

Supporting local forest use in Amazonian Brazil: The Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve

October 2008

The state of Acre in western Amazonia became famous in the 1980s as the site of local resistance to environmentally destructive national development plans. The conflict was personified by Chico Mendes, rubber tapper, union activist and environmentalist. Following his assassination in 1988, the Brazilian government established the 980,000 hectare Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve, in which the rights of forest-dependent communities are protected. The struggle did not end with establishment of the reserve, however. Soon to follow was the challenge of using economically, environmentally and socially viable forest production as a driver of local development.



The family of Nilsson Mendes honours the memory of Chico. Photo © IUCN

Nilsson Mendes besides a rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*. Photo © IUCN



0 100 400 Km

Map of Acre showing the location of the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve. Map © IUCN

Today, rubber tapper Nilsson Mendes, a cousin of Chico, is a community leader and a beneficiary of a vertically integrated production system. The high-quality rubber he extracts from the reserve receives a premium from the Acre's newly built contraceptive factory. Brazil nuts and timber are other products extracted from over 12 million hectares of community managed forest in Acre, providing an alternative to forest clearance.

IUCN, along with member organisations such as the Centre for Amazonian Workers, will work on strengthening community forest cooperatives in Acre through generating knowledge, restructuring markets, training and strengthening local social structures. This is characteristic of the *Livelihoods and Landscapes Initiative*, which seeks to add value to the ongoing work of IUCN members in forest landscapes around the world. In Acre, this will help to increase the price of rubber and Brazil nuts substantially, make families more articulate in defence of their rights to forest resources, and create jobs. Simultaneously, this sustainable form of management ensures a future for the biodiversity of these forests.

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