

ACTIVITY REPORT

Activity:	Land Rights Gathering in Apetina
Financed by:	OAS, Sustainable Development and Biocultural Conservation in the Brazil-Border Region
Focal group:	Indigenous communities of South-Eastern Suriname, from the village of Apetina, Kwamalasamutu, Wanapan, Amatopo, Sipaliwini, Kawemhakan, Curuni, Alalapadu and Tepu
Execution:	The Amazon Conservation Team (ACT), Virginia, USA; President: Mark Plotkin; ACT Suriname Program Manager: Gwendolyn Emanuels Counterparts: the Trio Indigenous communities
Date:	May 28-30 th , 2005

OBJECTIVE

The main objective was to 1) built capacity on land rights issue in Suriname, 2) discuss position of the indigenous communities of South Suriname in land rights issues and 3) compile a collaborative action plan on how to go move ahead with land rights with the Government and other stakeholders.

COORDINATION

Activities were coordinated by the ACT Suriname Culture Coordinator Beverly de Vries and Program Director Gwendolyn Emanuels.

PARTICIPANTS

Land Rights Gathering Attendants

Name	Role or position	Village
James	Translator	Kwamala
Pikoemi	Tribal head	Tepu
Ewka	Tribal head	Sipaliwini
Wakuruma	Kapitein	Kwamala
Alapate	Kapitein	Wanapan
Jan	Basje	Wanapan
Moses	Hoofd-Kapitein	Tepu
Shedde	Kapitein	Alalaparu
Panesi	Kapitein	Amotopo
Pepu	Hoofd-Kapitein	Amotopo - Lucie
Kenke	Kapitein	Kuruni
Meester Stanley	Minute taker	Kwamala
Sintaman	Kapitein	Lawa Kawemhaken
Nuahe	Hoofd-Kapitein	Apetina
Ainas	Kapitein	Apetina

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Tuesday June 28th 2005

15:00 -16:30 Welcome: songs, speeches & introductions
(James made a quick speech about Granman Asongo's absence and Gwen about the purpose of the gathering).

- 16.30-17.00 Consultant Marieke Heemskerk her presentation:
 “San na grondrechten?” (What are land rights?)
 “Fa den grondrechten be seti kon na ini Sranan?” (How are land rights organized in Suriname?)
 “San ede leti tapu gron pricipali?” (Why are land rights important?)
 “San ede lanti no be meki unu kisi leti tapu gron” (Why do Indians do not have title on their lands in Suriname?)
- 17.00 The schedule for the next day’s meeting was explained to all participants.

Wednesday June 29th 2005

9:00 – 11:00 Discussion on land use and territory: What do you use land for? How much land do you need? What other natural resources do you need?
 One by one, speakers came to the front to address those assembled. They told of the history of the land and where their ancestors had been. In 1980 they had held a meeting in which the elders told them of the different areas in the region they had all come from.

Granman Nuahe from the Wayana tribe explained that they needed land for building materials, agriculture (in which they need large pieces of land due to shifting cultivation), looking after their children’s interest. He also explained that in their culture it is important to be able to visit family across country borders.

Pepu from Lucie/Amatopo gave an overview of the history of Indians in Suriname: how they have been driven out of Paramaribo to Sanuwaka, into smaller villages in South Suriname. He stressed that land rights so that their kids are not driven away out of their ancestral lands. He also claimed that since 2000 until now they’ve tried to get land rights with no success. He also stressed that the army should return for surveillance in South Suriname.

Alapate from Wanapan explains the need for maps and stressed that due to population growth granting land rights is becoming more important.

Ewka of Sipaliwini told us *“where there are forests, that’s where we want land”* and went on to ask *“Why does the government not give us the land where we are? Why don’t they protect us from companies that want to take our land and resources? They protect animals and forests [referring to the Central Suriname Nature Reserve] but not us.”*

Moses of Tepu talked about the unwritten rules that guide the Indians in land use. The rules against fishing or hunting certain animals at certain times of year as well as plants they use. He likened these to the rules that the Nature Conservation Division have.

- 11.00 - 11.30 Consultant Marieke Heemskerk presented the different types of land rights (communal/individual and underground/above ground and written/verbally transmitted rights) with simple drawing on the flip chart.
- 11.30-12.00 Gwendolyn Emanuels explained the role of large companies in the South Suriname region. Why are they extracting natural resources without making good

deals? Why don't Surinamers do not get all the information? What can be the potential problems with large logging/mining companies? (large companies-large problems). Why do we have to be informed and think long term?

After the presentation both Alepate and Panini stated that they would protect the land by their death if they had to. They were not sufficiently informed on the plans in their region, although Basja Jan had visited NIMOS (National Environment Institute) to obtain information about the ecological consequences of mining in their region.

14.00

In the afternoon we continued with discussing the plan of action for land rights and how ACT can assist the communities.

Pikumi of Tepu, referring to the information presented by Marieke and Gwen said, *"without ACT we wouldn't have known any of this, without ACT we would be dumb... I want money just as badly as the Government does but it's not worth destroying our lands and forests"*.

Ainas of Apetina asked ACT for help in securing land rights and went on to tell us, *"L.B.B. came here to tell us how to use the forests properly. We asked them if it was us who destroyed the forests and villages that were located where the Brokopondo Lake now stands. We know how to take care of our forests"*.

Living at the Kuruni airstrip in an area directly affected by the Suralco dam project, Kenke stated *"the Government planned this without us. They think we're just like wild animals... but we're people not pakiras(wild animals)... the company will have to kill me first before I witness them destroy my land"*.

From nearby Wanapan (Wonotobo Falls), Basja Jan told us that he still wants to be able to cross freely, without passport, over the border into Guyana. He asked that this not change once they have land rights. He asked ACT to help them make a more up-to-date map of the area and asked for another land rights meeting to discuss this matter further.

Trio chief Asongo, who couldn't be present because of his sick wife, send a note stating that they have a clear need for information and guidance through the land rights process. He stated that he feels that ACT helps in issues in which the Government should have played a role. He stressed that *"every inhabitant of Suriname should have to right to basic life (constitution), also the Indians who use land to provide for their basic needs"*

Gwendolyn Emanuels and Beverly de Vries presented two questions for the group to consider.

- Do they want collective or individual rights to land?
- Could they appoint 3 people to represent them in talks with the government and with companies such as Suralco? These three would receive additional training and capacity building from ACT. They would be responsible for keeping the indigenous communities informed and involved.

The leaders all gathered that evening to discuss the issues amongst themselves.

Thursday June 30th 2005

8:30 – 9:00 Gwendolyn Emanuels gave a wrap-up speech thanking those that attended and also those who helped. Several leaders spoke as well. Regarding the question of representatives, the leaders wanted to consult with Granman Asongo before making a decision. They promised to carry what they had learned back to their communities and consult them for further action.

Sintaman of Kawemhakan gave a touching closing speech “*the ground is as mother earth so we should take care of it as your own family*”. He also stressed that he sensed that before outsiders were exchanging goods, but now they are helping the Indians.

PHOTOANNEX



Marieke presenting “What are land rights”



Discussion about land use



Kapitein Ewka making statements



Gwen presenting on “Land use and large companies”



Krutu for evaluation of the gathering



Village heads of South Suriname together



Participants of land rights gathering with Apetina- and ACT team

