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The Apaporis river, a tributary of the Caquetá

An informal working group was set-up with non-government and government members, and has enabled an unprecedented exchange of information about the Caquetá-Japurá River basin. This includes analysis of the main local and regional dynamics, coordination of agendas at the local level in the lower Colombian side, and the development of strategic actions to prevent deforestation and the exploitation of natural resources.

The group has become a key player for a wider conservation initiative - Amazon Regional Articulation (ARA), facilitated by AVINA foundation, working for a shared vision and approach to climate change and the Amazon. Within the framework of ARA, the working group is looking for economic alternatives to support the standing forest of the Caquetá-Japurá River basin and its environmental goods and services.

The baseline study highlighted the complexity of the higher part of the Caquetá-Japurá River basin and the need to identify key actors, community initiatives and public policies. Around 17% of the Caquetá-Japurá River basin is located in the Andes and foothills, where the historical processes of colonization, violence and drug-trafficking have created a context that leads to deforestation.

Strategies already identified by the working group as alternative sources of income for the population are: i) REDD pilot projects with inhabitants near to protected areas (Doña Juana,

Indi Wasi, Guácharos, Puracé and Orito), for which the Climate Change division of the Ministry for the Environment is seeking finance; ii) the creation of Andes-Amazon biological corridors, through mechanisms that favour reforestation and natural forest conservation (such as Forestry Incentive Certificates, Green Markets, Clean Development Mechanisms); iii) encouragement and advice for community initiatives aimed at eco-tourism, food security, the production and marketing of non-forest timber products, low-impact technology, among others.

Meanwhile strategic actions for conservation in the middle and lower Caquetá River, and to prevent the advance of deforestation from the foothills, are being achieved through working with the National Parks Administration, of the Ministry for Environment.

Firstly, in the lower Apaporis River, one of the main tributaries, the Yaigojé Apaporis indigenous resguardo is being threatened by gold mining, by the Canadian company Cosigo Resources. Of particular concern are the La Libertad rapids, considered an extremely sacred site by the ethnic groups - Tanimuka, Yucuna, Matapí, Letuama, Makuna, Yuhup, Barasano, Itana, Eduria and Tatuyo – of this region. According to their cosmivision La Libertad is the origin of thought and of life. The gold that is found there is the energy that gives life, and taking the gold is like “turning off the sun”. Gold mining within indigenous territory has occurred because the subsoil of indigenous

resguardos in Colombia belong to the nation. In response,

Gaia Amazonas has supported the local indigenous organization, the Association of Traditional Authorities of the Yaigojé Apporis (ACIYA), to approach the National Parks Administration and request that a protected area is superimposed over the resguardo. This would cover 12,197 km², as a conservation, a measure that would conserve the area and facilitate the survival of the indigenous people. An agreement has been made with ACIYA for the necessary process to establish the protected area, with technical support from Gaia Amazonas. The combined expansion of the resguardos and Chiribiquete will give effective protection to 174,755 km² (83%) of the Caquetá River basin in Colombia.

Another example is with the Forestry Reserve lands around Chiribiquete National Natural Park. The Forestry Reserve in the Colombian Amazon cannot guarantee conservation of the forest and its natural resources, and already 14% (61,073 km²) has been lost to colonization in the foothills – which highlights the need to protect the Caquetá River basin through more solid organisations. Local indigenous organisations have requested that the resguardos of Villazul and Miritia Paraná are extended by a further 4,200 km². Meanwhile Gaia Amazonas and the National Parks Administration are pushing for an extension to the Chiribiquete National Natural Park by an additional 12,800 km², to provide a total coverage of 52,800 km².



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This initiative for the conservation and shared management of the Caquetá-Japurá River basin is a delicate process but needs to move ahead swiftly if it is to take an effective stance against the ever-increasing demand on natural resources and pressure on Colombia’s standing forest.