

# Our Indigenous Territory on the Corantijn



Traditional occupation, use, and management  
of the Lokono People in West-Suriname



January 2008

Community Report for Inter-American Development Bank project: "Indigenous Peoples and Mining in Suriname  
– Building Community Capacity and Encouraging Dialogue" ATN/CT-8811-SU

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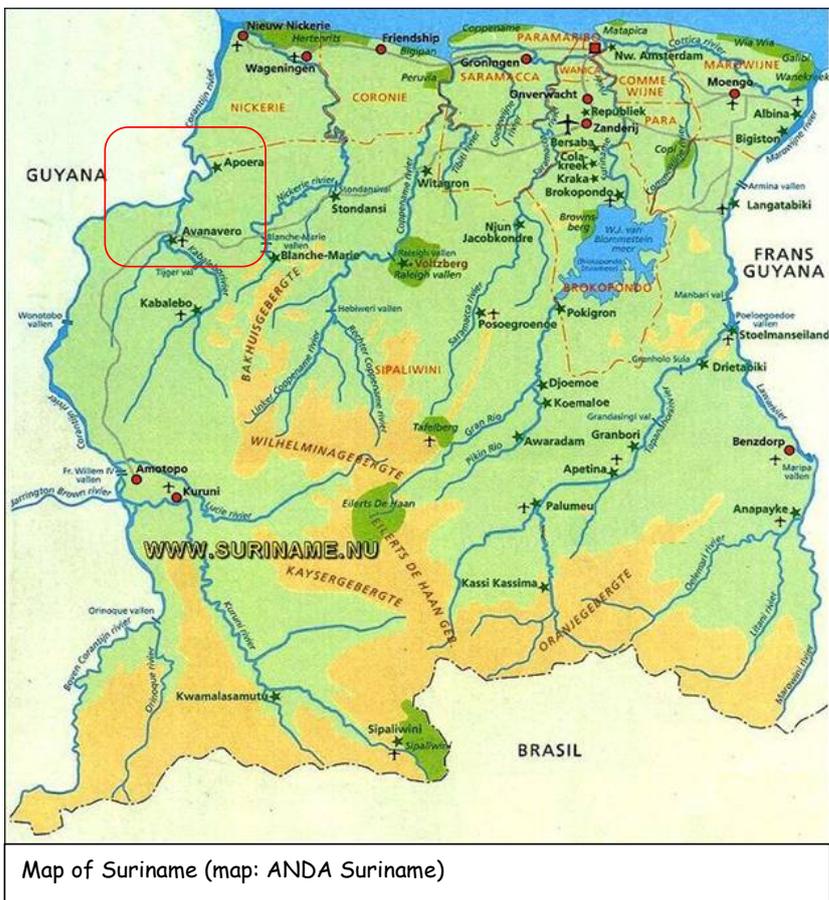
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### Background and objective of the report

The Indigenous villages of Apoera, Section and Washabo are situated in West Suriname (South America), on the Corantijn River, the border river between Suriname and Guyana, about 150 kilometres from the coast. The people in the villages are mostly Arowak (Lokono) Indigenous peoples, but there are also Carib (Kariña) and Warau inhabitants. They mapped their traditional territory in 2004, indicating which areas are used for which purposes; where they live, where they hunt, where they farm, where they fish or get their medicinal plants, and which places have a special spiritual or cultural value.



Map of Suriname (map: ANDA Suriname)

In "Our Indigenous Territory on the Corantijn," the Indigenous communities of Apoera, Section and Washabo describe their traditional occupation and use of this area in West Suriname. Its main purpose is to show, using their own words, to others such as the government, companies and organisations, what this area means to the Indigenous Peoples of West Suriname. This report is a supplement to the communities' land use map of West-Suriname. The other significant document in this series addressing Indigenous occupation and use of the area is a 2007 report documenting archival research on the

Indigenous occupation of the Corantijn River area. The earlier report demonstrates that both banks of the river, its branches and creeks and the nearby forests, savannas and other lands, were occupied and used by Indigenous groups long before colonisation and have been continuously occupied by them ever since<sup>1</sup>.

The Government of Suriname does not recognize the collective land rights of Indigenous peoples. According to the Constitution, all natural resources belong to the state. Moreover, all land to which no one can prove official ownership (in Dutch: "eigendom") is considered State domain. The consequence is that Indigenous communities, who do not have any papers demonstrating ownership of land, cannot be considered the owner of the land. They can only apply for an individual land lease title, which is neither applicable nor desired by the communities.

The fact that Indigenous peoples' land rights are not officially recognized makes it hard for the communities to deal with activities that are planned and carried out in their territories by the government, companies and others, including logging and mining activities and plans to turn the Kaboeri Kreek, an important part of their territory, into a Nature Reserve. This also touches on the lack of recognition of other Indigenous rights, particularly the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) concerning activities within their traditional territories. According to its international obligations, Suriname is obligated to legally recognize the ownership rights of Indigenous peoples to the lands, territories and natural resources that they traditionally occupy and use. This report is part of the effort of the communities to show to others the way they still traditionally use their ancestral territory.

This research is part of the project "Indigenous Peoples and Mining in Suriname - building community capacity and encouraging dialogue", a joint project of the Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname (VIDS) and The North-South Institute (NSI), with funding from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). It is a follow-up to previous joint projects of VIDS and NSI, who have worked collaboratively on projects since 2003.

### **Methodology**

The analysis contained in this report is grounded in community-based research. A large part of the communities' population contributed to this project by sharing knowledge and information. The material on which this report is based was collected by a team of local researchers who were trained in research methods, developed the research questions, and introduced the project in every village. The information in the report is based on individual interviews and group interviews, with both men, women, Elders and youth. The quotes in this report originate from these interviews. Additional information was gathered through the research process, but is not included here for a number of

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline de Jong, Indigenous Peoples on the Corantijn 1900 BC - 1900 AD. The historical Indigenous occupation of the Corantijn River in West Suriname [*Inheemsen aan de Corantijn, 1900 voor Chr.- 1900 na Chr. De historische inheemse bewoning van de Corantijnrivier in West-Suriname.*] (original in Dutch, with extensive English summary, VIDS report, august 10, 2007).

reasons, including the fear of community members that outsiders could exploit traditional medicinal recipes and plants.

The research team also went on village walks and visited places with special cultural, biological or economical value, accompanied by Elders. During these site visits, stories and legends were written down about the history of the villages and surrounding areas.

In June 2007, the first version of this report was presented and discussed in each village. During these meetings, the community members commented on the preliminary chapters. After these verification meetings information has been changed, added, adjusted or deleted.



The research team is collecting information

### **The Indigenous communities - past and present**

West Suriname is an area full of water and this is reflected in the traditions and lifestyle of the Indigenous peoples in the past and today. The rivers and creeks are of great importance to them. The Corantijn is considered to be the lifeline of the Indigenous peoples; important for drinking, fishing, bathing, washing clothes, and transportation. The Kaboeri Creek is also of great importance for the communities.

According to a community census carried out by VIDS (2005), the total number of inhabitants of the three villages was 1023. Apoera, Section and Washabo used to have one communal village leader but since 1997 all three villages have their own village councils. The councils cooperate as much as possible, especially on issues that concern the entire collective territory.

The villages can be reached by road (over 10 hours from the capital), by plane (one hour) or by boat from Nickerie (depending on the type of boat 2 - 12 hours). There are two primary schools and two health clinics. In the 1970s the government developed the 'West Suriname Plan'. According to the Plan, Apoera would become the second largest city of the country, with economic activities centred on an integrated bauxite industry, including refineries and a smelter. The agricultural plots and awara fruit trees of the Indigenous communities were bulldozed to build the city of Apoera. Roads and houses were built for the labourers. Around 1980, however, aluminium prices dropped and the

motor behind the development activities disappeared. The 'city' Apoera is still there but it never became what the government officials had planned.

Apart from the present villages, there are many more places that have a special significance for the inhabitants because ancestors have used or occupied these places for centuries. This is reflected in the many stories and legends that provide information about the history of the area. The stories and legends underline how the communities are connected to their ancestral territory.

Although Washabo and Apoera are mentioned frequently and continuously in documents since the 1740s, the oral history of the three villages goes back approximately one hundred years. In the past, the Indigenous peoples moved around a lot and used to return to certain places after (sometimes) very long periods. In the oral accounts, people speak about the "establishment" of Apoera, Washabo and Section, which indicate they had been abandoned for quite a while before people started coming back in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first people arriving in Washabo in the 20<sup>th</sup> century came from Epira (Guyana) during the First World War, when disease caused many deaths in Guyana. Around the same time, Apoera was occupied again. This was either by a man named Appu You in 1918 or by a family named Gordon, also coming from Epira. Section was originally called 'Middle Section' because it was in between the other two villages. Later the name was changed into Section.

There are many stories and legends related to certain old villages and other areas that still have a special meaning for the communities and which are still being told by community members. It is not a coincidence that these are places that are also frequently mentioned on old maps and in old records that were collected for the archival report. One very important place is Kaboeri Creek (recorded since the 1740s), where many Arowaks and also Waraus used to live. There are many legends about the time the Arowaks (who lived along the creeks, inland from the river) were at war with Carib tribes. By retreating to the creek, they were also protected from the white people, who came on expeditions looking for gold. There are still many signs pointing towards the former occupation of the creek; for example the fruit trees that were planted and iron tools that are sometimes found. Nowadays many people still go to Kaboeri Creek to hunt, fish, and collect timber and non-timber forest products. The area has a high biodiversity value. The Kaboeri Creek offers them everything to live from.

In 1978, the Ministry of Environment made plans to turn Kaboeri Creek into a Nature Reserve. The Indigenous community successfully protested against these plans. *"We did not agree with the nature reserve, because it would mean that we could no longer go hunting in there. [...]. We want to be free to do whatever we want. Because if they say this is a nature reserve, you have to go to the city to ask permission to enter the area. We are not going to do that. We Indigenous people don't need permission to come here. This creek belongs to Washabo, Section and Apoera. Outsiders do have to ask permission to us. This creek is important to us because we hunt and fish here and we*

*collect material to build houses and everything to live from. The youth starts coming too and one day they will use it" (village leader Ricardo MacIntosh).*

Another such area is Epira (presumably the same place as 'Eppera' on a map from 1596 and mentioned in many more documents later on). Many people who now live in West Suriname are originally from Epira and people still hunt and fish there. There is still a large graveyard where the victims of a deadly virus were buried. Kaurikreek is the oldest known settlement in Suriname, where archaeologists have found materials dating back between 1900 and 550 BC. People still hunt there and the creek is rich in medicinal plants, nuts, fruits and construction materials.

### **Traditional activities**

Traditional use means daily activities to the communities. These activities include hunting, gathering, fishing, and agriculture. Indigenous Peoples' knowledge is very comprehensive as it is based on hundreds of years of experience of living in the area. They have knowledge of all flora- and fauna species found in the area, the methods of collecting (or planting, or catching) and processing the species, as well as knowledge of the seasons. They also know which areas within the territory are being used for the various activities, and, for example, which types of fish or non-timber forest products can be found in a certain place.

#### *Agriculture*

Agriculture is important to all three communities, residents of which use the rotational cultivation method: every dry season a new plot is cleared and used two or three times after which it is left to regenerate for more than 5 years until it is ready to be used again. One of the most important traditional crops is the bitter cassava



The bitter cassava can be processed into all kinds of food and beverages.

(manioc), which can be processed into various foods and beverages such as cassava bread and an alcoholic drink called kashiri. Other traditional crops are plantain, banana, sweet potato, pepper, corn and sugar cane. The last few years less traditional varieties of vegetables have also been grown, including long beans and cucumber.

In the past, people only planted for their own use, but nowadays people also sell part of their harvest. In the nineties they started planting and selling pomtayer, a tuber used for a special dish in the city. The products are mostly sold in Guyana or Nieuw Nickerie. Most people have several (2-5) plots. The communities practice a traditional communal labour method, called *masramani*, to carry out activities such as clearing or weeding. Most activities are carried out in the long and short dry season. Both men and women work in the plots. There are several rituals and practices that people perform in order to have a good harvest or to avoid bad luck in the plot. A good example is talking to the soil and the seeds. People also pay attention to signs of nature that let people know whether there will be a good harvest.

Some of the farming plots are quite far away from the villages. Due to population growth people have to go further away to find fertile land, but there is still enough fertile land for everyone. Tools used in the plot are also subject to change: in the past people exclusively used axes and handmade baskets; nowadays many people use chainsaws and wheelbarrows as well.

### *Hunting*

Many men from the communities are hunters. Hunting is an important means of subsistence. Examples of game animals are rabbits, wild pigs, tapirs, armadillos, deer and caimans. Although they predominantly hunt for their own use, if they have a large catch, the men will sell some of it as a way to cover the expenses of the hunting trip. Fuel costs for their boats are high, especially if they have to go far up river. The hunters also sometimes eat part of the game while they are in the forest, and take the rest back home for their families. In the past, the hunters would take the whole family along for a hunting trip that could last for some days and include time for fishing and gathering non-timber forest products as well. They used a range of hunting methods, including the bow and arrow. There are still several methods that the hunters use, but they all use a gun or traps. They know which fruits the animals like to eat and where they come to drink and await them in these places, sometimes from a stand or hammock in a tree.

There are some traditional, unwritten rules the hunters follow to make sure that there will always be enough game in the forest. One is that they will not shoot a female with young. If they kill a female by accident, they will take the young animal back home and raise it, because they know it will not survive alone in the forest. The most important rule of all is that they shouldn't kill any game for waste, so a hunter will only shoot what he can carry. He will also not kill an animal that he doesn't eat, such as jaguars, sloth, the giant otter and porcupine. Recently, however, this rule has come under pressure, with traders of wildlife looking to buy exotic animals and some people, mainly foreigners, willing to pay high prices for certain parts of animals, such as jaguar teeth.

Hunters look for tracks in the soil and move cautiously so that the animals don't hear them. At the same time they have to make sure they don't get lost. It is essential for a hunter to have comprehensive knowledge about the forest. This will help him to survive

in case he gets lost. For example, he has to know which fruits he can eat and where to find water to drink. They also have to have knowledge about forest medicines in case of emergencies. The hunters have special rituals and knowledge in terms of hunting, for example how to prepare certain plant extracts to bring them good luck, but they have chosen not to publish this information.

Hunting takes place year-round. For example, hare can be caught in the dry season, while it is easier to catch wild pigs in the rainy season. People hunt both during day and night. There are many places in the area that are suitable for hunting. The hunters mostly hunt along and from the rivers and creeks (in a boat) and near *pans* (places in a creek or swamp where the water does not flow fast) and swamps in the forest. One of the most important places is Kabori Creek. Hunters also go to the Kabalebo or the Upper Corantijn. In these cases, they stay away for several days and combine hunting with fishing. They also go to Epira (Guyana) and the islands in the river.



Hunting and fishing are often combined.

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### *Fishing*

Fishing is a very important means of subsistence for the Indigenous communities. They fish in the river, the creeks, the swamps, and *pans* in the forest. Most of the fishermen primarily fish to feed their own families, but there are also fishermen who focus on selling the fish. People fish either alone or in a group. This mostly depends on how far the fishing area is: close to home they fish alone, farther away they go in a group. Sometimes the women go too, but most of the times it is the man who catches the fish.

During interviews villagers provided information on many fish species that they know, both river fish and creek fish, including the Indigenous names and special characteristics or other knowledge about that kind of fish. Many of the creek fish can be found in the Kabori Creek, which is one of the most important fishing areas. The fishermen have also made seasonal calendars, indicating which fish is abundant during which season. Most fish can be found in the dry season, because there is a lot to eat (small fish species) for the bigger fish in this period. The phases



Creek Fish.

of the moon and the tides of the river also influence the fish stocks.

The fishermen use a number of fishing techniques depending on the type of fish and the location. In the river some will use nets, but by unwritten customary rules this is not allowed in the creeks. This is especially the case in the Kaboeri Creek. These customary rules also forbid fishermen to waste any fish: they only catch what they will use and they don't keep small fish. The aim of these rules is to preserve nature and to make sure that there will be enough fish for the next generations. For this reason, the behaviour of non-indigenous persons, who catch small fish with nets and leave them to rot on the shore, is one of the concerns of the communities.

Most fish can be found where the water is not too deep or where creeks empty into the river. There is a lot of food for the fish in these places. The communities fish in the Corantijn River, and in the creeks and swamps on both sides of the Corantijn using small boats. They mostly fish near the village, for example, in the vicinity of the Apoera harbour, where they can catch a lot of Koebi at the beginning of the big dry season; but fishermen also travel upstream or downstream to fish at Anorasa (Guyanese side), Waramoeri (opposite of Kaboeri), around Wakai, at many places in the Kaboeri Creek such as Orali Creek, Monkey Pan, Frenchman Backdam and Winana creek, the creeks on the Guyanese side, the sandbanks in the Corantijn, the Nickerie River, and Moses Creek and Van Ams creek at Bakhuis. Before entering a fishing place that has a special spiritual significance (like Kaboeri) the fishermen perform a short ritual.

#### *Non-timber forest products (NTFPs)*

Many forest fruits and nuts grow in the forest and are collected by the communities to eat or process. Examples of wild fruits are wild cherry, *maripa*, *pacoeli*



and guava. A nut that is used frequently is *krappa*. The women process it into *krappa* oil, which can be used for people who have health problems. Making *krappa* oil is a long process that takes many days, even weeks, from collecting nuts to extracting oil. Popular edible nuts are the *ingyino* (Brazil nut) and the *sawari* nut. The communities do not want to reveal all places where nuts can be found, but Pauw Creek (a branch of the Kauri Creek) and Kaboeri Creek are good places to gather nuts.

The forest also provides the communities with many materials for plaiting or basketry. The communities use special techniques to make baskets and sieves and presses for the cassava. Plaiting is done by the men, who either use the objects themselves or sell them. These are also popular among tourists nowadays. The materials used in particular are cane or liana species like *warimbo*, *mamoeri* or *mibi*, or young leaves of the *awara* and

*maripa* palm. There are no specific seasons for collecting the material, but there are quite a few requirements for the material to be suitable. Sometimes the men collect the material close to the villages; especially the warimbo is plentiful close to the villages. For other species they go to Kaboeri Creek, or Blaka watra, a branch of the Kauri Creek. Not all people in the villages know how to make baskets anymore. People switch to using wheelbarrows and forget the techniques of making a basket. The *tasi* leaf or *dalebana* is another material that is used for plaiting, but this is used as roofing material. It is mostly collected in the Kaboeri Creek. A special technique is required to process the *tasi* into a proper roof.



Processing cotton.

Women make ropes from forest materials such as *ekele* (sealgrass) and *tibishiri* (young leafs or the *mauritus* palm). This also requires a special technique. With the ropes, the women make hammocks or bags. Cotton is also used to make hammocks. In the past people planted cotton a lot, but nowadays, it can also be bought. The women use their own spinning techniques and tools to make the threads.

Another very important non-timber forest product that the communities use is medicinal plants. Many plants and other species have a medicinal effect, but they do need to be prepared according a special recipe. During the centuries

they've lived in this area, the communities have learned which plants can be used for which problems. This knowledge has been passed on from one generation to the other. The communities have



Basketry.

decided not to publish the recipes and prescriptions, because this valuable information may be abused by outsiders. Only a few examples of species that can be used against snake bites, stomach ache, fever, or to cure wounds, have been provided. Medicinal plants are found all over the territory but there are certain species that only grow in select areas. In the Bakhuis Mountains, for example, community members can find certain types of lianas for medical use that do not grow in other places near the villages.

The Indigenous People believe that everything, including the forest, has a spirit, a "mother," and that they have to ask her permission to collect any material. By doing so she will not get upset and the men and women will be allowed to return home safely.

### Use of wood

The forests of West Suriname are home to many wood species. The communities know all of these species and know what they can use them for. The trees are traditionally used to make boats (dug-out canoes), houses and camps, woodcarving objects, and for fuel wood. Trees are cut with an axe and increasingly with chainsaws. For boats people use strong wood species like *awarabali* and *silverbali*. The knowledge of making a boat is passed on from fathers to sons. Some men also know how to make objects like a cassava grater or shredder, and a *mata* (used to crush cassava in order to get flour).

Since the 1940s, the communities have a logging concession area (HKV - Houtkap Vergunning). This area was assigned to the communities by the



Wood species are used to make cassava graters (left) and dug-out canoes (right).

government. It is

about 6-7 km away from the village and is 19.000 hectares. It is intended for both private and commercial use. A government rule is that the communities cannot collect wood outside of the HKV. However, the communities regard the entire territory that they traditionally use as their property, from which they can freely take what they need..

Many commercial logging activities take place within this territory. First, there are men from the villages who cut wood in the HKV and sell it; this activity almost exclusively takes place in the dry season, as the roads are bad in the rainy season. Second, there are commercial logging companies active in the area, working in logging concessions that have been issued by the government, often without knowledge of the villagers and in all cases without their free, prior and informed consent. Some employ indigenous persons from the villages. Because of new techniques and transportation means (chainsaws, tractors or trucks) much more wood can be cut and sold than in the past.

### The traditional land tenure system

The communities consider the entire ancestral territory, as indicated on the land use map, as a collective area. All hunting, fishing and gathering grounds within the Indigenous territory, and all natural resources within it, are considered the collective property of all Indigenous peoples of West Suriname. Anyone who comes from one of the Indigenous villages can hunt, fish or collect material (like wood or NTFPs ) anywhere in the area. In practice, the inhabitants of Apoera, Washabo and Section do have their 'own' places where they go for various activities. This primarily has to do with the location of these places close to the respective villages. And although traditionally,

collecting wood is permitted anywhere within the Indigenous territory, this is not allowed according to the Surinamese law and nowadays many community members prefer to stay out of trouble and cut trees only within the concession area (HKV).

Outsiders are not allowed to enter the Indigenous territory for hunting, fishing, wood cutting or gathering without permission of the village council(s). However, it frequently happens that outsiders

do not follow these rules and moreover, that they violate the customary rules and hunt or fish excessively (one of the customary rules is that you are not allowed to waste and use only what you need).

Only the agricultural plots ('kostgronden') are individually owned. Every family has its own place to plant. That is why other rules apply to the plots than to the rest of the area:

- one cannot just go into someone else's plot;
- one cannot harvest from someone else's plot;
- one cannot clear an old plot of someone else without asking permission.

All Indigenous peoples from the three villages can clear plots anywhere in the territory as long as that place is not occupied.

Indigenous people who are not from West Suriname and who want to plant in the area have to ask permission from the village leader. In the case of non-Indigenous immigrants the village council discusses it with the community who makes the final decision.

### **Sustainable use**

The responses of those interviewed for this study also revealed the depth of the connection between the communities' spiritual beliefs and their sustainable ways to use the area. Because of the traditional laws and rules, the communities have been able to use the natural resources for centuries, without causing a threat to the area's rich biodiversity.

The Indigenous peoples believe that everything on earth has a soul and has to be protected. Humans, animals, plants, but also things that non-Indigenous peoples view as dead, such as rocks or water, are considered equals of the people. Community members can use what they need to survive, but they have to use resources with respect.



The plots are individually owned.

"We believe that everything has a mother. Even if the tree belongs to no one, it still has a 'ma'. So you're going to ask the 'ma' for permission. Before you cut it, you talk to the tree and you say: 'I am not cutting you for no reason, I am cutting you because I have to make living and you are going to help me with that (because I am going to make a dug-out canoe from you)'".

Keeping the balance between human and nature is of utmost importance. If this balance would be disturbed, by misuse or excessive use, this could have consequences like diseases or accidents. In such cases a *piay* (shaman) has to restore the balance through contact with the spiritual world.

Moreover, the communities are dependent on their environment for survival, so it is essential for them not to disturb the ecosystem but to conserve it. For generations, people have subsisted on the natural resources and they want to make sure that generations to come can also subsist on them. This results in some basic rules:

- One of the most important and effective rule is: do not take more than you need. Using too much, or indiscriminately, is not permitted. "*[Because] we live like our ancestors. We hunt and fish but we don't exterminate. We use an angling rod, not a net. With a net you can catch a lot of fish, but you risk wiping out all of the fish. We take only what we need. [...]*".
- Related to this: you can't waste or spoil or let something rot. That is not respectful. Animals that people don't use are not shot, because that would be wasting. Trees that people do not need, are not cut.
- People have to be very careful with female animals. "*We rather catch the male animal than the female, because she might carry a cub*", the hunters say. The mother sometimes is together with the cubs, they eat together. And sometimes the female animals are pregnant. "*You don't shoot these animals*", the hunters say, "*you have to look very carefully. This is a traditional rule, because otherwise you may use up all your resources*".
- People also cannot take young species. This applies to both game animals and fish, but also for young plants or trees that still need to grow. "*They still have to grow. We don't want to face scarcity later on, each year there has to be plenty*". "*We leave young trees alone. Everybody knows that. Because what if you just cut everything? You will be left with nothing! So we cut what we need, and the little ones, well, you're going to need them some other time in the future*". In the seasons when people know certain animals have young ones, extra attention is paid to this rule.
- One protecting rule related to fishing, is that the use of *nekoe*, an intoxicating plant extract, is forbidden, because too many fish in the creeks die when it is used.

There are also certain animal and fish species that people do not eat, and also certain wood species that can't be cut, or can only be cut for special occasions, such as the *kankantrie* (L. koemaka), the *ingipipa*, and nut trees.

### Threats and consequences

The communities are worried about some of the changes that are taking place in the area. Their concerns include that many wild game animals are becoming harder to find, for example *dia's* (deer), *pakira's* (wild pigs) and tortoises. Another animal that hunters hardly see anymore is the *watrash* (kapoea). Moreover, many animals are moving further and further away from the villages.

The fishermen also notice that there is less fish than in the past. The popular fish Anjoemara is getting scarce, according to the fishermen, and can hardly be found close to the villages. So, for both hunting and fishing, the community members have to go further away, which costs more time and money (because of the transport).

Non-timber forest products can still be found, mostly because most of these species, like the warimbo, grow very fast. A lot of valuable wood species, however, have run out in a lot of places and can only be found in remote places (For example, the Kaboeri Creek). Species that can hardly be found anymore, according to the woodworkers, are for example species like *'silverbali'*, cedar, and wild mango (*maka kabbes*). In the past, all the species that people used, including the ones used to make dug-out canoes, were growing close to the homes, but nowadays woodworkers have to go deep into the forest to find one.

The area is thus getting less rich in resources, while at the same time the area that the communities can make use of is shrinking because of access restrictions like the one at Bakhuy's concession. For the communities it is getting more difficult to survive. There are both external and internal factors that contribute to the fact that the communities' sustainable use of the resources in their territory is under pressure. The most important concerns are listed below.

#### Mining and logging

The arrival of the mining companies has had a big effect on the hunting and fishing opportunities in the area. The bauxite companies have restricted activities in the concession area in the Bakhuy's mountain range. One of the hunters said that before the exploration of BHP Biliton and Suralco, the Indigenous peoples also went hunting and fishing at Bakhuy's and surroundings. The Moses Creek and Van Ams Creek at Bakhuy's are good fishing sites. They especially fished for anjoemaras here, because this type of fish is abundant at Bakhuy's. Apart from anjoemaras, there is also much game, birds and tortoises. The hunters and fishermen did not go to Bakhuy's all year round, but at times that they knew there was a lot of game or fish to catch: "*Especially in the dry season we caught a lot of anjoemara at Bakhuy's*".

*"But unfortunately, that's no longer possible. So we have to satisfy ourselves with other places such as Kabalebo and the Nickerie River. [...] Nowadays, Bakhuy's is out of the picture for every hunter"*.

Because of the mining activities the fish and the animals have moved away, as they are chased away by the noise.

Commercial logging is the main reason that valuable wood species are running out in the area. *"Logging caused these species to disappear. All this wood is being sold now".*

#### *Influence of the cash economy and overhunting and fishing by outsiders*

In the eyes of the community members, commercial hunting and fishing and animal trade form a threat to the game and fish stocks. These activities have increased especially in the last few years. Complaints about the behaviour of outsiders, and their lack of understanding and respect for the forest, are frequently heard. Commercial hunters and fishermen generally don't pay attention to the seasons of the animals. *"Outsiders just shoot away. "Fotomans" (people from the city) don't know how to treat the forest".*

Moreover, the outsiders most of the time do not comply with the traditional, unwritten rules of the Indigenous peoples. They use methods that the Indigenous peoples disapprove of because they kill too many animals at once, they do not take all the killed animals with them and thus leave them to waste, and they do not care if species are still young or small.

*"Outsiders use a net and they leave the small fish to waste on the land. We throw the little fish back, but they don't".*

*"City people plunder our fishing grounds, they use dynamite and we disapprove of that... we don't mind them catching some fish here, but at least do it in the right way!"*

*"Some hunters unnecessarily shoot animals of which they only use a small part, to sell and get some money. Also the tigers. We Indigenous peoples don't eat tigers, but times are changing, there are strangers such as Chinese who will pay for a tooth, a tusk, of the tiger. Just for one tooth the poor animal is being shot!"*

In the Indigenous villages, the use of cash is increasing. Nowadays, you need money for a lot of things, while at the same time there are not many possibilities in the villages to get an income. The need for cash has forced some people to start hunting, fishing, or woodcutting on a commercial basis too, or for example sell animals like snakes or tortoises to traders.

#### *Lack of recognition of customary law*

The customary law of the Indigenous people of West Suriname - their unwritten norms, rules and customs - is not acknowledged or respected by Surinamese law. This is a source of concern for the villages, because it makes them powerless to act against outside influences within their territory as they are unable to enforce their rules.

### Influence of western world, education and the church

In the eyes of some community members, the fact that the contact between the villages and the outside world is steadily increasing, is leading to loss of their traditional values, knowledge and culture.

According to the elders, the youth does not learn about the traditional rituals, norms and values, because they leave the village, usually to go to school outside the area. The elders have a mixed feeling about this: "*They come back a little bit more educated, but their culture keeps declining, because they are neglecting it*". The education that the Indigenous children receive follows the same curriculum as what is used in the city; it does not pay any attention to the Indigenous language or culture and does not connect to the way of life in the Indigenous villages.

The church has also influenced the beliefs, rituals and uses. The people presently living in the villages say that the elders used to stick to the rules; but that many people don't know about them anymore, "*because we have become Christians*".

### **Conclusion**

This study has shown the strong connectedness of the Lokono People of West Suriname with the territory and resources that they have used since time immemorial. They have a specific social, economic, cultural and spiritual relationship with the land and their customary rules aim at preserving its resources for generations to come. Recognition of their land rights is therefore essential to secure their ongoing access to and control over the land and its resources.

The communities of Apoera, Section and Washabo hope that the information gathered through this research will contribute to a better understanding and knowledge of the Lokono territory, their way of life and connectedness with the area, but also of their concerns and visions. They hope that it will make a positive contribution to (future) meetings, discussions, negotiations and other interactions with other parties, and to the recognition and protection of their customary rights. This report is also seen as a way for them to discuss amongst themselves how to strengthen their culture, how to transmit their values and norms and to pass on their knowledge to the next generation.

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