Life stories

Protecting from the heart of the Park

Along with his 7 colleagues, Amalio Flores task is to protect 16,000 hectares of natural forest at the Caazapá National Park. Thanks to his work with the community promoting the importance of wildlife protection and preservation of nature, now he is no longer alone to face his challenge.

The Caazapá National Park (Paraguay) is one of the most important protected areas in Paraguay. Its 16,000 hectares. Comprise a territory that preserves biodiversity of the Atlantic Forest of Alto Paraná, surrounded by extensive agricultural business, small farmer’s settlements and pockets of rural poverty. This natural resource receives a high pressure from its environment.

The extraction of wood, the hunters, the demographic growth and the traditional practices of extraction as a way of life, put at risk its continuity and the environmental services it provides.

Amalio Flores López (37) is the park ranger’s coordinator established in the Caazapá National Park. It is managed by National Secretariat for Environment of Paraguay (SEAM). There are 7 rangers serving in this park distributed in 3 work stations located strategically.

“In our group of park rangers we all have daily responsibilities that are linked to the management and monitoring plans of this natural area. Among them, are the tours, the daily reports and taking care of our nursery of native species," said Amalio, describing his daily activities.

Amalio has many years of experience as a park ranger and previously worked in other protected areas. Since 2015 he coordinates the team for Caazapá National Park, which presents a diversity of challenges, especially in the buffer zones.

“At the beginning it was not easy because we had to earn the trust of different stakeholders and communities living next to the Park. But then people realized how we work and opened doors to us, “he said.

The Work with communities and stakeholders in the buffer zone

Both the presence of Amalio and his team, and the assistance provided by the Green and Inclusive Economy project, was progressively strengthened the role of the park rangers in the area.

Currently, in addition to complying with the management plans of the protected area, the park rangers go out to the communities to do promotion, protection, and conservation work with the population.
“In addition to our daily activities as park ranges, link to monitoring this protected area, we also work the social part,” explained Amalio.

His advocacy work involves participating in all community development activities.

“Thanks to the Green and Inclusive Economy project we were able to give strength to our work and make a difference. Thanks to this sum of efforts, today we can help people to become aware about the importance of the park,” said Amalio.

Greater awareness and less dependence

Since 2014, the Green Economy and Inclusive project, of the UNDP - UN Environment Initiative (PEI), supports 400 rural families that live in the buffer zone of the Caazapá National Park and participate in the programs of promotion and social protection of the National Secretariat for Social Action (SAS). Two of these programs are Tekoporã and Tenonderã, the first of conditional cash transfers with co-responsibility, and the second of increasing capacities for socioeconomic inclusion.

PEI support to the families is given through the institutional strengthening of the SAS and the SEAM, which is achieved with the local and national training of technicians and officials in charge of delivering actions of mentioned programs. One of the results of these actions was strengthening park ranger’s capacity regarding to protection, conservation and promotion of more sustainable productive practices and resilient livelihoods.

“Zones like this one are at risk for an inappropriate use of natural resources at this time. Nature needs our help to recover, said Amalio.” said Amalio.

Thanks to the work carried out by Amalio and his team, communities and producers around Caazapá National Park become more aware of the environmental services provided by the protected area, incorporating new productive practices and new livelihoods. All of this is progressively reducing the pressure over this important natural reserve.

“This project trigged people’s interest in the conservation of the park, but it needs help. Previously we wanted people not to enter in the park but now we want them to come and visit so they can appreciate and enjoy their beauty,” said Amalio.