



Brazil

Açaí, on the path of women

In the Brazilian Amazon, photographer Ana Mendes creates a documentary to highlight the women of the ribeirinhos communities and showcase their role in the development of their region. Women and their children are introduced to painting, photography, and poetry to produce works that convey their culture and their connection to their environment.

COUNTRY

Brazil

LOCALISATION

The State of Pará, municipalities of Cameta and Igarapé-Miri

DATES OF THE PROJECT

September 2022 – December 2023

ARTISTS INVOLVED

Ana Mendes

PARTICIPANTS

120 people, including 60 açai-producing women from the communities of Nazarezinho, Santa Antonio Cajá, and Rio Jacaré Xingu, and 30 children.

FUNDING

Fonds Metis
Budget 15,000 €

PARTNERS

Amazon Environmental Research Institute (Ipam)

SECTOR AND SDG'S



1st

WORLD'S PRODUCER OF AÇAÍ

60

WOMEN PRODUCING AÇAÍ AND THEIR FAMILIES INVOLVED

0.418

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX FOR THIS REGION, THE LOWEST SCORE IN THE COUNTRY

AÇAÍ: A BOOMING SECTOR

Who doesn't know açai? The small purple berry, fruit of the Amazonian palm tree, has been consumed by Amazonian populations since pre-Columbian times. For about fifteen years, it has also been enjoyed by Europeans, Americans, and Japanese seeking vitality, appreciated for its antioxidant properties and superfood benefits. Açai is now the non-timber product with the highest production value in Brazil, and the market continues to grow.

The açai berries are harvested by the ribeirinhos communities, or "river people" (from Portuguese, "ribeira," meaning riverbank). Ribeirinhos women are at the heart of the industry. They climb to the tops of palm trees—trees that can reach 20 meters in height!—using a fabric loop wrapped around their feet to provide better support, with a machete at their waist. Beyond harvesting, they also process the berries into pulp and sometimes handle their commercialization. They play an essential role in the economy of their households, their communities, and their region. However, this role is often undervalued or made invisible.

MAKING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ROLE VISIBLE

With Metis, photographer Ana Mendes is creating a photographic and audio documentary about the daily lives of açai-producing women in Igarapé-Miri and Cameta, the two main producing municipalities in the state of Pará—from which 90% of the Amazon's açai comes.

The documentary highlights the women's role in açai cultivation and showcases its sustainable industry, echoing a study conducted by the Amazon Environmental Research Institute (Ipam). It also sheds light on the culture of the ribeirinhos people, recalling the threats they face, including isolation, poverty, and deforestation.

Simultaneously, the Fotoativa association conducts art workshops for these women and their families, introducing them to photography, painting, and poetry. Through artistic practice, the women can express themselves differently and gain a new perspective on their work.

The photographs by Ana Mendes and the artworks created during the workshops are presented in an exhibition shown in Cameta and Igarapé-Miri, and later in Belém and Brasília.

THEY SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE

"We, the women, cannot remain silent. We need to be strong. We must take control of our own lives and chart our own paths. I often tell the other river women, those who lack courage, that they must assert themselves, make their voices heard, and not allow themselves to be silenced!"

WALDICÉIA CHAVES PORTILHO

"Through a participatory artistic approach, AFD aimed to give a face and a voice to these açai-producing women who are also the economic pillars of their community and creators of connections with the rest of the world."

LAETITIA DUFAY, DIRECTOR OF AFD BRAZIL