Christian Aid is a Christian organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

We work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. We are part of a wider movement for social justice. We provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.

christianaid.org.uk

Cover photo: Raimundo Printes do Canno, elected leader of a quilombola community called Abui.

Photo credit: Christian Aid/T Ross

Christian Aid is a member of actalliance
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Cover: Raimundo Printes do Canno, leader of the Abui community in the Brazilian Amazon.
Photographs: Cover, page 8: Christian Aid/Tabitha Ross; page 5: Christian Aid; page 7,15: Christian Aid/Elaine Duigeman; page 9: Christian Aid/Tom Price; page 11: Christian Aid/Gui Carvalho; page 14: Christian Aid/A Smith.
List of Acronyms

CPI  Comissão Pró-Índio
ILO  International Labour Organization
INGO  international non-governmental organisation
NGO  non-governmental organisation
PVCA  Participatory, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment
Our vision

Our vision is to see an Amazon region where communities are the driving force behind sustainable development, challenging unjust systems to strive for social, climate and economic justice. We envision an Amazon region where development is inclusive and respects the environment. With these conditions, we hope to see a place where indigenous, Quilombola and farming communities can thrive.

Below: Children at play in the Bella Altura community of the Madidi National Park, part of the Bolivian Amazon.
The Amazon is vital to life on Earth

Protecting the Amazon is now of global importance for the future sustainability of our shared planet.

The Amazon region covers an area larger than the size of the European Union and extends across nine countries. It is home to Quilombolas, farmers and almost 20 million indigenous inhabitants.

Historically, these communities have recognised and respected the environmental importance of the region. The Amazon is a hub of biodiversity, boasting more species of plants and animals than any other ecosystem on the planet. It is the largest hydrographic network in the world and a vital global climate regulator.

Today, the Amazon region faces a growing number of threats. Predatory development models, extractive industries, state and private sector funded mega projects and agribusinesses all place it at great risk. These threats often impact the communities that know it best, leading to environmental destruction, displacement and even violence.

As the World Council of Churches has highlighted: ‘The green heart of the Earth is mourning and the life it sustains is withering.’ The unparalleled biodiversity in the Amazon, and the essential role it plays in controlling the planet’s atmospheric carbon levels, is directly related to the millions of indigenous and Quilombola people living in the region. ‘They are the custodians of this precious heritage.’

The Amazon in danger

In October 2011, the Bolivian government backtracked spectacularly on the construction of a road project in the Amazon that had triggered protests by indigenous people.

Construction of the road stalled in 2011, when indigenous organisations undertook a gruelling two-month, 425km protest march from the Amazon basin, up the peaks of the Andes to Bolivia’s seat of government in La Paz. The march, which drew thousands of urban supporters and the attention of global media, forced the government to put the project on hold.

However, more than four years of sporadic political conflict came to ahead in June 2015, when plans were announced to resume construction on a controversial highway that would pass directly through a national park and protected indigenous reserve known as the Isiboro Secure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS).

‘Bolivia’s Morales pushes controversial TIPNIS highway forward’, Mongabay, 2015
Christian Aid in the Amazon

Christian Aid was one of the first international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) to work in the Amazon region. We have worked with local partners and social movements for more than four decades, campaigning tirelessly for the land rights of vulnerable communities. We have gained the trust of forest communities – unlike many others who find it hard to build and maintain relationships in the region. There are still relatively few INGOs in the Amazon region and few with the years of experience and contextual knowledge that we have.

Christian Aid has offices in Bolivia and Brazil. We have built a diverse portfolio of local partners, ranging from community organisations to think tanks, which work across national borders with Amazonian communities.

We believe action must be taken now, because the cost of staying still is too high for vulnerable forest communities – and for the world. We must work for each person that lives in the forest, supporting them to implement alternative livelihoods that respect their environment, customs and expressed needs.

To achieve an impact across such a vast region, we cannot work in isolation. We place the highest value on partnerships and alliances, working with Christian Aid’s global network, INGOs, environmental and human rights advocacy networks, ecumenical networks, and social movements and organisations. These partnerships enable us to raise awareness and amplify the voice of the forest communities and influence Amazon-wide policies at regional and international forums.

We take calculated and informed risks to pilot new models of development. In Bolivia, we work with indigenous and farming communities to implement innovative strategies which are adapted to the local context. We consider those who are often left behind, including women, the elderly and young people. Local strategies include sustainable forest management, the introduction of renewable energies and access to inclusive markets.

In Brazil, we work with Afro-descendants (Quilombolas) and communities affected by hydroelectric dams to promote local leadership on territorial rights. We aim to strengthen and support new leadership and use policy analysis in our work to inform and influence changes in policy at all levels.

We ensure that our work is based upon what communities tell us they need. Our evidence-based advocacy demonstrates the power of local development models as viable economic alternatives for small Amazonian communities.¹

Successes and challenges

There has been much to celebrate over the past 40 years. Together with local partners and social movements, Christian Aid has helped to secure the land titles for over 7,000 km² of land² across the Amazon region and preserve nearly 10,000 km² of forest. Our work to empower forest communities – who were neglected for generations– has resulted in many speaking out on decisions that

Case study

Building for the future

Domingos Printes is a Quilombola leader based in the Brazilian Amazon. He believes that the future of his isolated community, descendants of escaped slaves, is dependent on finding a source of income that does not endanger the forest.

His wisdom and steadfastness has played a key role in his community gaining the collective titles to their land, where they have lived for generations.

However, Domingos has had to face off several threats, including a timber company and illegal fishermen. He believes that Christian Aid partner Comissão Pró-Índio (CPI) has been critical in helping the community fight off these threats, providing advice, legal skills and experience that the Quilombolas simply could not access any other way.

‘Without Christian Aid’s support of CPI, we would not have legs to walk this far. We know that the main effort is ours, but we still need the support of Christian Aid.’

Domingos Printes, Quilombola leader.

Above: Domingos Printes sees children off to school in the Amazon rainforest.
Affect them. Communities are denouncing human rights abuses and using global networks to raise awareness. However, communities still face a number of threats which could undermine this progress.

**Unsustainable development and inequality**

Indigenous groups and Afro-descendants have lived in the Amazon for thousands of years and have a close relationship with the forest. They have lived in harmony with the forest and protected its biodiversity for generations. However, their role in preserving the forest has never had much recognition or state support. The majority live in poverty, enduring discrimination and formal exclusion from social and economic institutions. Indigenous and Quilombola groups, especially women and young people, are often excluded and not consulted on new policies. Increasingly, state and private sector groups question their right to be involved in projects that determine the future of the forest.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that Quilombolas have been left on the margins of advances made by the general population in Brazil and states that several indicators (including health, nutrition and access to services) point to a chronic vulnerability. Quilombolas often face unequal access to basic services and rights, which only serves to heighten their sense of isolation.

Despite a wealth of natural resources, the Amazon is one of the most unequal regions in the world.

Indigenous and Quilombola communities rank among the lowest in terms of socio-economic indicators and provision of basic rights and services. Existing economic models exacerbate inequalities and concentrate wealth in the hands of a few. Many businesses, governments and financial institutions see the Amazon region as an economic opportunity – a source of raw materials and energy to power forward their industries. As a result, communities must contend with contaminated rivers, deforestation, poaching, uncontrolled migration and even violence. Quilombola and indigenous communities struggle to defend their land rights against this avalanche of threats from powerful economic and political interests.

**Risks to defenders**

The scramble for the Amazon’s natural wealth is one of the factors that makes Latin America the world’s deadliest region for human rights and environmental defenders. Indiscriminate exploitation in this territory has caused innumerable impact to its social, environmental and cultural heritage. Quilombola rights to their territories are guaranteed by the Brazilian constitution, yet just 9% of Quilombola communities have the legal titles to their lands. Without land recognition and titles, they are more vulnerable to conflicts and disputes involving their territories.

Brazil is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for human rights defenders, as according to Global Witness, 49 human rights defenders were killed in 2016. Many of them had previously opposed environmental destruction or land grabbing. Some of those killed were from indigenous and Quilombola communities. In the

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**Case study**

**Building resilience**

Our partner CIPCA protects the territorial rights of indigenous people and supports more than 200 families in the southern Amazon area to manage in excess of 1,893 hectares of forest sustainably. It helps to protect them from threats such as land grabbing, illegal logging and cattle ranchers.

We are implementing an innovative approach called Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (PVCA). PVCA helps Christian Aid and our partners Soluciones Practicas and CIPCA to understand the needs and listen to the proposals of some of the most hard-to-reach forest communities – people who can often be overlooked in times of humanitarian crisis.

Renewable energy sources are improving the wellbeing of families. Solar ovens enable them to cook nutritious meals, even during the rainy season when there is little dry fuel available. The solar ovens save time for women who generally spend many hours gathering firewood and cooking. The ovens also reduce deforestation, as each family traditionally uses 3kg of wood to cook each day, on average.

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**Above:** Francisca Lurici with her solar oven in Capania community, Bolivia.
first 10 months of 2017 alone, 17 murders of Quilombolas were recorded in the country.7

Despite progressive legislation on environmental and indigenous rights in Bolivia, indigenous leaders continue to face discrimination and defamation. Organisations that support indigenous leaders are often attacked by the government and other institutions established to challenge their claims, with accusations of co-optation, corruption and illegitimacy.

**Lack of transparency in investments**

The Bolivian and Brazilian governments have ratified United Nations conventions that respect the rights of indigenous and Quilombola communities to be consulted about any infrastructure projects or extractive industries which are planned on their territories. However, new infrastructure developments, including the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America’s estimated $22.4 billion infrastructure plan,8 suggest commitments to consult forest communities have been deprioritised. Many consultations have been overlooked, badly managed and had poor participation.

Although there are no final figures, it is estimated that 140 dams have been installed or are under construction, with another 288 planned across the region.9 At present, approximately 52,974 mining concessions cover 21% of the Amazon basin. This level of construction could lead a loss of livelihood and the eventual displacement of Amazonian communities, many of whom are unlikely to receive compensation. Neither Bolivia nor Brazil have specific legislation regarding the rights of people affected by such projects, and there is inconsistent application of provisions from the International Labour Organization Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. In addition, there is no framework for disaster risk reduction related to mega projects in the Amazon. Where disasters do occur, legal claims against the companies involved are rarely successful.10

**Below:** A mine site in Ariquemes, Rondônia state, Brazil. Mining, cattle ranching and soya cultivation have resulted in Rondônia becoming one of the most deforested places in the Amazon, and caused tensions and violence between migrant populations.
Deforestation

The Bolivian Amazon covers nearly 596,000 km² (nearly 2.5 times the size of the UK) and is home to more than 30 indigenous communities. Deforestation is on the rise and increasingly occurring inside indigenous territories. In 2016, Bolivia deforested an area equivalent to the size of New Zealand.¹

In the Brazilian Amazon, 1,086,950 km² of the forest is occupied by indigenous communities, approximately 21.7% of the entire territory, which makes indigenous land rights critical for forest preservation. The total area deforested prior to 2016 was 754,840 km² – an area larger than France.² Over the past 10 years, forested areas equivalent to the size of Switzerland have been lost to mining. In Brazil, deforestation remains the largest source of carbon emissions (31.2%). However, recent data suggests that in the areas where Quilombola communities are located, deforestation is considerably smaller than neighbouring areas.

‘Threats. Threats from mining companies that get into our lands without any respect, without arranging with us, without consultation with us. And when you see all the deforestation they cause, you want to cry... I like my land, I give my life and soul for it’

Aluízio dos Santos, Quilombola leader, Mãe Domingas Association, Oriximiná
Binational Amazon strategy

Since 2011, Christian Aid Bolivia and Brazil have brought partners together, through exchange visits and regional workshops, so they can share their experiences and knowledge about promoting the rights of forest communities. Our new strategy builds on these past experiences and continues to work through our historic relationships with territorial organisations at community level.

As the pressure on the Amazon basin increases, we are called to reaffirm our global commitment. The Amazon’s custodians cannot protect against these threats alone. Communities face multiple threats that undermine their territorial rights and right to a peaceful existence.

We call for an alternative development model based on the lessons of people living in the territory, responding to their needs and aspirations rather than outside interests. This model needs to consider transboundary approaches and respect the global importance of the Amazon ecosystem.

Innovation is at the heart of this strategy and we seek new ways to work, advocate and build partnerships at a regional level. We will help communities to overcome their isolation by connecting them with regional organisations and communities facing similar threats. In this model, we seek to foster a culture of shared learning and exchange which will strengthen the voices of Amazonian communities.

‘Discrimination on the basis of identity prevents the opportunity for a dignified life, leaving people either in a state of poverty or dependency’

Christian Aid
Our Amazon strategy is part of Christian Aid’s wider Latin America and the Caribbean strategy, which prioritises a focus on gender and inequalities and promotes shared learning across South America (Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil), Central America (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala) and Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

We will build new partnerships with regional bodies, particularly faith-based organisations and academia, to optimise their areas of expertise to achieve a greater impact.

In the long term, we hope to share knowledge and replicate forest management in other regions, including Central America, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa.

Our theory for change

Our vision is of a protected Amazon that is a cherished part of our common home. We hope to reduce the inequalities faced by Amazonian communities, especially those that threaten women, through the implementation of sustainable models of development that respect its ecosystems and the rights of communities that live there.

Pathways to create change

- To empower historically excluded and marginalised communities to participate, influence and inform decision making processes that directly affect them and their territories.
- To ensure communities have access and control over land and resources, through having titles to their land and services in place.
- To build sustainable forestry systems which are protected for future generations.
- To develop mechanisms of transparency, accountability, and inclusion for actors operating in the Amazon region.

Advocacy

To challenge the unjust power structures which promote unsustainable development models, marginalise communities and damage ecosystems in the Amazon.

Outcomes

- To produce independent and reliable data on the Amazon region through innovative research.
- To strengthen faith-based organisations to provide contextualised theology on the threats and opportunities for more sustainable development models in the Amazon region.
- To change policies and practices in the Amazon region based on local claims, experiences and robust data.
- To challenge governments, as well as regional and international organisations, to apply principles of free, prior and informed consent regarding investments on indigenous and traditional lands.
- To ensure financial institutions and private investors comply with international standards of transparency and good governance.
To strengthen women and youth to challenge social norms, ensuring proportional representation in decision making in their communities, organisations and public spaces.

**Capacity building**

To strengthen the capacity of civil society in the defence of a sustainable development model which respects the rights of Amazonian communities and the forest ecosystem.

**Outcomes**

- To build the capacity of civil society organisations with a shared interest in the Amazon to inform and influence the public agenda and promote sustainable development models.
- To promote the leadership capacity of women and young people to advocate more effectively for the territorial rights of Amazonian communities.
- To raise awareness of the threats and risks in the region among Amazonian communities and their organisations, and strengthen their protection and response mechanisms.

**Implement local development models**

To implement viable local development models which are sustainable, reduce inequalities, and increase resilience in the region.

**Outcomes**

- To develop innovative, sustainable and contextualised solutions to local development needs which can be implemented by communities themselves.
- To find effective, community-based solutions which can be widely shared among different communities, scaled up and replicated as appropriate.
- To push local and regional authorities to support sustainable solutions for local needs.
Our approach

- **Participatory processes**: using PVCAs to ensure communities are empowered around resilience, based on collective planning.

- **Evidence-based programming**: to ensure all decisions and processes are based on reality and not perception. This will help to validate the participatory processes.

- **Partner development and capacity building**: to empower partners to co-create, co-facilitate and deliver projects.

- **Regional networking, learning and coordination**: to enhance protection capabilities, overcome isolation, transcend local concerns and make long-lasting connections with communities and organisations across the Amazon. This will be achieved through regional exchanges, meetings and workshops.

- **Regional and international advocacy**: to amplify the voices of Amazonian communities and organisations to develop and implement evidence-based advocacy strategies at a regional level. To influence and target regional decision making bodies through participation in regional events, research publications and advocacy actions.

- **New and strengthened partnerships**: to incorporate new regional actors that speak out for the rights of communities and promote sustainable development models. These actors include the private sector, academia, regional and ecumenical networks.

- **Fundraising**: to develop and implement a funding strategy by engaging different segments of Christian Aid’s global partnership to set up new types of partnership and funding models.

- **Building international solidarity**: to increase awareness and solidarity with Amazonian communities through regional and international campaigns, supporter networks, intercultural theological dialogues, global events and advocacy opportunities.

- **Regional and international litigation**: to use local, national and international legal mechanisms to denounce human and environmental rights abuses, and protect the rights of the communities that we work with.

Risks and mitigation

We are aware of potential risks in our work, but due to our long experience delivering projects in the region, we have developed a range of mitigation strategies.

Achieving engagement from communities can be difficult. Our PVCAs guide our interventions and help community members feel they have an ownership of projects. We will work to tackle power inequalities within communities through gender-sensitive programming and training. Above all, we are committed to protecting and defending the rights of the communities with which we work.
Sustainability and evaluation

This strategy is built on more than 40 years of experience in the Amazon region, and a strong foundation of networks and partnerships. Our strategy will promote changes in policy and practice, and integrate community concerns into proposals. We aim to encourage local and regional authorities to commit to sustainable solutions for local needs through the allocation of public funds.

Contextualised approaches will ensure relevance and sustainable engagement from communities. Alternative models for development will be sustained by integrating them into existing community management structures and, when appropriate, linking them to markets systems for replication and scale up.

This strategy responds to a Theory of Change and power analysis. Partner intervention will bring diverse, complementary expertise to meet our strategic objectives, and advocacy will strengthen these results.

The role of Christian Aid is to deliver innovation, promote effective partnership and achieve a greater regional impact, which will bring transformative benefits to vulnerable and excluded communities.

‘We want all people to have the power to influence institutions, so that the decisions affecting their lives are made responsibly and fairly’

Christian Aid
Measuring change and structured learning

We will integrate annual country indicators with success development indicators across the two programmes. To share our learning, we will produce:

- Quarterly updates to highlight the work, learning and results at a regional level.
- Annual report.
- Impact study.

The implementation of our strategy will be followed by strong evidence-based programming, providing knowledge and reflection on two levels – with communities and partners, and within and beyond Christian Aid.

'I must say something to you: There are no words in Portuguese to thank you for supporting our struggle, for your help. Please, send a big hug to the people from Christian Aid. They do believe in God, don’t they? So, tell them that God will give them twice!'

Edilson, local Quilombola leader, Oriximiná region
End notes

1 The Amazon covers 5.5 million km² (2.13 million square miles).


3 For example see: https://www.christianaid.org.uk/about-us/in-their-lifetime-ilt-report/brazil

4 2,703 square miles (1,339 in Bolivia and 1,364 in Brazil).

5 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2014.


8 Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America is a development plan to link South America’s economies through new transportation, energy, and telecommunications projects.


10 A notorious example is the case of Mariana in Brazil, in which a burst dam killed 17 people and displaced thousands of families. More than 20 months after the worst socio-environmental disaster in the country’s history, a lawsuit against the company Samarco and others responsible for the burst was still ongoing.

11 Bolivian deforestation was not only in the Amazon, but the whole country – it is not possible to specify geographic areas. See: ‘Bolivia’, Global Forest Watch, www.globalforestwatch.org/country/BOL


13 Actors include civil society organisations, local and national authorities, international organisations, financial institutions and the private sector.

14 Civil society organisations include social movements, churches, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, private sector, universities and research bodies.
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