



Report

# **Alto Purús National Park, the cradle of the mahogany of our Amazon rainforest**

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*View of the native communities from the river*  
Photographs: Susana Parra/APECO

Figures can help us understand the significance of the Amazon region when analyzing it in terms of proportion. This region is home to one in ten species of the planet. It accounts for about one fifth of the water that reaches the oceans. Its trees and soils –the so-called biomass– capture almost ten times the world’s carbon dioxide emissions, which is essential to keep the balance of the global temperature. Its conservation is vital to understand and deal with the challenges of climate change.

In this scenario, Alto Purús National Park—located between Ucayali and Madre de Dios— turns out to be a real icon of biodiversity and Peruvian culture to the world. There, eleven indigenous villages settled in 176 native communities, in the zone of influence of the protected natural area, depend directly on a forest that represents food, home, and pharmacy. “Local populations live on the resources from the forest. The Park is guaranteeing that this is maintained

over time,” says biologist Arsenio Calle, director of Alto Purús National Park. Purús Communal Reserve and EcoPurús contribute to this task with a strategy of the Peruvian State that seeks, besides the protection of this ecosystem, to promote the sustainable development of its populations.

### **The conservation strategy**

Facing climate change, while adapting ourselves to it, implies appreciating the value of the ecosystem services that are provided by nature. In this respect, the

*“The Peruvian State that seeks, besides the protection of this ecosystem, to promote the sustainable development of its populations”*

sustainable development requires a boost, more value, and recognition to the native populations that preserve forests like Purús, which has a conservation strategy, implemented by the State and based

on complementary relations between Alto Purús National Park, Purús Communal Reserve, and EcoPurús.

While, in the National Park, situated in the high area of Purús, the species reproduce themselves, in

the Communal Reserve, located in a lower area, species can be hunted, fished, or employed in a sustainable manner for the benefit of the local indigenous communities. In accordance to these ideas of Amazonian development, EcoPurús plays an essential role. This is a local indigenous organization that co-manages the Purús Communal Reserve together with the Peruvian State.

This interesting work of inclusion recognizes excellent opportunities for consensual development in the wisdom and ancient usage of our Amazonian culture. Indigenous peoples have created over time a sustainable technology for the use of their resources. “In Purús, within its range of influence, different Amazonian indigenous peoples that live there have contributed with their presence to the conservation of this exceptional area, emphasizes the biologist Calle. This could imply direct benefits from lucrative and sustainable activities.

The sale of mahogany seeds is an example of inclusive business. “In Peru, the only institution capable of selling mahogany seeds from natural seedbed stands, without cutting down trees and having high germinating potential, is EcoPurús”, affirms Rafael Pino, director of Purús Communal Reserve. The deal is to commercialize seeds that ensure, thanks to the treatment and the harvest





*Indigenous person of the Sharanahua ethnic group of the native community of Bufe. The feather Crown is a sign of power and beauty among the indigenous peoples of the Amazon.*

Photographs: Susana Parra/APECO





*Coconuts as a sign of the diversity that communities have.*

Photographs: Susana Parra/APECO





process, excellent mahogany species, which could reforest other zones that can be part of a legal wood industry undergoing the proper processes of environmental protection and conservation.

This is a positive twist in a commercial ecosystem that has caused mahogany to become the principal endangered timber tree in Peru. It is estimated that each felled tree harms other 28 and destroys around 1,450 m<sup>2</sup> of land. In addition to this destructive chain, in their search, loggers open paths in virgin jungles, devastate forests, and impose the migration of settlers. This brings about disruption of ecological cycles and pressure on ecosystems with new crops. The so-called land use change is destroying all the Amazon forests.

EcoPurús currently sells its seeds to different reforestation companies, generating a direct economic benefit for native communities. Nevertheless, the smuggling of mahogany seeds, which, even when coming from Purús do not have the EcoPurús seal, is a latent risk. It is the result of local opportunism that can provoke the costs of these seeds to drop significantly, up to a third of their real value, due to the lack of investment in the care of the collection or in the treatment of the seeds that ensure the quality of the product.



## Revenues, in global terms

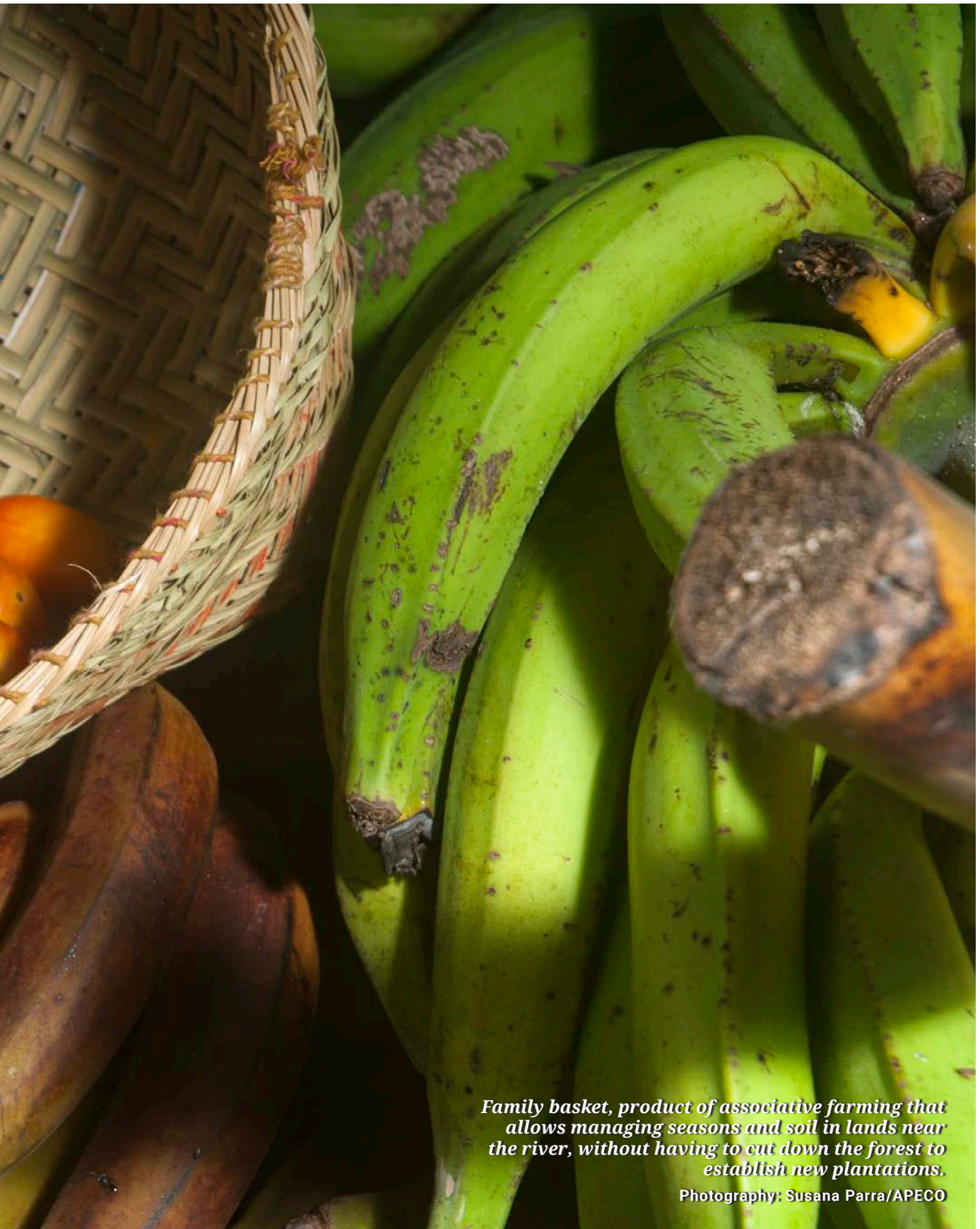
The United Nations has announced a climate crisis as consequence of greenhouse gas emissions that have led us to face the four hottest years in a row in history, according to a report by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in September 2019. We are close to what scientists call an unacceptable risk to life: water crisis, loss of soil for agriculture, rupture of the sowing and harvesting cycles that can cause risks in food security. Overall, weather-related disasters and extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and cost the global economy \$ 520 trillion annually, pushing millions of people into poverty.

Astronomical figures place more emphasis on the role of the Amazon rainforest in the face of global emergencies: flying rivers or air masses filled with water vapor, formed in the Amazon rainforest and influencing rainfall from Brazil to Chile, are conducive to their agricultural activity. Trees of more than ten meters in diameter can produce 300 liters of water a day, a guarantee before the decrease of snow-capped mountains. The Amazon rainforest is the most biodiverse space on the planet that ensures the sustainability of all life forms in the event of possible climatic accidents; not to mention that it is a natural laboratory providing, since 1999, more than two thousand new species to science.

In Purús, perhaps the best-conserved rainforest in the entire Amazon,







*Family basket, product of associative farming that allows managing seasons and soil in lands near the river, without having to cut down the forest to establish new plantations.*

Photography: Susana Parra/APECO





*Grau native community having a family breakfast*

Photography: Susana Parra/APECO





home to the blue-headed macaw and other emblematic species at risk of extinction, the coexistence between humankind and the forest allows us to trace progress in terms of family, “forests received from parents must remain well-preserved for grandchildren.” Achieving this implies giving a twist to the laws of financial value that, so far, have given away hundreds of trees that guarantee water, habitat, and carbon sequestration for the benefit of humanity, in return for luxurious furniture and decorations.

Illegal logging, controlled as much as possible since the creation of Alto Purús National Park, has been a drag on the survival of these forests. The violence associated to this activity - killing, slavery, prostitution- shakes the very foundations of civilization, but it is justified in the grounds of the “red gold” rush: the trade in mahogany wood. And, in these forests, the richest population of mahogany in Peru is found.

Alto Purús National Park, as a natural area protected by the State, is Peru’s natural heritage. Purús Communal Reserve, as home to diverse native Amazonian cultures, is cultural heritage of a diverse nation. Purús forests represent a chance for the development of citizens, who have the right and opportunity to mold their civic, professional, and technical training into ancestral knowledge, which needs to be rescued and put into practice in times of climate change and technological innovation. Such privileged education and training constitute a benefit that few countries in the world can count on.