Tackling gender as a core programmatic component: SRJS best practices in the Guianas

One of the main focus of the Shared Resources, Joint Solutions (SRJS) programme has been improving the enabling environment, gender responsiveness and inclusiveness. This required civil societies to maintain or increase their operational space, advocating for changes in policies, behaviours and practices and strengthened actions for gender and inclusiveness. A critical aspect is to increase the participation of vulnerable groups, civil societies and communities in natural resource and environment governance and decision-making processes.

However, when the SRJS programme started implementation in 2017, little or no work had been done to link gender and social inclusion with environment and natural resources issues. Conversations around gender and gender-responsive actions were non-existent and not included in the narrative in Guyana or Suriname. To address this gap, WWF Guianas, Projekta and the IUCN Global Gender Office designed and fostered different tools and approaches, using a gender and social inclusion lens, grounded in the fundamental and cross-cutting human rights-based approach.

The programme created the space for environment and natural resources practitioners to start the conversation on gender and social inclusion, in particular understanding the differentiated relationship men and women have with their environment and how they access, use and manage resources. This sets out the basis for greater participation in environment and natural resources governance and decision-making processes in Guyana and Suriname.

In both countries, initiatives within these sectors intersect society at varying levels, especially at community scale. Recognising the differing priorities for men and women and their relationship with nature, it was critical that initiatives involve and benefit people since they have different needs and use for natural resources. And these roles mean each group will influence governance processes, including conservation outcomes in a variety of ways. The approaches implemented during the SRJS programme specifically targeted the differing roles of men and women, including those most vulnerable to generate a shift in power balance to strengthen conservation outcomes.

From the programme’s inception until its last phases in 2020, the gender component of SRJS has been fully integrated into the work of WWF Guianas and executed jointly with Cuso International and IUCN Global Gender Office, in Guyana and Projecta in Suriname. The human rights-based approach emerged as the key platform to centre the gender and inclusiveness component. The gender responsive tools and approaches applied across the Guianas programme were tailored to the specific needs of the SRJS partners and the country (Guyana and Suriname).
The importance of Fresh Water Education
A story by Benita Davis

Water is essential for life and in its various forms’ accounts for more than 70% of the entire earth’s surface. However, only a small percentage of the available water resource can be readily used for drinking and sanitation purposes. Hence, it is imperative to preserve our freshwater resources as they are crucial to sustain life and safeguard ecosystems.

In May 2019, Policy Forum Guyana (PFG) responded to this challenge under its Freshwater Protection Component of the SRJS Programme with the overall goal of increasing rivers protection and—by extension—the security of Guyana’s freshwater resources. The school-based element of this component aimed to increase understanding of these fragile systems among students, empowering young people within communities to care for their freshwater environment. In collaboration with the National Centre for Educational Research Development (NCERD), Policy Forum Guyana piloted a module which harmonized with the science curriculum of Primary Schools in Guyana and comprised both lesson plans and community (field-based) activities. Seven Primary Schools in Administrative Region 4 participated in the pilot, which targeted Grade 6 students (who have recently completed the Grade 6 assessment) and their teachers. Through this education programme, PFG created a series of games, to be used as teaching tools.

Among these, was a board game—”The River Guardian”—focusing on freshwater education. With the assistance of nine volunteers (six females and three males) from the University of Guyana, the game initially benefited a total of 224 Grade 6 students (110 boys and 114 girls).

Game-Base Learning
Games tend to mirror the way the human mind was designed to learn. They motivate players to take risks and actions, persevere through failures, set and achieve increasingly difficult goals, and devote attention, time, and effort to acquiring knowledge and skills. Strategic games improve the functioning of the brain.

Because of this, Game-Based Learning plays an important role in teaching, as it allows students to collaborate, communicate, interact and work in teams.

In fact, gaming creates a dynamic that can inspire learners to develop skills and build an emotional connection to both learning and the subject matter.
Suriname and Guyana are among the greenest countries on earth, still maintaining more than 85% of primary rainforests in a pristine state. Their developing economies are driven by the extractive sectors—primarily gold and oil—which earn much needed foreign revenue; create employment for people, and contribute to the national growth, as well as, to the development of other sectors.

What are Strategic Environmental Assessments?

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a tool that aims to integrate, through participatory process, environmental considerations into policies, plans and programs and evaluate their interlinkages with economic and social considerations at the early stages of decision making that affect natural resources.

While gold mining has been historically characteristic of the economic landscape in the Guianas, oil and gas extraction has emerged in a significant way within the last few years. Huge offshore oil reserves have been discovered in the last five years in both countries and Suriname has been producing crude from onshore fields for about three decades.

Though important to the economy, the extractive industry has an enormous impact on the integrity of natural resources and the people who directly depend on them.

While the industry has expanded, relevant instruments such Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA), and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) within the framework of environmental laws and institutions (state regulatory agencies and civil society organisations) have not transformed at the same pace to bring about effective governance and management of the industry. Specifically, the challenges surround: lack of technical capacity and uncertainty of roles of government and civil society actors, weak state policies, regulatory frameworks and laws, and limited financial resources to effect changes.

There was interest and willingness on the part of state agencies and civil society organisations to improve the way in which sectors of the extractive industries were being managed and the Shared Resources, Joint Solutions (SRJS) Programme, being implemented in the Guianas since 2016, provided resources to begin filling key gaps and effecting policy changes with a focus on oil and gas in Suriname and gold mining in Guyana.

In Suriname, all activities in the oil sector are guided and monitored by the National Institute for Environment and Development in Suriname (NIMOS). Sector specific ESIA guidelines for several sectors are in place however, specific guidelines for the offshore oil sector are lacking.

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In Pelelu Tepu (commonly referred to as Tepu), a village along the banks of the Tapanahony River, three young women decided they wanted to keep their village clean. What started off as a pilot—at least as their first intention—grew into a regional success story, setting an example of Indigenous women leadership and a best practice of community-led conservation, contributing to multiple SDGs and sustainable development.

With technical support from Amazon Conservation Team (ACT)-Suriname through funding and expertise made possible via the Shared Resources, Joint Solutions (SRJS) programme, these young Trio Indigenous women have strengthened local governance for both the Trio and Wayana in South Suriname, providing communities with knowledge and tools to sustainably preserve and manage their ancestral lands—crucial for their livelihoods. Having a 20-year familiarity with the community of Tepu, ACT recognized the commendable work of the women involved in the project, a group now identified as the Waste Management Team (WMT).

WMT is a 100% woman-powered initiative, dealing with complex issues in a remote area. The motivation behind this grassroots project is simple: “Ik ben gewoon zo, ik houd ervan als zaken netjes en schoon zijn” said Marijane*, who is leading a group that today counts about eight young women who, on a daily basis, actively contribute to the sustainable waste management system implemented in their community.

Working with WMT, ACT-Suriname looked at the possibility to support their grassroots initiative since 2016, identifying three main areas of focus: (1) capacity building of WMT and key figures; (2) awareness raising in the community; (3) set-up of all necessary infrastructures, to properly tackle this issue. These elements were at the core of ACT’s component of SRJS within the wider framework of landscape planning and management to secure ecosystems.

*“I'm just like that, I like it when things are neat and clean”
A Best Pratice Story: Herbal tea production in Kwamalasamutu

A story by Amazon Conservation Team (ACT) - Suriname

For remote indigenous and tribal cultures in Suriname, the rising dependence upon goods and services from outside their communities led to an increased need for cash-wage income. Many village populations are shrinking as residents leave to find jobs mostly in extractive industries such as logging and mining. Whether happening outside or inside village territories, such activities typically have long-term negative effects upon ecosystems, biodiversity, human health, cultural cohesion and traditional knowledge systems.

To address this challenge, the Amazon Conservation Team (ACT) Suriname has promoted, for many years, the development of local non-timber forest products (NTFPs) as sustainable food security and economic alternatives. In Suriname, ACT worked closely with partner communities to promote NTFP products such as handicrafts, herbal tea, hot pepper, and honey.

In late 2017, as part of the Shared Resources, Joint Solutions (SRJS) programme broader suite of initiatives, ACT-Suriname initiated an herbal tea pilot project in the remote areas within southwestern Suriname, in partnership with the village of Kwamalasamutu. Village-wide and leadership meetings applying the principles of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) were held to discuss, plan and launch the project. The first step was building a simple solar drying and processing unit in Kwamalasamutu.

The relatively low-tech value-chain idea was that village residents would collect tea materials from common plants near the village.

Cutting spiral ginger leaves onto drying trays within a tea drying greenhouse

Siwiru (Costus scabra) plant in the forest with red inflorescence

Kwamalasamutu villagers harvest siwiru for herbal tea production

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Most of Guyana’s territory sits on top of a 1.7-billion-year-old geological formation: the Guiana Shield. The Shield’s pristine forests, largely uncontaminated aquatic ecosystems and other intact ecosystems also contain 10-15% of the world’s freshwater reserves. The Shield is essential to enriching and replenishing the world’s biodiversity and, consequently, it is essential to the planet’s survival.

Multiple indigenous communities live in key parts of the Shield such as the South Rupununi region (South of the Kanuku Mountains). Here, communities are at the forefront in protecting this unique biodiversity hot spot, ensuring the high diversity of neotropical habitats of the Shield is preserved and disturbance levels remain low.

South Rupununi is also where several key rivers covering and flowing throughout Guyana originate, expand and grow. Among these, flowing from the Acarai Mountains, is the mighty Essequibo River, the third largest watershed in the South American region.

Protecting Freshwater, right at the source

The Southern Rupununi region is an essential part of the Shield. Its topography is shaped by an expansive network of rivers and streams, accounting for nearly one-quarter of all water on the continent. However, the region’s vast endowment of mineral resources, especially gold, poses a significant risk to the ecological integrity of the often uncontrolled and illegal extraction, as well as through unsustainable practices which are quite frequent in the Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining (ASGM) industry.

Entities such as the South Rupununi District Council (SRDC) and South Central Peoples Development Association (SCPDA) have been actively working, both autonomously and under the Shared Resources, Joint Solutions (SRJS) Programme, to protect and manage their critical waterways throughout the Wapichan Territory (Wapichan Wiizi), in the South Rupununi.

*This story is also based on a report prepared by Mahendra A. Doraisami for South Central Peoples Development Association (SCPDA) and WWF Guianas*
The shared marine fisheries resources of Guyana and Suriname are of critical importance to the economy and livelihood of many people in both countries. Such resources provide various types of employment (direct and indirect) and are extremely important for both food and nutritional security. Nonetheless, the effects of fisheries activities on shared stocks are considerable, and—as a result of the growing demand for fish and fish products—have been recognised to pose several threats.

Further, fisheries resources are mainly threatened by (1) Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU), compounded by ineffective surveillance and monitoring within and between countries as well as by (2) bycatch associated with the capture and discarding of Endangered, Threatened and Protected (ETP) species in commercial and artisanal marine capture fisheries. Assessing and capturing the current state of things, led to a reflection on the actual sustainability of marine fishery resources.

Assessing and capturing the current state of things, led to a reflection on the actual sustainability of marine fishery resources. Through support from the Shared Resources, Joint Solutions (SRJS) Programme, WWF Guianas recognised these threats and begun rolling out plans towards sustaining the fisheries resources within the three Guianas (Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana), in close collaboration with government agencies and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

Several initiatives have been executed under SRJS—both at national and regional scale—to share and exchange information, raise awareness and identify possible solutions or mitigation measures that could improve fisheries resources, thereby ensuring more sustainability of artisanal and industrial sectors.

While there is still more work to be done unilaterally and multilaterally to combat IUU fishing and ensure the effective management of bycatch of ETP species in the Guianas, the support of the SRJS Programme has been crucial. Through SRJS, several positive changes have already occurred, also establishing a positive trend for further engagements towards ensuring the sustainability of fisheries resources in the future.
Both Suriname and Guyana have large intact mangrove forest ecosystems, providing a vast range of services and functions. For instance, mangroves provide a buffer from storm surges, stabilize shoreline, allow for sustenance of coastal fisheries, serve as a habitat for several unique coastal and marine species of both flora and fauna.

Mangroves are also crucial in the sequestration of carbon dioxide, which helps mitigate climate change. However, despite their ecological and socioeconomic values, mangroves are threatened by the degradation and depletion of habitat occurring through natural (erosion) and anthropogenic processes — including pollution, grazing of animals, removal of mangroves for urban and coastal development, agriculture and climate change.

All such processes are seriously impacting the livelihoods of people who are dependent on mangroves.

In recognition of these threats—particularly climate change—a number of efforts have been implemented with support from several entities including government, CSOs, academia and NGOs, toward safeguarding mangroves by ensuring this crucial ecosystem can benefit from more effective management, restoration and preservation — across the Guianas.

Through these interventions, vital ecosystem services and values have been effectively incorporated into policies and plans. However, challenges such as limited resources, overarching institutional mechanisms and competing priorities have had an impact on implementation.

**Mangrove safeguarding within the shared resources, joint solutions programme**

Developed under the “Shared Resources, Joint Solutions” programme