



PRO-NATURA
INTERNATIONAL

Innovation towards Sustainable Development
Member of IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature

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JURUENA AND THE BIRTH OF PRO-NATURA

In 1985 a visionary group, assembled and led by Dr. Marcelo Carvalho de Andrade, a well-known Brazilian explorer, medical doctor and environmentalist, met in Rio de Janeiro and New York to design strategies for the construction of a new institution to be named Pro-Natura. Their intention was to stimulate environmentally appropriate, socially fair and inclusive economic development in disadvantaged regions worldwide, while providing education, better access to food and empowering local communities and regions.

Early Amazonian ambitions

Right from the beginning Pro-Natura realized that, if it wanted to effectively address these problems, it needed to innovate and think ambitiously long term. Two major ecosystems were thus chosen: the Amazon and Atlantic Forests of Brazil.

In the Brazilian Amazon six areas where infamously known as the "Amazon's arc of destruction". One of the worse was Juruena, an area of over 12.5 million hectares of Amazon forest (larger than the UK) overlapping the borders of the States of Amazonas and Mato Grosso – and this is where this group of pragmatic visionaries decided to implement it's initial developmental strategies.

Juruena Region

Located along the Juruena River, the Juruena Region in the northwest part of Mato Grosso was incorporating over 100 000 people. At the time, the reality on the ground was disheartening.

Waves of colonists, encouraged by the Federal Government in order to reduce population pressures in the states in the South and the North East of Brazil, had arrived to take advantage of public lands, offered to private colonizers with promises of technical and financial support. These promises were never kept and with little or no agricultural knowledge the new landowners survived by implementing drastic slash and burn agriculture. The result was massive deforestation.

Within a few short years, the land could no longer sustain crops such as coffee and other perennial species and cattle were brought in. When that endeavour failed, more acres underwent slashing and burning, sending Juruena and other parts of the Amazon into a downward spiral of destruction.



Juruena River from the sky



Juruena River near town

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After months of interviewing stakeholders and acquiring all the necessary strategic knowledge, and a Developmental Plan was put into place incorporating the main guidelines of Pro-Natura's pragmatic methodology - to use smart and innovative practices and technologies to help turn those who are creating the problems into those who solve them.

In practice, to address Juruena's (and eventually another 7 neighbouring municipalities) environmental degradation a number of projects were initiated including agroforestry, soil restoration enhancement, job creation, education and training, crop diversification, reforestation, timber eco-certification and product development and distribution. This holistic approach made the community less vulnerable to product price variations and resulted in increased, and sustainable, short, medium and long-term financial returns.

The power of collaboration

In 1990 Guy F. Reinaud, Business Director at ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries) in the UK took the initiative of organizing in Brasilia, jointly with the UK Overseas Development Administration, the first Anglo-Brazilian Conference on Tropical Forests. This ground breaking environmental initiative convened 125 of the world's most respected scientists with the agenda to stop deforestation of the Amazon forest, conserve biodiversity and mitigate climate change together with fighting poverty.

During that event a competition was organized to select a Brazilian NGO that could manage such a project. By the end of the week several conclusions and recommendations emerged, most of them mirroring Pro-Natura's projects already starting in the Juruena region and... Pro-Natura was selected.

At the closing ceremony Marcelo de Andrade emphasized the urgency of global initiatives and asked for concrete engagements on the part of the funding community. On behalf of ICI, Guy F. Reinaud pledged to fund the project over 7 years, help create the Research Centre for Agroforestry and brought ICI's considerable agronomic expertise to bear. Eventually the European Commission, the World Bank/GEF and the State Government of Mato Grosso also contributed. That was the beginning of a great partnership.

After the Rio Conference in 1992, Guy F. Reinaud decided to leave ICI to internationalize Pro-Natura's approach and founded in Paris Pro-Natura International (PNI) becoming President of the Organization with Marcelo, Chairman of the Board. Both transformed Pro-Natura as the first organization born in the South, to gain international status and become one of the leading institutions innovating to construct sustainable local economies in the tropics.

Eventually this approach to developmental issues would be called sustainable development and earn Marcelo Andrade for Pro-Natura the US Academy of Sciences' 1997 Mitchell Prize, widely considered the "Nobel of Sustainability".



Acknowledgement Ceremony for Pro-Natura and ICI in 1990



Education Center at Juruena



Focusing on promoting social capital in the region, Pro-Natura facilitated the creation of ADERJUR, the Rural Development Agency of Juruena, and started several educational and training initiatives that included an educational centre for children and adults, environmental workshops and certification, training and production of sustainable local crafts and the creation of community recreation areas. These initiatives, led by Pro-Natura trained municipality managers, helped flourish greater community participation and support.

The Peugeot's Carbon Sink

In 1999 Pro-Natura brought to the Juruena region, and in particular Cotriguaçu, Peugeot and the French Office National des Forêts (ONF) for a forty-year, innovative project - the creation of the world's first major Carbon Sink.

The objective was and still is to study the relationship between reforestation, atmospheric carbon sequestration and climate regulation. This project, now in its 14th year, has sequestered in total around 240,000 tonnes of CO₂ by planting over 2 million trees, primarily by using sixty native Amazonian species.

Today the Juruena carbon sink has evolved into the largest of its kind worldwide. This natural scientific laboratory, with a data bank of scientific research, analysis and systems, coordinates around 40 research projects and has over 100 students doing field research that can be applied to other tropical regions.

In 2009 this initiative has taken a new dimension with part of the high value natural forest of the project being turned into a Private Natural Heritage Reserve, with support from the Federal University of Mato Grosso.

That same year saw the certification of the first VCS carbon credits in Brazil (Voluntary Carbon Standard protocol), the income from which, estimated at over 1 million Euros, is entirely reinvested in the project.

A new wave of development about to happen

Pro-Natura has demonstrated that it's possible to revitalise degraded Amazonian forests both through the smart use of agroforestry techniques and the re-introduction of native species. Juruena's lessons have now been applied from Central and South America to Africa and Asia.

A new phase of rural development in the region is now going to take place with the introductions of innovations, especially ones like biochar developed by Pro-Natura in Africa & Asia in the field of agro-ecology. This will include the transfer of the Pro-Natura technology designed in France to produce very high quality biochar in a continuous and ecological way.

Today there is around 10.5 million hectares of preserved forest, the success of this endeavour stands today as a symbol that our collective determination and ingenuity could heal our planet. ■

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Carbon Sink Nursery - 1



Carbon Sink Nursery - 2



Local seeds collected by the small farming community

