

Indigenous Communities of Chiquitanía, affected by forest fires, are strengthened

Santa Cruz, October 2020.- In 2019, more than 1,9 million hectares of the Chiquitano Dry Forest were affected by fires, risking the health and home of hundreds of families, who lost their livelihoods. Many indigenous communities in the Monte Verde Territory live from the timber and non-timber resources provided by the forest.

Due to this emergency, the Forest Fire Emergency Program was activated since September 2019. Together, WWF and APCOB implement actions to restore the livelihoods of indigenous communities and recover natural places that were lost by forest fires.

Clean water for affected families

The drought in the Chiquitanía area, which in recent years has been more intense and lasted longer, is one of the causes of forest fires. *“During the 2019 emergency, one of the problems in the area was the lack of access to drinking water. The families not only did not have this resource to deal with the fire, but they were unable to supply their own consumption. The little water left in the wells or in streams, was contaminated by the ashes. That is why it was a priority to ensure that families have this resource”,* says María del Carmen Carreras, coordinator of this project.

The Río Blanco community was one of the beneficiaries with the drilling of a water well that supplies clean water for 30 families in the community. In the following months, wells will be drilled in other communities affected by fires and drought. Also, resources were destined to fight the drought through the construction of “atajados”, artificial hollow in the ground to ensure the storage of rainwater in the communities of Río Blanco, San Pablo Norte and Nokoborema. The summer rains will allow this storage to ensure water for livestock, poultry and will facilitate the production of seedlings in forest nurseries that are implemented in the communities.

Restoring the production of natural oils

Women from the communities of the Monte Verde Territory in Chiquitanía have been making artisan cosmetic products for several years - ointments, soaps, shampoos, among others - from the natural oils of fruits of the forest such as cusi and motacú that are harvested, and the extraction of the oleoresin from the copaibo tree, ensuring in all cases that the trees' species keep on standing and continue in the forest, providing the ecosystem services that characterized them.

The forest fires affected the *copaibo* populations because of their fragility in the face of fire, affecting the source of raw material that the women's producer associations need to make their products.

In immediate response, WWF and APCOB support producer associations in the restoration of affected areas - through the construction of nurseries for the production of seedlings of native species, mainly *copaibo*, facilitating access and transport conditions, in addition to offer equipment to improve the production of natural oils. In the marketing area, technical assistance has been initiated for the development of participatory bio-business plans to strengthen their productive initiatives.



Recently, the Association of Women Producers “Pioneras” of the Río Blanco community, inaugurated its laboratory for the processing of products based on natural oils of *cusi* and *copaibo*. The infrastructure, implemented with the support of WWF-Bolivia, APCOB and a community counterpart, has three areas: laboratory area, meeting room and product processing area.

“With the construction of their laboratory, the women of the community demonstrate that despite the fires and the damage they suffered, they are still committed to moving forward, working for the well-being of their family and especially the conservation of the forest in which inhabit” mentioned representatives from APCOB. The association and its members feel the support, *“We are very proud to open the door of our laboratory to be able to work and generate economic resources to help with the needs that exist in our homes,”* said Polonia Supepi, president of the women's association of the community.

Equipment and training for fighting forest fires

Men and women from five indigenous communities in the Monte Verde Territory were equipped with materials and tools to react to the forest fires. The community brigades were trained to manage forest fires in the community, protecting integrity and managing risks.

In 2020, before the occurrence of new fires, the community crews have acted applying knowledge for an effective response, using tools and equipment such as mini cisterns and water packs in the fire emergency.