



## **BAOKOPA'O WA DI'ITINPAN WADAUNIINAO ATI'O NII**

Kaimanamana'o, wa zaamatapan, wa di'itapan na'apamnii  
wa sha'apatan Wapichan wiizi Guyana'ao raza

## **THINKING TOGETHER FOR THOSE COMING BEHIND US**

An outline plan for the care of Wapichan territory in Guyana

Summary



We, the indigenous Wapichan people of southern Guyana, have drawn up, agreed and published a community-based plan for caring for our territory, called *Baokopa'o wa di'tinpan wadauniinao ati'o nii* (Thinking together for those coming behind us).

This brochure summarises our plan. It outlines some key parts of the plan and includes examples of agreements made between our villages on ways to secure and care for our lands, forests, savannahs, wetlands and mountains and promote self-determined development in our communities.

This brochure also explains how we made the plan and includes some of the lessons that have come out of our community-based planning process.

We hope our experience will be of interest to indigenous peoples in other parts of Guyana and in other countries.

*“We appeal to the government, international agencies and allies in Guyana and beyond to support us in our efforts. We ask them to recognise our rights and to help us move this plan forward. Let us work together to realise the vision of the Wapichan people for this beautiful land we call Wapichan wiizi.*

Toshaos Patrick Gomes and Habert Wilson, February 2012

# About our plan

“ We have only been given titles to mapas kau dau (a small part) of our lands and we still seek recognition of wa wiizi bau-kopa’o (all of our territory). All these lands are baukopa’o wa mashap kiizi (the place where we live together). Late Daniel Kinchin, former Toshao, Potarinao Village, 2005

The Wapichan people and our ancestors have occupied and used the whole area that we call *Wapichan wiizi* for generations. Our communities have sought legal recognition of our territory for many years. In 1967 they presented a written request to the Amerindian Lands Commission for legal title to all of our lands but so far much of our territory remains without legal title. We are continuing to work together to secure our customary lands and gain recognition of our traditional ways of caring for our territory and resources.

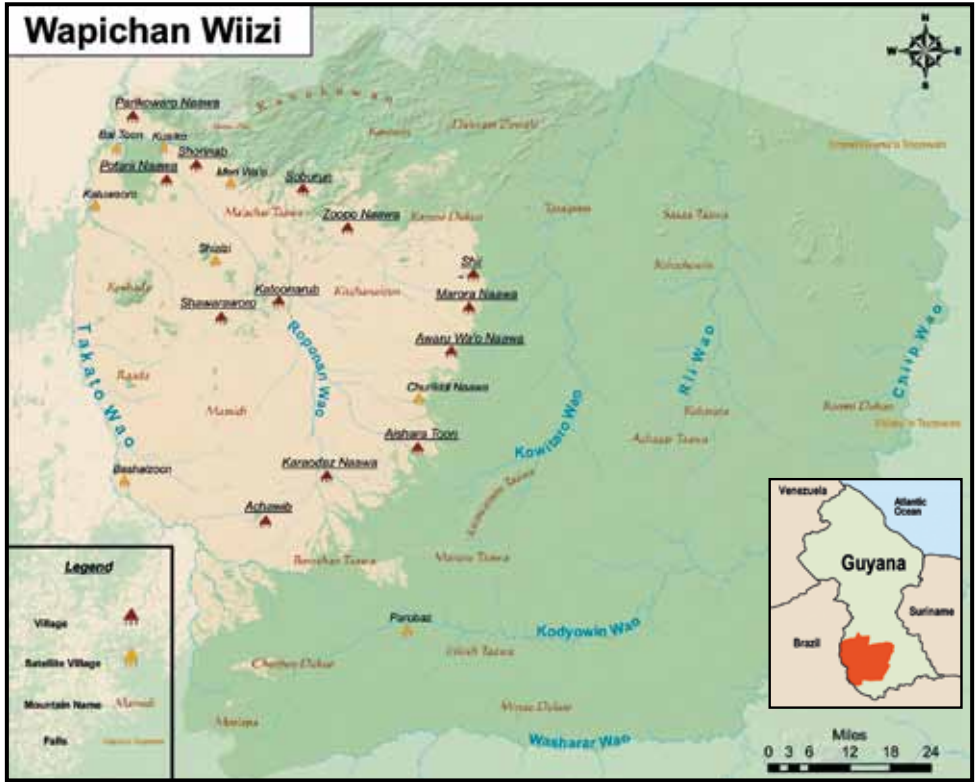
Our efforts to have our lands recognised are led by our South Central and South Rupununi Districts Toshao Councils (DTCs), with support from the South Central Peoples Development Association (SCPDA).

Our work has included:

- ◆ Community mapping of our traditional use, occupation and spiritual attachment to our land (2000-2008)
- ◆ Documenting our customary use and traditional ways for caring for lands and biological resources. We published this community study as *Wa Wiizi Wa Kaduzu: Our Territory and Our Customs* (2006).
- ◆ Compiling an outline community-based plan for securing and caring for *Wapichan wiizi* for the benefit of present and future generations. We published this plan, with our territorial map, as *Thinking Together for Those Coming Behind Us* (2012).

The DTCs and SCPDA are working to take our territorial plan forward within the framework of the Amerindian Act (including Section 59), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and related human rights and environmental treaties that have been ratified by Guyana, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. From 2012 we aim to put our plan to work through dialogue with the government, international agencies and allies.





Map 1: Wapichan wiizi : Wapichan territory

“Important boundary markers of our Wapichan wiizi are Takoto Wa’o (Takatu), Diniwod Dukuo, Mamid Dukuo, Taama Toon, Washarar wa’o – Washarara Dukuo (Kassikaiytu), Kodyowin wa’o (Kuyuwini) and Chiiip wa’o (Essequibo). There are a lot of Kuba Kida along the river that have sensitive Yachin (malaria Dukuzo) and Tozowan (waterfalls) that are found on Chiiip wa’o at Imanaowunau Tozowan (King George falls), Idaruo Tozowan (Great Falls), King William falls and Wanatu-ba falls. Our marunaonaos visit all these places that are sacred to us. So through them we can say that we know our land and everything within it. Vincent Lewis, Morora Naawa Village, March 2011

Our territory lies in the south-west of Guyana (see Map 1). Our traditional lands are made up of diverse and rich habitats and ecosystems, including many different types of tropical forests, savannah grasslands, savannah woodlands and wetlands, lakes, ponds and rivers. Our lands support very high biological diversity, including rare species such as the harpy eagle, giant otter, bush dog and jaguar. Large parts of our territory are designated as an Important Bird Area that supports rare birds, including the Red Siskin, and endemic birds such as the Rio Branco antbird and the Hoary-throated spinetail. Our creeks also support rare and endemic fishes.

# Purpose of our plan

Support our leaders' work to get our rights to Wapichan territory legally recognised

Help our communities to protect the land and resources that our way of life depends on

Set up and put to work inter-community agreements on how to care for and use the land, for the benefit of the present and future generations

Help make our Wapichan institutions and ways of taking decisions stronger

Develop our lands and communities according to our rights, our vision, our culture and our needs

Foster dialogue and enable negotiations with the government of Guyana and outside agencies on land rights, development, conservation and the environment



# Vision for our territory

In 25 years' time:

- ◆ We will continue to live together on our traditional lands as one Wapichan people, using our savannahs, forests, mountains and creeks freely and sustainably, according to our customary laws and traditional practices.
- ◆ The entire *Wapichan wiizi*, as set out in submissions to the Amerindian Lands Commission in 1967 and as defined in our proposed title extensions, will be legally recognised and secure.
- ◆ We will breathe pure air, have clean water and keep the beauty, scenery and resources of our lands so that those coming behind us will enjoy what we have today.
- ◆ We will have a strong economy and enjoy a high level of self-sufficiency.
- ◆ We will keep our Wapichan values and traditions, including rotational farming, hunting, gathering and fishing, ant-stinging, healing ceremonies, cotton farming and weaving, making clay pots, using bow and arrows, and eating traditional foods such as cassava bread and pepper pot.
- ◆ Our development will benefit all our people, including women, young people and the elderly. It will be based on respect for our culture and provide jobs and incomes for young people in our territory.
- ◆ We will use, conserve, control and monitor our lands, territory and resources ourselves through our own institutions, traditional leaders and experts.



**Map 2: Wapichannao Kazanatap nii Kanoko : Wapichan Conserved Forest**

“Tominkaru created this world as a special gift to the wapichannao and other people who occupy this earth. He created many living beings to beautify this land and gave us a special gift to have control over his creation and to cultivate this fertile land and use the various resources within it. So we are the tapiki (keepers) of this part of the world along with the taapiki kida (spirit masters) of the various games, fish, bird, the various timber species and all small insects and all living things we have today, found in the rivers, creeks, lakes, mountains, hills and forest in Wapichan wiizi. George Simon, Shorinab, 2011

**UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**

Our plan contains many actions on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and equitable sharing of benefits among our communities. Much of our plan is based on our traditional knowledge (CBD Art. 8(j)) and customary sustainable use (Art. 10(c)) passed down from generation to generation. Our Wapichan Conserved Forest contributes to the CBD’s work on protected areas. It is also similar to the holistic ‘ecosystem approach’ of the CBD. If we have our lands legally recognised and we can put our plan to work, it will help to implement the Convention at the local level.

# Caring for our territory

Our plan contains over 100 agreements made by our communities on collective principles and actions to care for *Wapichan wiizi* and to promote sustainable land use and community development. Here is a selection of these agreements:

## Land use agreements

### Different kinds of lands

**Forests:** Our communities will work together to protect and care for our Wapichan conserved forest for the benefit of present and future generations and the world. (See Map 2)

**Bush islands:** We will try out ways of creating new bush islands in suitable areas and restock bush islands with native trees at *Shiuu Toon Naawa* and *Wataba Naawa*.

**Mountains:** We will protect our beautiful mountain scenery, watersheds, cultural heritage and sacred sites through reserve areas and no-go zones on mountain peaks and upper slopes.

**Savannah:** We will continue to share our grazing areas and other communal resources according to custom and look after our gallery forests, salt licks, ité palm swamps and fish spawning grounds.

**Waters & wetlands:** We will protect springs and creek heads at agreed sites e.g. at *Achazai Taawa Paawa*, *Karishizi*, *Kobarara Taawa*, *Kanun Wa'o Kuwuzo* and *Kanun Wa'o wanom*.

### How we use the land

**Hunting grounds:** We will maintain the abundance of game animals by: respecting *doronainao mashapkiizi* (homes of the grandfather spirits), moving our hunting around to different areas and setting up community-conserved areas to protect game multiplying and feeding grounds.

**Gathering grounds:** We will use our gathering grounds sustainably following our customary laws and harvesting only mature plants and trees.

**Fishing grounds:** Each village is encouraged to discuss and adopt Village Rules agreed in our plan e.g. prohibition of dive fishing in sensitive sites and deep pools.

**Farm lands:** We will keep our tradition of planting many different crops, using natural fertilisers and rotating our farms around different areas, and we will re-use the farming areas of our ancestors.

**Ranching:** We will rear healthy cattle and horses and improve our stock by animal breeding, keeping the pasture healthy through controlled burning and training our ranchers and youths.

**Use of fire:** We will make community fire agreements and choose responsible people to watch over the safe use of fire on our lands.

### Important places

**Things left by our ancestors:** We will adopt Village Rules to protect sites with rock carvings, old pottery, beads and human remains, and control who can go to these sites.

**Wildlife sites:** Our communities will take actions to conserve rare species like the Red Siskin, keep important habitats healthy through rotational use and traditional use of fire, and set up community-conserved sites for protecting wildlife.

# Community development agreements

“Our Village Councils and DTCs must have information about the development plans of outsiders. This is our right as indigenous peoples. No outsider developments can go ahead on our lands without our agreement beforehand, which must come from the people in all the villages that might be affected.” Joint DTC meeting, Morora Naawa Village, April 2011

## Development in Wapichan wiizi

**External development:** Our right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and our related rights over land and resources on titled and untitled lands must be fully respected by all external project proposals and national development plans, including LCDS and REDD+ proposals.

External programmes aimed at our communities must respect FPIC, involve our Village Councils and DTCs and respect and protect our traditional practices.

**Working together:** Our DTCs and Village Councils will work to secure legal title to our territory so we have a sound base for deciding and controlling our own development.

We will set up a Wapichan Institute to promote our way of life, train our young people and carry out cultural and development activities.

## Governance

We will strengthen our community decision-making, by actively involving our young people in community discussions and updating our Village Rules to put our plan to work.

We will organise community-based monitoring to watch over our forests, savannahs and other resources to protect them from illegal hunters, rustlers, loggers and miners.







## Customary law

Our project documented more than 100 Wapichan customary laws on the care and sustainable use of our lands. Here are some examples:

Do not cut trees with spirit masters and do not set fires nor make camps at sensitive sites in the forest.

Do not waste bush island materials and consult with elders before opening new farms.

Announce your presence to the mountain spirits and do not disturb sensitive sites.

Consult with a *marunao* or other knowledgeable person before building a house or ranch on the savannah.

Do not trouble sensitive pools with *ka-dorara* (water spirits).

Farms are to be cut only to the size that a family can care for properly (do not waste).

Grandfather spirit masters of the game animals must be respected and decorative animals e.g. giant anteater, must not be killed.

Dismantle fish traps after use and only catch fish that can be eaten.

In our gathering grounds, follow the right blessings and rituals and make offerings for harvesting sensitive materials.

Make controlled burns along the bush mouth each year at the end of the rainy season to create fire breaks.

Never carry away the belongings of the *tapikinao* watching over caves and burial grounds.

# How we made our plan

We made our plan by holding many community-based consultations, workshops and intercommunity discussions between 2008 and 2011. The consultations were carried out by a Wapichan team in the Wapichan and mixed settlements of *Aishara Toon, Shii, Karaodaz Naawa, Maroraa Naawa, Awaru Wa'o Naawa, Achawib, Parabaz; Showaru Wa'o, Katoonarub, Shorinab, Potari'i Naawa, Shizizi, Bai Toon, Parikowaro Naawa; Katuwarao, Soburun* (S Creek) and *Zoopo Naawa*. All meetings and discussions were held in local languages.

We held:

- ◆ 18 village public meetings, including people from satellite settlements, ranches and homesteads
  - ◆ 33 community workshops
  - ◆ 12 intercommunity workshops involving between three and six neighbouring communities
  - ◆ More than 20 Village General Meetings to review and ratify proposed land title extensions and land use agreements
- ◆ 26 sub-district DTC meetings, four joint DTC meetings and three DTC workshops (on FPIC and the LCDS, community self-determined development and the Amerindian Act)
  - ◆ Two five-day validation meetings to carefully review and correct the draft plan with participation by women, elders, youths, traditional leaders, Toshaos and Councillors

We also commissioned:

- ◆ Two participatory studies on natural resource management: one on burning practices in savannah grasslands and one on water quality and fisheries
- ◆ Three field studies (on farming, livestock and crafts) carried out for the DTCs. These looked at options for community-based income generation and identified pilot projects for possible follow-up.





# Lessons learned

We learned a lot about how to discuss, plan and make decisions together. In particular, if communities know about indigenous peoples' rights before a project starts, they can discuss land use and development issues more effectively and make stronger decisions. Our project design omitted this prior capacity-building, so we had to do it as the project went along.

Other lessons learned:

1. Good facilitation of meetings by our leaders and technical people, in our own languages, was essential for people to participate successfully.
2. Our team were good communicators; they knew the words of our traditional knowledge and could translate complex terms into our languages.
3. Through well-organised meetings, sound financial planning and capacity building of SCPDA staff, our communities became confident in the Toshihaos' leadership of the project, and elders, women and holders of traditional knowledge participated actively.
4. Even so, we made special efforts to involve women and young people in discussions and decision-making about land use.
5. Participatory, community-based studies on how people make their living and use natural resources should be done before making a territorial plan, so that communities can use this information during discussions.
6. Our project had funds to buy reliable equipment (laptops, GPS, cameras etc.) and trained team members how to use it properly.
7. Photo and video documentation of land use and communities should be planned and budgeted as a specific project component.
8. Visual communication through talking maps, story-boards and participatory video, can reach more members of a community than written documents, allowing better sharing of information about the project.
9. Effective projects need to build in resources for sharing of project results (dissemination) including in local languages.

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