

Improving Quality of Life for Women in the Amazon

Location

Mamirauá Reserve, a protected flooded forest in the Brazilian Amazon

Problem

Lack of clean water, significant time spent by women collecting water, and lack of electricity for schools

People

18 riverside communities within the preservation area (2135 people according to the last official population census)

Solution

Photovoltaic water pumping, and electricity for school applications

Timeframe

2001-2002

Results

Clean water and improved health conditions for hundreds of people in the reserve and more time available for women to engage in domestic and productive applications, including eco-tourism and handicrafts.

Mamirauá Sustainable Development Institute is a non-governmental organization operating in the Mamirauá Reserve, a unique region of flooded forest. The NGO's objective is to protect the *várzea*¹ at the confluence of the Solimões and Japurá rivers, near the town of Tefé, in the state of Amazonas in Northern Brazil. Mamirauá's activities in the region include environmental education, basic hygiene, rational use of natural resources, and sustainable economic development.



Floating PV panels in Mamirauá

In 2001 and 2002, through the USAID-Brazil Mission's Brazil Clean and Efficient Energy Program (BCEEP), Winrock's REPSO Brazil led a project in the region to provide clean water and education through the use of solar power for sustainable development while addressing gender issues. Photovoltaic (PV) systems were installed to power water pumps and provide electricity to schools in five riverside communities. Clean water and improved health conditions now benefit hundreds of people in the reserve. Previously, women had to fetch water from a far-off river. They now have time to focus on domestic and productive activities, increasing income and improving quality of life.

REPSO Brazil, with USAID support, prepared the technical projects, obtained PV panels from the Brazilian Ministry of Mines and Energy and, together with Mamirauá, mobilized the communities to

install the systems. With USAID support, Winrock was responsible for the proposal development for the Tropic Humidity Program of the Ministry of Science and Technology (MCT), and for technical assistance and training. REPSO Brazil frequently served as a process catalyst by

providing technical assistance and support to facilitate an enabling policy environment. Twenty-five local people were trained in operation and maintenance of the PV lighting and water pumping systems.

Mamirauá designed a micro-credit funding mechanism to ensure long-term sustainability of the project. Communities should have access to this funding within the next three years.

Following the successful implementation of this project, REPSO Brazil assisted in developing another proposal with USAID support, for the Program for Energy Development of States and Municipalities (PRODEEM) to replicate this initiative in 13 additional communities. The proposal was approved and the Ministry of Mines and Energy, manager of PRODEEM, funded the systems.

The Mamirauá experience could be successfully expanded throughout the Amazon region.



Chairwoman, in the women's ceramic co-op

¹ *Várzea* is forest flooded every year by rivers rich in sediments and nutrients, and it may remain under water for more than four months each year.