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DEVELOPMENT, ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF BINA HILL INSTITUTE NORTH RUPUNUNI, GUYANA

Enticing the young people to stay in the Rupununi.

In 1998, Mr Sydney Allicock, at the time Head of the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDB, an elected body) and a very prominent local leader, requested of Dr Norma Bubier (at the time Visiting Fellow at Green College Centre for Environmental Policy, Oxford, UK and shortly thereafter, Executive Director, Pro-Natura UK) if a programme could be developed to entice the young people to stay in the Rupununi. He was reflecting the great concern of the Makushi Elders that so many young people were emigrating to Brazil to work in mining. Working together, the development of a youth training centre was proposed to provide the youth with the skills needed to meet the challenges that a newly upgraded road would bring and for the protection of the rainforest, which was already coming under increasing outside pressures. As a next step, a group of leaders was brought together to draft a plan and constitution for a new institute.

Bubier obtained an initial funding stream for the project from IUCN Netherlands before working also with Dr Bradshaw, Development Director, Pro-Natura UK to obtain further funding from various UK- and Guyana based organisations. Initially, a building was constructed and related infrastructure was put into place, including solar energy, computers and a satellite-internet connection. Villages were invited to contribute labour and Mr Glen Allicock, a local villager, took charge of training the youth who also assisted in the construction process. Over the next few years (from 2001), a kitchen, shower block, eight residential units and a large round classroom building, based on a local traditional benab design, were constructed and vehicles were purchased. Management and financial systems were put into place.

The new Bina Hill Institute sought to focus on building local capacity for economic development, environmental management and the preservation of culture in a changing world. With substantial private foundation support, in subsequent years, Pro-Natura UK worked with the Makushi people to build up the educational programme and employ numerous staff.



Bina Hill Institute, Annai



Training at Bina Hill Institute commences



Students at work at benab training building

Pro-Natura International

33 Avenue Duquesne, 75007 Paris Tél. +33 680 61 09 36 Email pro-natura@wanadoo.fr - www.pronatura.org

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With the support of the Government, the facility was also utilised by programmes from many agencies and NGOs including Ghost Rivers Rediscovery Programme, Youth Challenge International and Raleigh International along with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which supported the Makushi Women's Research Unit. Iwokrama International Centre ran Wildlife Clubs, supported the NRDDDB and hosted scientific research. The only local radio station in Guyana was established, Radio Paiwomak, which broadcasts in both English and Makushi. The cattle herd, which began with 2 animals, grew to 45 animals.

The leadership programme for the youth was designed to provide a two-year training based on two principles: learning by doing and that the work carried out by the youth would be integrated with the specific needs of the communities.

The main objectives were to teach basic skills and also evidence-based decision-making, processes of rational assessment and how to articulate arguments well while encouraging innovative thinking. Youth gained confidence by being given responsibility in their second year. Each subject area taught skills in collecting and understanding survey data from the environment. The training was initially for 35 Amerindian (Makushi) youth and contained the following elements:

- Qualified local people or, where not available, Master's level scientific staff, were hired to develop and provide instruction for the youth in forestry, agriculture (with crops grown at Bina Hill and in the communities), natural resource management, small business development and computing offered along with CXC-level Mathematics and English.
- Training was provided in leadership skills for the youth, conducted by an international trainer. A second course was run in listening and empathetic skills for village health workers, who were the primary point of contact for health care, and thus wanted to learn skills that better prepared them for an initial meeting with a patient.
- An Amerindian lawyer conducted workshops to facilitate understanding of Guyana's new Amerindian Act.
- A fully qualified Medex, Bartholomew Sampson (i.e. Guyana's highest-level rural medical staff) was hired to work at Bina Hill Institute in partnership with the National Health Service. Projects were run in the villages on malaria prevention and on mother-infant care. Many medical students have also been supported from Oxford University and the University of Toronto to work in Guyana. A pilot test was run using satellite telephones to connect remote health workers to regional health centres. A project was also run between the Guyana University Medical School and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to videoconference on a weekly basis to share knowledge and experience in tropical medicine.



Exercise as part of Leadership Training



Bina Hill vaquero, horses and herd of cattle



Surama Health Post



- A highly successful project relating to traditional medicine trained several local women in how to standardize formulas and procedures, including the sterilization of bottles, for making Makushi medicines, soaps and creams for local use (which followed on from the publication of a book on their traditional medicinal plants).

This project included providing a small amount of crab-wood oil for a partner organisation, a garden, in the UK, which returned a percentage of the profits on their own hand-made soap sales to the communities through Pro-Natura UK. Also working with the women, a crafts workshop was organised with a successful Brazilian artist to explore the viability of international sales of high quality crafts.



Traditional medicine project

- An agro-forestry project, which worked with five communities to each establish a well to provide dry-season irrigation and plant vegetables and trees of their choosing (Bina Hill was also one of these sites). Still under development, fishponds were dug in two sites.
- A forestry support project, which developed a logging cooperative and procedures to make logging for local use more sustainable and efficient in the utilisation of trees.
- A nursery-school support project provided wooden toys for local nursery school use, used particularly in teaching Makushi.
- Training in computer mapping skills.
- The establishment of a local newspaper.



Youth working among crops at Bina Hill

Bina Hill Institute has become the hub for all activities in the area with many organisations contributing workshops although the main aim continues to be a Makushi-led, vibrant, locally controlled development and educational centre, which seeks also to preserve the culture while integrating it into modern life. Bina Hill has been at the centre of the Guyanese Government's activities in working with Indigenous People on REDD+ (i.e. UN Programme 'Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation'). However, the greatest achievement is that many of the youth who attended Bina Hill have gone on to find jobs and / or be leaders in their communities.

In 2015, under the expert guidance of Ms Emily Allicock and Mr Bryan Allicock, current co-ordinators of the Institute, Bina Hill seeks to build on its reputation as a base for promoting the same principles for which it was founded: management of the natural resources; training and development for the local people, especially the youth; preservation and integration of Makushi culture; assistance for the local people in their role and partnership with the Guyanese Government for good REDD+ management.



Training in natural resource management



Bina Hill has always played a role in sharing agricultural practices with local people but is seeking to expand this role to become an innovative centre for the demonstration of modern resource management, using 'Landscape and Living' and agro-ecology techniques. In the words of Sydney Allicock, 'appropriately changing the thing we once set out to preserve.'

The single most important outcome of Bina Hill's work has been to provide hope for local people and demonstrate the important global contribution they can play in preserving the forests and mitigating climate change. They can also play a significant part in showing best practice on how Indigenous People can work with governments and national and international NGOs and organisations. As pressures mount for an upgraded road and for further development, Mr Sydney Allicock continues to ask the youth, 'will we use the road or will the road use us?'

One of the most significant developments in recent years has been the generous support, greatly appreciated and fully acknowledged, given to the Bina Hill Institute by the Guyanese Minister for Amerindian Affairs, many Government Ministries, the Forestry Commission and most particularly, the President's Office.



Youth engaged in training at Bina Hill Institute



New second building based on a traditional bebab

Contact

Dr Norma E. Bubier, Executive Director, Pro-Natura UK (part of Pro-Natura International) and a trustee of Bina Hill Institute, North Rupununi, Guyana, South America.

Dr R. Harry Bradshaw, Development Director, Pro-Natura UK and Senior Member, Wolfson College, Cambridge.

Tel. +44 1872 562062

Email: pronaturauk@btinternet.com

www.pronatura.org



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