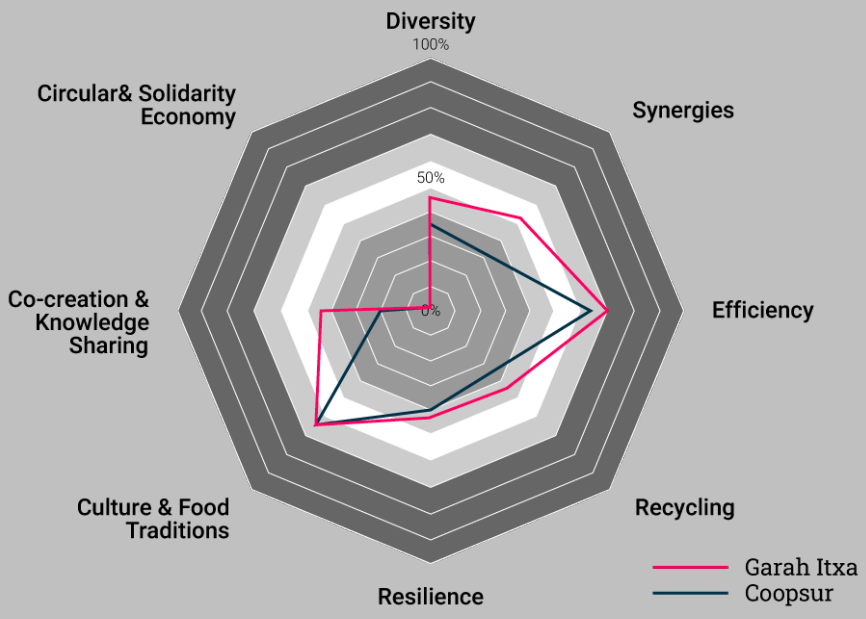


Figure 1: CAET scores for each of the 8 'elements of Agroecology' for two indigenous producers cooperatives, Coopsur and Garaht Itxa.

Preparing the Brazil Nuts for storage

5. Facing a Harsh Reality

In the first year, agroecological performance was initially assessed within the territory using the FAO's Tool for Agro-ecology Performance Evaluation (TAPE). This involved completing Step 1 of the FAO TAPE assessment, which evaluates the Agro-ecological Transition Level (CAET) score based on ten key elements of agro-ecology.

Participant Demographics and Comparison

Fifty indigenous producers participated in the baseline study, with 27 associated with Coopsur and 23 with Garah Itxa cooperatives, enabling a comprehensive comparison of their productive systems. The resulting CAET scores, depicted in Figure 1, revealed that while both cooperatives predominantly employ conventional practices, Garah Itxa exhibits a higher degree of sustainability, particularly in Efficiency, attributed partly to financial constraints rather than environmental awareness.

Primary Commercial Crops

The assessment also identified coffee, banana, cocoa, and Brazil nut as the primary commercial crops cultivated by indigenous farmers, with coffee and banana being prevalent among over 90% of producers in both cooperatives.

Income Insights

Given the significance of establishing enduring relationships in Paiter-Suruí culture, Step 2 of the TAPE methodology, which delves into quantitative inquiries regarding revenue, was deferred. However, interviews with cooperative presidents shed light on crop production quantities and associated income. Coopsur reported an average monthly income of 370 BRL from coffee and 350 BRL from bananas, while Garah Itxa reported 320 BRL from coffee and 1,400 BRL from bananas. For context, Brazil's minimum wage stands at 1,320 BRL/month, with Bolsa Família, a federal income distribution program for low-income families, providing 600 BRL monthly.

WHAT THEY SAID

Bruno Suruí (35)

Rural producer

My biggest worries are all about outsiders messing with our community. Whether it's loggers, miners, or farmers leasing our land, it's a big problem. We need better ways to keep an eye on things, like using satellites and drones. That way, we can report any trouble to the authorities and protect our territory.

My biggest wish? It's pretty simple. I just want us all to live well. I want to wake up knowing we have enough to eat and our kids aren't hungry. I want our community to thrive without relying on handouts. A good life for everyone, with no one going hungry and everyone having a decent place to call home.

6. The 2023 Achievements in Bullet Points

- The territorial diagnosis was finalized and presented to the community.
- More than 50 Paiter-Suruí people in Gamir village, the most populous one in the territory, were informed about the project, its objectives, and its steps on two workshops and three focus groups; women, youth, and producers.
- The leadership of the territory is aware and engaged with the project: the general cacique, the general vice-cacique and president of Coopsur, and the president of Garah Itxa.
- The baseline study based on the FAO TAPE methodology was finalized and presented to the community. The study involved 50 producers from two cooperatives: 27 from Coopsur and 23 from Garah Itxa.
- The Community Development Plan of Gamir Village was finalized.
- Planning the program's next steps and mobilizing potential external partners for implementation.
- The agreement was signed with Coopsur for the organization of the Brazil Nut harvesting and strengthening of the organizational maturity of the cooperative. Thirty-nine indigenous people are expected to benefit from this activity.

Community Meeting

7. A Strategic Roadmap for the Community

The Community Development Plan aims to ensure the quality of life by providing access to rights and decent income from their work, whether it be productive or artisanal while preserving the natural environment. This overarching objective is pursued by implementing four intervention axes, each containing specific objectives and strategic actions to achieve the community's vision.

Developing the plan involved engaging with various segments of the community, including women, young people, and rural producers linked to Coopsur, to identify common aspirations and dreams. These aspirations were then translated into tangible goals and actions focusing on the short-term future, spanning a 2-year horizon.

Additionally, the plan considers the Territorial Diagnosis of the Sete de Setembro territory, providing data that enables residents to prioritize activities aligned with their collective vision and aspirations.

While it's acknowledged that the program may not fully cover all aspects of the community plan, there are recognized synergies between the two initiatives, suggesting potential avenues for collaboration and support.

Overall, the Community Development Plan serves as a strategic roadmap for the community of Gamir Village, guiding their efforts towards sustainable development that balances economic prosperity with environmental conservation and social well-being.

Capacity Building: 164 members were trained on regenerative agriculture practices, and the model farms served as a platform for knowledge exchange, empowering various groups to implement sustainable agricultural approaches and improve their livelihoods.

Figure 2: Community Development Plan of the Gamir Village.

8. Working Capital, Power to the People

In December 2023, an agreement was reached with Coopsur to provide support for planning, preparing, and coordinating the Brazil nut harvest season. The agreed-upon financial assistance will facilitate the restructuring of Brazil nut operations, which have been on hold since 2022. Additionally, the cooperative intends to utilize the funds as working capital to procure Brazilian nuts from indigenous harvesters. It is anticipated that approximately 30 tons of Brazil nuts will be harvested, benefiting 39 indigenous harvesters. Each producer is projected to yield an average of 769 kg of Brazil nuts and receive fair compensation for their sales, aiming to ensure equitable returns. The cooperative's board members are proposing a strategy to purchase nuts from indigenous producers at fair prices during harvest (from January to May) and sell them directly to a nut processor, bypassing intermediaries when prices typically rise. Negotiations are underway with a local Brazil nut processor to establish an innovative business arrangement where Coopsur acts as both a supplier and sales partner, potentially maximizing returns for all involved parties.

Harvesting Brazil Nuts in the forest

Capital as Catalyzer

An important innovation in the program is transferring non-refundable working capital to Coopsur to allow them to structure the Brazil Nut harvesting. Typically, working capital is provided by credit organizations that expect a return on their investment. With the model that reNature is implementing with Coopsur, the cooperative can purchase Brazil nuts from indigenous harvesters at a fair price, preventing them from selling them to middlemen. It will market the nuts for nut processors at a better price. Coopsur can invest in cooperative development and other supply chains (such as coffee) with the Brazil nuts sales revenue. During the first quarter of 2024, Coopsur must present an investment plan for the Brazil nut revenue. Having enough resources to structure the Brazil nut harvest will allow Coopsur to reestablish trust with its members and partners.

9. Lessons Learned

The lessons learned from the territorial diagnosis and the recommendations for implementing the Regenerative Regional Entrepreneurship Program offer valuable insights into working effectively with the Paiter-Suruí people and similar indigenous communities. Here's a summary of the key takeaways:

- Cultural sensitivity is paramount, emphasizing the importance of implementing free, prior informed consent (FPIC) and respecting the hierarchical governance structure.
- Regenerative practices should focus on environmental benefits and increasing community income, prioritizing initiatives with short-term financial returns and supporting existing value chains.
- Cooperatives play a central role in fragmented territories, necessitating their strengthening and promotion of inter-cooperation to mitigate potential conflicts.
- Training advanced producers as multipliers can enhance dissemination of good practices within the community.
- Alignment with community leadership and constant monitoring are necessary to ensure inclusivity and respect for all stakeholders.
- Given educational gaps and hierarchical cultures, personal assistance and capacity building are crucial, extending training beyond leadership to all members.
- Promoting exchanges with successful initiatives outside the territory can demonstrate the economic potential of regenerative practices.
- Sustained presence and face-to-face interactions are essential due to language and educational gaps, requiring organizations to provide personalized assistance and support.

Implementing these lessons and recommendations can contribute to the success and sustainability of programs like RREP and foster positive relationships with indigenous communities while promoting regenerative practices and economic development.

10.Changes, Challenges, and Opportunities

Tewá 225's ethnographic approach has been pivotal in reNature's collaboration with the Paiter-Suruí community, notably Gamir Village and Coopsur. This method deepened our understanding of Paiter-Suruí culture and gained crucial leadership support—a foundational step for building trust.

However, Coopsur must exhibit a higher maturity level, with decision-making centralized around its president, who holds significant political influence. Weak accountability and decision mechanisms pose risks to project implementation. Thus, hiring a neutral technical advisor with experience in the territory becomes imperative. This advisor would focus on strengthening Coopsur's internal processes, including management, financial control, and accountability while facilitating procurement from indigenous producers and managing revenue from Brazil nut sales. Conexsus is identified as a suitable organization for this role.

Though Coopsur is the primary beneficiary, the program aims to involve at least one more cooperative, such as Garah Itxa, to diversify impact and validate inter-cooperation initiatives.

WHAT THEY SAID

Abrão Palabiway Suruí

25 year
administrative director of Coopsur,
coffee and banana farmer

I envision my future as one of the representatives of the village, developing plans and projects for the well-being of our community. The most important element of the Paiter Suruí culture is our language. It defines our identity as "real people." Preserving our language is crucial because we lose our identity without it.

Another threat to our community, in my view, is individualism, where people prioritize their interests without considering the collective. To prevent this, we must work together through organizations like cooperatives, planning and executing projects for the community's benefit.

The women of Gamir village

Working on Replication

The ultimate goal of the Regenerative Regional Entrepreneurship Program is to create a globally replicable approach for creating local ecosystems of regenerative entrepreneurship. Due to the innovative nature of the approach, we have started to test assumptions and gain valuable insights into the practicalities of setting up a strategy with the beneficiaries at the center of ideation and decision-making.

The methodology developed in this phase–social & production context analysis, stakeholder analysis to determine key target groups, and identifying key challenges and opportunities for RREP– is easily transferable to other contexts.

This second phase will help clarify the required focus and capacities of the involved parties. A core objective of the program is to drive the adoption of regenerative practices in the field by making farming attractive and economically sustainable for current & coming generations. However, the question arising from this first exploration is the required investment into the social structures and professionalization in general before regenerative agriculture can be discussed, drawing focus away from the original objective and creating a more substantial reliance on external partners.

Special Thanks to the Team

The project was greatly carried by many people who gave their love, dedication and knowledge to make it a success.

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