

# Protecting the Orinoco River Basin

## The TONINA project in Colombia

### Where and how we work ...

A multitude of scenic landscapes linked by rivers and thousands of streams are some of the natural wonders that can be found in the Colombian Orinoco River Basin (Orinoquia). Its diverse ecosystems are vital for the prosperity and development of the region because of its biological, hydrological and cultural richness.

At the national level, development plans consider the Orinoquia as a region with a high potential for agro-industrial development. Not recognizing the importance of biodiversity for the region's progress could jeopardize its ecological stability and the desired development, as well as destroy livelihoods.

### Objetives

The importance of nature's benefits is considered in regional and agricultural development and spatial planning for the Colombian Orinoquia.



The plains landscape is home to a unique biodiversity.

### What we desire to achieve with our work ...

The TONINA project (the abbreviation of the project name is identical with the local name of the region's emblematic river dolphin), works with public institutions, the private sector, as well as the civil society of the Orinoquia.

The project consists of four action areas:

**Understand, learn, apply and protect:** Disseminate knowledge and raise awareness among the local population about the importance of nature, e.g., by training 500 decision-makers, municipal officials, farmers and other relevant stakeholder. To date, **96% of participants** have reported an improvement in their knowledge and skills in instruments and tools that facilitate the conservation of biodiversity and nature's benefits.

At the municipal level, **three** institutions and **thirteen** cashew and honey producers' associations are learning to measure and recognize the value of pollination services to generate new business opportunities, contribute to their productivity and conserve ecosystems.

**Integrating nature and its services into land planning:** Representatives of both public sector and private enterprise are working together to change behavior toward sustainable production and ecosystem protection. One important step is that, thanks to TONINA, the benefits of nature were integrated into development plans at the departmental and municipal levels. These plans cover almost **200,000 square kilometers** (about 18% of Colombia's continental

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area). The population of **1.1 million** people in the departments of Meta and Vichada will benefit from these changes.

At the subnational level, five round tables with representatives of public, private and civil society institutions actively participated in the consideration of nature in territorial planning and management. Examples include the Vichada Regional Roundtable for Sustainable Livestock, the Vichada Environmental Roundtable, the Regional Beekeeping Committee, and the National Cashew Value Chain.

Likewise, farmers and local people involved in agribusiness reached agreements that conserve and maintain the benefits of nature. **Six agreements** have been signed with cashew and honey green entrepreneurs in Vichada.

In addition, the local population establishes agreements to protect and conserve nature. In Vichada, six agreements have been concluded with cashew and honey entrepreneurs on environmentally friendly business practices.

**Measure and observe:** Local people and experts record more than 271 species of birds and 70 species of mammals through a monitoring system of the state of biodiversity and its benefits, to recognize changes over time, for example, the decrease in species diversity. This covers an area of environmental importance called

the Puma Triangle in the department of Meta. It is a replicable model for other areas of Colombia.

**Share knowledge:** The learning experiences and successful models promoted by the project are disseminated nationally and internationally at events and through eight publications. The TONINA methodology for selecting and planning policy instruments to protect ecosystems was presented at the **IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille**, in September 2021. In the participants' survey regarding the methodology's utility for their own work, the event was rated with an average of 8 out of maximum 10 points.

In addition, the project contributes to the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular: Zero Hunger, 12. Responsible production and consumption, 13. Climate action and 15. Life of terrestrial ecosystems.



Extensive cattle ranching is one of the main economic activities in the Orinoquia.



Knowing how to identify and value local biodiversity and its benefits locally is important for its preservation.

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