

COMMUNITY FUNDS IN THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON

NEW TOOLS TO DEFEND RIGHTS AND
COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE



In recent decades, movements for Indigenous Peoples, other peoples and traditional communities in the Brazilian Amazon have become stronger. The creation and consolidation of new organizations has been accompanied by the emergence of a new generation of leaders, including women and young people with university training. These new leaders, who combine the traditional knowledge of their peoples with academic training, have driven a process of autonomous institutional development, which has transformed them into local, regional, national and even global actors. Indigenous Peoples' movements, and those of other traditional communities, have begun to establish new types of organizations to both manage financial resources and channel funds directly. This presents a new alternative for international funds and philanthropic organizations, a way to reach local communities that is more effective, efficient and participatory.

BACKGROUND

Since the 1980s, social movements for the Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities of the Brazilian Amazon have significantly increased in both the number and diversity of their organizations, as well as improved their institutional capacities. At the beginning of the 21st century, movements representing local peoples and traditional communities (Indigenous Peoples, local communities, extractivists, Afrodescendants, *quilombolas* and riverine communities) were strengthened by the creation of dozens of local organizations and community funds, like the Dema, Babassu and Podaali Funds.

Established in 2003, the Dema Fund supports forest peoples' community projects. As well as helping Indigenous Peoples, *quilombolas*, extractivist and riverine communities and small-scale farmers to improve their social and environmental efforts, it supports them to preserve the Amazon biome in ways that respect socio-biodiversity, economic, social, cultural and environmental human rights; food sovereignty and security; gender equality; and respect for cultural and religious diversity and plurality.

The Babassu Fund, created in 2012, was a further achievement for women from the Inter-State Movement of Babassu Palm Coconut Breakers (MIQCB). Based on their experience with a microcredit rotating fund, the Babassu Fund has supported activities designed to guarantee food security, generate income and encourage social organization, while at the same time incentivizing the conservation of the socio-biodiversity present in babassu forests. The Babassu Fund has already managed four calls for proposals, which have funded the socio-environmental projects of community groups and organizations that represent babassu coconut breakers.

The Indigenous Fund of the Brazilian Amazon, Podaali, was founded in 2019, to facilitate access to resources for Indigenous Peoples' communities and organizations in the Brazilian Amazon. Indigenous associations find it hard or impossible to get support from large funding agencies. The Fund has also provided grants for projects that bolster Indigenous Peoples' capacity to manage their territories autonomously.

A NEW GLOBAL CONTEXT

United Nations initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement (2015) have provided a conceptual framework for international cooperation agencies to support countries in the Global South, especially in combatting climate change. However, the climate-focused funding that has resulted from such agreements has not really considered initiatives led by local communities and organizations.

In this context, funds like those mentioned here – which are organizations that mobilize, administer and redistribute financial resources – have been increasingly recognized as being relevant mechanisms to channel funding to local organizations. The pandemic and rising threats to the rights of traditional peoples and communities have also increased demand for emergency support, further highlighting the importance of these funds.

CHALLENGES

- With the pandemic and setbacks to the rights of Indigenous Peoples and other peoples and traditional communities, the funds have become increasingly focused on providing emergency response. The challenge they now face is how to maintain their strategic coherence while responding to these short-term emergencies.
- Setbacks in government policies towards Indigenous Peoples and other peoples and traditional communities have made it harder for community funds linked to social movements to access national government funding. How to respond to this situation is a particular challenge.
- The community funds represent local social movements, which have their own agendas and strategies for their territories. They are by no means simply financial instruments to help large funders get resources to local communities. A key challenge is, therefore, how the funds can present their own visions in ways that attract potential donors.
- The community funds receive many requests from informal groups – villages, collectives, women's groups, youth groups – that have no legal status. How to handle such requests is another challenge under consideration.

OVERCOMING THESE CHALLENGES

To overcome these challenges, we recommend:

- Facilitating dialogue between the community funds and other intermediate funds, to encourage the construction of a common agenda for action.
- Promoting dialogue between the community funds themselves, so that they can build a shared agenda together with national philanthropy and international funders.
- Engaging in advocacy to promote policies that protect the existence and autonomy of community funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that funders:

- Consider supporting community funds directly, without intermediaries, including providing a component of institutional support.
- Include a component of inter-institutional dialogue with community funds when supporting intermediary funds.
- Provide resources to support informal groups.

Maria Alides is a leader of the babassu coconut palm breaker movement and the current general coordinator of the Inter-state Movement of the Babassu Coconut Breakers (MIQCB), which works in the states of Maranhao, Para, Piaui, and Tocantins. She is part of the Association of the Rural Women Workers of the Lake of Junco, in the Middle Mearim region, where she was born and raised. In 2000 she was a municipal council member and helped to write the municipal “Free Babassu Law”, which led to a broader legislative process to defend the rights of the babassu coconut breakers in the region and other states. The Babassu Fund, which is managed and used by the women babassu coconut breakers to develop small agro-extractivist income generating projects, is one of the achievements of the MIQCB.

Valeria Paye is an Indigenous woman of the Kaxuyana People of the Teumcumaque Park Indigenous Territory in the States of Pará and Amapá, Brazil. She got her degree in social sciences from the University of Brasilia (2017). In 2018, she became the Coordinator of the Office of COIAB in Brasilia, Distrito Federal, Brazil, and

was the first Indigenous woman to occupy this important role within the Indigenous movement in the Amazon. In this role, she helped to coordinate relations between the Indigenous movement of the Amazon with that of other parts of the country. She participated in the creation of the Indigenous Coordinating Body of Brazil (APIB) and the organization of several Terra Libre (Free Land) camps. She was a member of the executive leadership of APIBL in Brasilia (2018). Until she was recently named Executive Director of the Podaali Fund, she has been working since 2019 as a COIAB policy advisor.

Maria Das Graças Costa is a popular educator, with great experience both as a teacher and militant against social injustice in the Amazon. She was working as a teacher in an adult literacy program when she joined FASE. After joining FASE, she began working with women and men rural workers and learned the importance of the defense of common resources and women’s rights. She coordinated FASE work on women’s rights.



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Solutions 21-23 September
from the 2021
Inside Out #GLFAmazonia

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