

CHILDREN'S LAND IN THE CHOCÓ BIOREGION

Presented by: Fundación Amigos del Chocó - AMICHOCÓ

Partners: FUNDAUNIBAN

Main component: Environmental education

Other components: Capacity building

Place: Municipality of Turbo in the Colombian Chocó Bioregion

Duration: 24 months

CONTEXT

The Chocó Bioregion



The Chocó Bioregion has a total area of 71,000 square kilometers and it is considered one of the world's 25 top biodiversity hotspots; holding 20% of the world's identified plants in just 1.4% of its surface¹. Over the last decade this strategic ecosystem has been threatened by economic and political forces that have caused irreparable damage to both its landscape and its people. In Colombia, the Chocó Bioregion holds the highest rates of unsatisfied basic needs² as well as the highest rates of cultural and natural diversity. This paradox is the result of irresponsible and uncontrolled land exploitation practices, corruption, violence and institutional abandonment.

Over 98% of the people that live in the Colombian Chocó Bioregion are Afro-Colombian or Native American; both have collective property rights over their territories and share a close and powerful bond to the land. The destruction and degradation of this ecosystem risks the survival of these ethnic communities by threatening their cultural identity and their traditional income generating activities such as agriculture, fishing, and hunting.

Urabá

Urabá is a Colombian sub region located on the northern coast of the country; it has eleven municipalities and is known as the most important banana producing region in the country. During the 1980's Urabá became a destination for people migrating from the states of Chocó, Córdoba and Antioquia, who were fleeing armed conflict or seeking new economic opportunities in the area. This unexpected influx of people caused sustained pressure on the land and its people, altering the social and economic dynamics of the region. Additionally, the public order was disrupted due to the territorial disputes that sprung up between illegal armed groups who sought to control this strategic region.

Currently, the Urabá region has a precarious transportation and communication infrastructure, with bare coverage and minimal quality of basic services like education, health, recreation, sports and culture. This is due mainly to inadequate governmental policies, and a lack of planning and articulation between state entities and public order issues.

Fundación Amigos del Chocó – AMICHOCÓ

AMICHOCÓ is an environmental NGO dedicated to fostering the sustainable use of natural resources and improving the quality of life of the people of the Chocó Bioregion. Through the implementation of

¹ Ayala Mosquera, Helcias José, *Diagnóstico Situacional de la Minería Artesanal y en Pequeña Escala desarrollada por Afrocolombianos en Territorios Colectivos de Comunidades Negras en el Chocó Biogeográfico*. Instituto de Investigaciones Ambientales del Pacífico – IIAP, 2005. ISBN 958-97824-5-0.

² According to the 2005 census, 79% of the population of the Colombian Chocó bioregion has unsatisfied basic needs.

productive environmental education, communication and capacity building projects we aim to articulate grassroots organizations within national and international communities.

Over the last thirteen years AMICHOCÓ has been working in three main areas:

- a) Fair and green markets
- b) Communication and environmental education
- c) Capacity building

Our organization is renowned for its capacity to work directly and in alliance with grassroots organizations; over the years we have developed an ongoing strategy in which all our projects are channeled through a local organization. This empowers the beneficiary communities and organizations, and allows them to develop the skills necessary to assure the initiative's sustainability once the project is finished. Additionally, it's a non invasive approach that doesn't interfere with the communities' social and governing dynamics, making them the lead players. We have worked in the Chocó Bioregion for over a decade, and we have come to understand and appreciate the people's natures as well as the social and political structure of the Afro-Colombian communities. We have the ability to design and implement projects that incorporate the communities' needs and dreams while providing alternatives to their development.

<http://www.amichoco.org>

FUNDAUNIBAN

FUNDAUNIBAN is a national NGO created by the banana industry associates of Uniban, in the region of Urabá. Its mission is to implement social developmental, entrepreneurial, environmental, cultural and recreational projects that aim to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the region. The organization seeks to empower local communities by providing training and capacity building activities as well as research, diagnosis and project design.

For over twenty years FUNDAUNIBAN has been working with the communities of the Urabá region and is well known for its political and religious impartiality as well as for the efficiency of its projects and initiatives.

<http://www.fundauniban.org.co>

THE PROJECT

This project seeks to create four Children's Lands in the municipality of Turbo in the Colombian Chocó Bioregion. Children's Land gives sixty children a piece of land on which the children are responsible for all of the decisions. We assist by organizing learning activities to develop their knowledge in four main areas: self-management, proper use of natural resources, environmental health and artistic and spiritual expression. Children are able to use their new skills to plan their land. A group of adult volunteers selected from the community help plan their land, care for their plants, design a flag and elect a system of government for their Children's Lands, among others. They aim to strengthen the core values necessary in the first stages of childhood, to allow social development and environmental responsibility. Through the use of safe and healthy spaces, the project aims to facilitate children's participation in sustainable development, and stimulate environmentally friendly values. Integration of these learning methods within the formal education system is another goal of this project.

Specific objectives

- Train a group of young leaders, parents and teachers to galvanize the initiative, assuring the protection of the children's rights and the sustainability of the Children's Lands.
- Provide 60 children from Turbo with a safe and appropriate space for education and recreation.
- Strengthen the self management and self empowerment skills in 60 children from Turbo.

- Teach 60 children from Turbo about the proper management of natural resources.
- Include the Children's Land methodology in the education programs of one public school in Turbo.

The ruling principles of our Children's Lands are:

- **Outstanding participation:** The children are recognized as citizens with rights, ambitions, opinions and social weight.
- **Acknowledgement with love:** Make the children feel and know that they are important to their country and that each of them has great potential to help create a better world.
- **Acknowledgement of the developmental conditions of the children:** Understand that the physical, cognitive and emotional development of the children vary according to age and context. This knowledge allows our Children's Lands to be a space to promote the children's connection with nature and aid the development of the children.
- **Safe and appropriate spaces:** The Children's Lands are spaces where the children are motivated, guided, protected and supported. They are encouraged to express what they think and feel individually, and as a group.

SUSTAINABILITY

This project is the beginning of a process that will last until Children's Land generates life, knowledge and individual and collective growth opportunities in the child population. That is why the first stages in the process are meant to provide specific skills and training to those who will be responsible for protecting the children and the project.

The Children's Land methodology is designed to be sustainable and last over time. Through the implementation of the self management, planning and self governance components and the constant practice of participation mechanisms, the project will create a structure that allows conscious decision making and the adequate management of natural resources. This model turns away from the traditional welfarist schemes and strengthens the sense of belonging to the land, stimulates initiative and creativity and develops values like respect, honesty, tolerance, responsibility, and solidarity. The application of Children's Lands in other countries have had very positive outcomes and proved to be models of efficiency and sustainability.

Another important element in assuring the sustainability of the project is the coordinated work between local organizations and the public schools where the project will be implemented. In this case, AMICHOCÓ will work with FUNDAUNIBAN and four rural public schools from the municipalities of Apartadó, Carepa, Chigorodó and Turbo; all of them are highly committed to the project and have the necessary skills to continue the project on their own.

BENEFICIARIES

Direct Beneficiaries

This project will directly benefit 60 children between the ages of six and twelve, in the municipality of Turbo.

Additionally, twenty individuals will be trained in capacity building, and to implement and replicate the Children's Land methodology. These Children's Lands promoters will be young men and women who participate in FUNDAUNIBAN's other social projects, as well as parents and teachers from the public schools

Indirect Beneficiaries

Indirectly this project will benefit 356 children that attend the public school where the project will be implemented. They will have access to a convenient space for learning, recreation and for interaction with the environment; additionally the project sees to integrate the Children's Land into the school's curriculum so all the enrolled students can benefit from it.

Furthermore, the direct family members of the children involved in the project will also benefit from its implementation; the environmental education workshops and the artistic expression activities will provide the children with skills they can pass on to their family members and will also positively affect the way they relate to others.