

## Parana-Paraguay Basin



# CIVIL SOCIETY SYNERGY IN RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT

**Civil society is achieving an ever-greater role in managing one of South America's largest river basins, which includes the world-famous Pantanal. External financial support has helped hundreds of NGOs and community-based organizations secure a commitment from the environmental authorities of five countries to develop a joint programme for the sustainable management of the entire complex.**

The Parana-Paraguay River Basin in South America is characterised by a vast wetland corridor crossing five countries and extending over 3,000 km. It includes the Pantanal, the largest freshwater wetland complex on earth, which still harbours unrivalled biodiversity. At the same time, large sections of the population in this region live below the poverty line. The Rios Vivos coalition was established in 1994 by around 100 NGOs and community-based organizations that actively opposed the controversial Hidrovía mega-project for river works and port development. The project was temporarily suspended as a result. Rios Vivos now consists of over 300 member organizations.

**ACTIVITIES** Since 2001, IUCN NL has funded several capacity-building and advocacy projects initiated by Rios Vivos members and other NGOs in the basin. These projects played a crucial role in the development of an alternative development proposal for the entire river basin that consists of an environmentally sound and pro-poor alternative to conventional development schemes.

**IMPACT** This series of projects has had a considerable snowball effect in the development of a critical mass of civil society organizations. As a result, the environmental authorities of the five countries made a commitment to develop a joint programme for the sustainable management of the wetland complex (Poconé Act, 2005). Several government bodies have committed funds to the programme. Among the impacts of the local projects are the withdrawal of an ecologically and socially harmful industrial project and the



Cage with live baits for fishing. All photos: André Siqueira.

suspension of the development of similar projects. Furthermore, a fisheries policy favouring large companies over small-scale fisheries has been frozen and networks of fishermen associations have been strengthened. At a Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention one project was commended as 'one of the most successful experiences of participatory environmental management in Latin American wetlands'.

Governments from the region now see NGOs increasingly as serious partners in wetland and river basin management, especially in view of the ecological and socio-economic services provided by those ecosystems.



**Grantees:** Rios Vivos Coalition, ECOA, FOBOMADE, Rede Pantanal, PROTEGER, Sobrevivencia, Taller Ecologista

**Project:** between 2001 and 2006, IUCN NL supported nine different projects

**Grant size:** from € 13,000 to € 78,000 per project

**Category:** Civil society

[www.riosvivos.org.br](http://www.riosvivos.org.br)