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The Amazon Basin contains 40 percent of the world's tropical rainforests. It is the Amazon which will first show whether the battle against deforestation and climate change can be won. And also what will happen if it is lost.

Just last year, 130,000 square kilometers of forest was cut down or burnt, at least 10,000 square

electricity four years ago. Here he paints dots and lines on his face and body during religious festivals, the remains of which can be seen as faint blue coloring shimmering on his skin.

This is the world which was rocked by modernity 41 years ago when workers cleared a path through the forest as a prelude to the construction of a highway. This road brought with it settlers, cattle, cars, and telephones. Today, in many settlements you can find a chest freezer in which the villagers put the peccaries they hunted with bows and arrows.

### **Lost Harmony**

This other world begins at the end of the fields where the forest suddenly grows dense again. Only a narrow track leads to the village comprising a few huts, a school, a church, three computers, and 102 inhabitants. Almir Surui parks his pickup outside the wooden house of his parents. Marimop, his 87-year-old father, is lying in a hammock wearing a green crepe shirt and orange shorts. His mother is squatting on the ground drilling holes in an armadillo shell.

Both have two blue lines across their face. Almir's father explains that it is the symbol of the Surui, and that all men and women used to have this tattoo. "But young people don't want that anymore." I ask him what has changed since his people were involuntarily connected to the outside world. "The spirits used to keep the forest and the weather in harmony," the old man explains. "But the spirits are no longer what they used to be in the time of great tranquility." In other words, before 1969.

The loss of tranquility was accompanied by a loss of tradition, primarily pride. Outsiders sneered that the Surui were stupid and indolent, and they became embarrassed to call themselves indigenous people. Since then they have been at pains to appear as Brazilian as possible. Whenever they travel to the city, they wear carefully ironed shirts and meticulously polished shoes. Those who can afford to tile their terrace. A handful even own a car. And the most important person in the village is no longer the shaman, but a man from Germany. Every Wednesday, the missionary comes to the village to preach -- though mostly about the Apocalypse and Genesis because little else has been translated.

Looking at the chief sitting between his parents, you can imagine what a huge leap he must have taken to venture out into the other, alien world. Almir was the first Surui to go to college. He studied biology in Goiânia, a city of 1.2 million inhabitants, where fellow students ignored him because he didn't talk, look or eat like they did. Almir only ate soft-boiled meat, preferably pork, and no vegetables or sauce. Although the Surui have adapted in many ways, their nutritional habits have not changed.

### **Technology and Tradition**

The young Surui therefore sought refuge in the Internet and joined the battle against the World Bank and its Planaflo development project, which envisaged building new roads, dams and settlements on Indio land, but ignored the country's indigenous people. The Indios took on the World Bank -- and won. When the chief returned to his village, he brought with him a computer and an idea: that the Surui's only hope for survival lay in combining the two worlds of technology and tradition. It was the dawn of a new era.

Almir's father still hunts with a bow and arrow, while Almir now has an iPhone. "I revere modern technology," he says. It sounds like a profession of faith. Although he can get no reception, he holds his iPhone in his hand, and won't let go. He glances at the unresponsive screen, yearning to check his e-mail, surf the Internet and Google his own name, which he often does whenever he is bored. Yesterday he generated 49,600 hits. That gives him hope, he says, because you don't disappear so

quickly if you have 49,600 hits. He has five different e-mail addresses, and 324 friends on Facebook. One of them is fellow Amerindian Evo Morales, the Bolivian president.

Almir Surui, the Indio from the Amazon rainforest, is now famous.

It all began in 1997, the year of the Kyoto Protocol. Almir Surui was 22 when he hatched a 50-year plan that was as simple as it was ingenious: The Surui would themselves heal the wounds the

They shot a video for YouTube, built a website and learnt the meaning of words like "blog", "overlay", and "3D". They even invented a word for Google in their own language, Tupi-Monde: "ragogmakan." It translates literally as the messenger, because Google carries the message of the Surui and their plan out into the world.

### **Scanning Googles for Intruders**

The chief hopes to fully digitize the reservation one day. They're already working on the first step: They want to integrate a self-produced map of their forest into Google Earth, where people will be able to consult photos, take a virtual flight over the reservation, and watch videos of the tribal elders talking about their traditions. Meanwhile in a palm-leaf hut down on the forest floor, Surui will sit at computers scanning high-resolution satellite images of their forest inch by inch to detect intruders, pictures that the Chinese-Brazilian CBERS III satellite will soon be supplying.

Until then, they must make do with satellite pictures on Google Earth. Despite their poor resolution, the pictures were good enough to identify dozens of places in which wood poachers and gold prospectors have penetrated and been driven out again. Many tons of wood have been confiscated. It has been a taste of things to come, of the future that will hopefully come in October when the Surui will engage in global emissions trading.

Almir Surui first heard the term REDD -- or "retchy", as he pronounces it -- three years ago. The acronym stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation. He discovered that forests trap carbon dioxide, and companies around the globe are willing to pay a lot of money to have the trees soak up carbon dioxide on their behalf. They don't pay for a forest that is merely in existence, but rather for preventing its destruction.

### **Forest Could Vanish by 2100**

The Surui therefore commissioned a simulation of what would happen if they didn't protect their reservation: The "business as usual scenario", to use the REDD jargon. For the Surui, business as usual would mean that 30 percent of their forest would disappear in the space of 50 years. By the end of the century it could all be gone.

Swinging in his hammock gnawing on a peccary rib, Almir Surui throws out a huge figure: \$120 million (! 99.6 million). That's the price of protecting his forests for 44 years and thus preventing 16,475,469 tons of carbon dioxide entering the atmosphere. The possible purchasers of such "credits" are companies willing to voluntarily trade in emissions, but also investment banks, brokers, and even governments. The US state of California would be one such candidate because it has pledged to reduce its CO2 output.

The Indio chief is well aware of the criticism of REDD. Critics say it is too complicated, that Mother Nature should not be steered by the logic of the money markets, that too much money is lost in transaction fees. Moreover it is far from certain that REDD will really help protect the environment.

Nevertheless if everything goes to plan, REDD could restore some of the indigenous peoples of

The Surui want to use a part of the money to build new homes for themselves and to plant even more trees. They would also like a hospital, a better school, computers for all, and pensions for the elderly and infirm; a mini welfare state for the Surui. The rest of the millions they hope to generate from emissions trading would be put into a fund with which they would buy companies and bring jobs to the region, something which would also benefit their enemies, the wood poachers.

The chief speaks of a business plan, about Surui coffee, yield, and growing capital assets. He talks just like a businessman -- which is exactly what he will be in the near future. He and other Surui are to act as the fund's supervisory board, a body he will chair. Fifteen Surui are currently studying business, biology, and tourism so that they can run the businesses.

The young people hope that emissions trading will bring the future into their village. The elderly hope it will bring tradition back to the village.

Almir senses it will be a delicate balancing act. He has turned the Surui into high-tech Indios, but at the same time he wants them to preserve their culture. He says he sometimes despairs, and worries that the two are mutually exclusive. "But what's the alternative?" He shrugs his shoulders. There is none.