

## **The strengthening and accessing the rights of children and adolescents in remote areas of the Amazon**

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### **Introduction**

The beginning of the twentieth century is marked by industrial advances in countries around the world, mainly Europeans, however the speed of this advance was not proportional to the advances in social rights and policies for all populations. The working conditions of the time were unsafe and unhealthy, and children were also considered, without distinction between adults, work forces. After recognizing these injustices and the need to promote the best development of children, a child protection movement was started (LIMA, POLI, JOSÉ, 2017).

International child rights standards have been advancing since then, but there are still several gaps to be filled on the world stage (UNICEF, 2019). The most important landmark of public policy for children and adolescents in Brazil happened in 1990, with the Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente - ECA, Statute of Children and Adolescents (BRASIL, 1990). The statute is divided into two parts, the first addressing the protection of the rights of the developing individual and the second addressing the protective bodies and processes.

The protection of the rights of children and adolescents, highlighted in the first part of the statute and addressed in this article, begins by saying that:

Art. 4 It is the duty of the family, the community, society in general and the public authorities to ensure, with absolute priority, the realization of the rights related to life, health, food, education, sport, leisure, professionalization, culture, dignity, respect, freedom and family and community coexistence (BRASIL, 1990).

To fully achieve these rights in Brazil, there are many challenges, starting with the access and guarantee of basic rights and it can be even more complex in a riverside context of the Amazonas region due to the great distances from urban centers and little or no access to public services.

Thinking about the best way to guarantee these rights for children and adolescents who live in riverside communities and municipalities in the interior of the state of Amazonas in Brazil, where naturally access and guarantee of these rights are more fragile compared to urban areas, the Fundação Amazonas Sustentável (FAS - Amazonas Sustainable Foundation), a Non-Governmental Organization, created the Programa Desenvolvimento Integral de Crianças e Adolescentes Ribeirinhos (DICARA - Integral Development of Children and Adolescents Riverinie the Amazon), with the objective of promoting actions to defend and guarantee the rights of children and adolescents bordering the Amazon.

Thus, this article aims to present the experience of DICARA with children and adolescents from 0 to 17 years old in riverside communities and peripheral areas of the urban zone of municipalities in the Amazonas state - Brazil.

To strengthen and expand access to the rights of children and adolescents, the DICARA program initially divides its direct audience into three age groups, the first two age groups correspond to the categories of the child, with the first age group being 0 to 6 years old and the second, from 7 years to 12 years old. The third age group corresponds to adolescents, with ages ranging from 13 to 17 years old. After this division, the program promotes specific actions for each age group and thus achieve the best impact results.

There are also important cross-cutting actions that cut across all age groups, such as actions to promote health and citizenship and expand access to complementary education. In order to carry out these activities, there is a great effort to overcome logistical difficulties, efforts to mobilize not only the children and adolescents who benefit from the project, but also their families and guardians, and support and coordination with local institutions are also essential.

In all those six years of the program, the DICARA has carried out more than 250 activities, benefiting over ten thousand children and adolescents in seven municipalities in the Amazonas state, reaching more than 1600 families residing in the riverside communities of the state's conservation units and also peripheral areas of the urban zone of municipalities (FAS, 2018).

### **DICARA platforms**

The work axes of the DICARA program guide its actions based on a strategy that welcomes and understands the different stages of childhood and adolescence, so the activities are structured based on work axes compatible with the perceptions of integral development. Thus, based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the program it aims to contribute to health, well-being (3) and quality education (4), respecting the formation of the identity of riverside children.

For the promotion of health and well-being (3), the DICARA acts more directly in early childhood, does socio-educational activities that promote the guarantee of the rights of children and adolescents and combat social vulnerabilities. Within the scope of quality education (4), knowing the precariousness of regular education in remote areas of the Amazon, the DICARA offers several free courses in the riverside communities so that young

### **The Primeira Infância Ribeirinha (PIR, Early Riverside Childhood)**

This first platform is focused on early childhood (0 to 6 years), based on training specifically geared towards Agentes Comunitários de Saúde (ACS, Community Health Agents), the PIR develops a follow-up that starts during pregnancy. The main tool through training is the home visitation guide, that aiming at prevention and contributes to strengthening the bonds between parents, caregivers and children.

The PIR created in 2012 before the DICARA, aims to address a specific problem that exists in the riverine communities of Amazonas to access basic health services for pregnant women and children from 0 to 6 years old. In this way, the PIR aims to improve the method

of home visitation with a focus on the integral development of riverine children, through the training of Agentes Comunitários de Saúde (ACS, Community Health Agents).

The ACS is part of the Equipe de Saúde da Família (ESF, Family Health Team), a Brazilian health strategy to strengthen access to the Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS, Brazilian Unified Health System), this team is also formed by doctors, nurses and nursing technicians. The role of the ACS in this team is supported according to national Law No. 11.350, of October 5, 2006 and according to the manual "The work of the Community Health Agent" (Brazil, 2009). Thus, the ACS is considered as an "agent of change", he is part of the community, which helps to create trust and bond in the territory.

For the execution of the work, the involvement of the municipal departments of Health, Education and Social Assistance is essential, as it requires understanding the local data and the existing demands. In short, articulation and partnership with the municipality is fundamental for the existence of the project and development of activities. After this articulation, the stage of formation of ACS in early childhood begins, being this stage divided into phases: the first consists of the training of the ACS with a 40-hour training course and the second phase deals with more theoretical issues such as presentation of the rights of the child, breastfeeding, child health handbook, among other topics related to the health of the child and the pregnant woman.

To improve this process, FAS developed the Home Visitation Guide, to guide ACSs during home visits. This Guide consists of 93 themes, which can be worked out according to the local reality, so the agents develop skills to work on issues related to the beginning of pregnancy until the child is 6 years old.

In order to improve and improve the services of ACSs, tablets are used in the home visits. This tablet contains an application developed by the FAS that consolidates the information in the Home Visitation Guide, the forms of family monitoring and the main indicators collected by the ACS. Updating this application requires a stable internet network service to update information, however there are limitations of the internet in many municipalities in Amazonas, which causes delay and information lag.

The next step is the supervision, inspection and monitoring of the work performed by the ACS. This verification is carried out by the FAS team, where a representative of the institution conducts a field visit in the communities where the project is taking place, and can sometimes also count on the participation of the municipality's technical health team.



Figure 1: PIR supervision. Source: Dicara Collection. Photo: Dirce Quintino

This type of monitoring makes field supervisions more effective in order to monitor the work carried out by the ACS, detecting points that can be improved, as well as the impact of the project through the reports of the families who receive the monitoring of the ACS and community leaders. In addition, the ACS must also participate in visits to other communities, together with the technical supervision team, doing an exchange of experiences that may help their professional practice.

The last step is the certification of the CHA and as a guarantee that the actions continue in early childhood, a Cooperation Term is made between the FAS and the municipality so that the monthly transfer of visit data is maintained and thus the indicators continue to be consolidated and analyzed. Among the main results achieved in the PIR, the creation of a public policy for Early Childhood in the State of Amazonas stands out, resulting in Law No. 4,312 of March 11, 2016.

The PIR also contributes with the tools to make this policy truly inclusive, reaching all children in the state, regardless of where they live. Amazonas is the first state in the North region and the second in the country to have a specific policy for the integral development of children, from pregnancy to six years of age.

More recent data from the PIR, show that in 2019, 11,295 children and 14,908 families were followed, were trained in riverine early childhood methodology: 308 ACSs, 47 multipliers, technicians from different specialties: social workers, pedagogues, teachers, pharmacists, nurses, psychologists, speech therapists and etc.

And as a national recognition, still in the same year, the PIR was recognized as Social Technology which promotes actions that address the dimensions of child development (language, cognitive, motricity and socio-affectivity), the strengthening of family bonds and the exercise of parenting, via Banco do Brasil Foundation Award for Social Technology 10th Edition, Early Childhood category, placing second in the mentioned category.

**CriArte Ribeirinha (CAR, CreArt Riverside)**

Following the guidelines of the Sustainable Development Goals, where the fourth objective provides for ensuring inclusive and equitable and quality education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, DICARA created the CriArte Ribeirinha platform.

This second platform act in the age group 7 to 12 years old the activities are based on the complementary education perspective, free courses and workshops are offered within the scope of CriArte Ribeirinha (CAR, CreArt Riverside). In addition, pedagogical training is provided for educators with transversal themes with the aim of strengthening local regular education.

The main objective within the CAR is the development of the existing skills and potential of children, for which it offers courses in music (guitar, flute and keyboard), handicrafts, theater and sports (field soccer and indoor soccer). The offer of the courses is linked to the request and the physical structure that the community has to receive the course, a profile survey of the target audience is also made in the community that hosts the course and in the surrounding areas.



Figure 2: Flute course student. Source: Dicara Collection. Photo: Luiz Maudonnet

Another important activity within the CAR linked to objective 4 of sustainable development, is the educational practice with local teachers, this activity begins with the characterization of the education situation in the municipality from the articulation with the education departments, where schools are mapped, the number of teachers, grades and subjects taught in the project's area of activity. Subsequently, training workshops are offered to these teachers addressing concepts such as human rights, sports and environmental education, in order to pedagogically strengthen local teachers, based on ECA and also on objective 3 of sustainable development.





Figure 3: Training of local teachers. Source: Dicara Collection. Photo: Luiz Maudonnet

With the training, local educators develop educational materials and activities focused on sport, human rights and environmental education according to the age groups they teach directly, thus contributing to the development of skills and empowerment of children in this age group.

In 2019, more than 600 children from 7 to 12 years old participated in the free DICARA courses offered in the municipalities where the project operates.

### **Jovem Ação Ribeirinha (JAR, Young Action Riverine)**

Adolescents correspond to a representative group within the communities of the municipalities of Amazonas (IBGE, 2010) and require actions that promote responsible youth leadership in these places. In this way, DICARA, with the Jovem Ação Ribeirinha (JAR, JAR, Young Action Riverine) platform, operates free and professional courses that promote the empowerment and development of the skills of young people in the forest.

This way, the JAR platform comprises teenagers from 13 to 17 years who have low access to a complementary education in the Amazon communities, opportunity to expand your knowledge without leaving the place where they live. The courses are, computer science, crafts, environmental education and music) and also thematic workshops (youth leadership, theater, sports, entrepreneurship and photography and video).

In 2019, more than 800 young people from 13 to 17 years of age participated in the free DICARA courses offered in the municipalities where the project operates.

DICARA on this platform also promotes great youth meetings between the young leaders of the participating municipalities with the aim of strengthening youth leadership and promoting the mobilization and empowerment of young people, based on the principles of sustainable development.

In March 2020, FAS, through the DICARA program, held the first edition of the Youth Congress of the Forest in a community in the interior of the state, with the objective of bringing together young people to debate current issues involving climate change, sustainable involvement, forest economics and public policies for riverine youth. In total there were 451 participants, including young riverine people, community leaders and 26 FAS

partner institutions involving public, municipal, governmental organizations, associations and a research center.



Figure 4: Forest Youth Congress. Source: Dicara Collection. Photo: Débora Holanda

### **Social Assistance Services**

In addition, the program carries out socio-assistance actions aimed at support and the side dish family, through home visits, guidance and socio-educational workshops, with the aim of reducing situations of social vulnerability resulting from poverty or lack of access to public services and social rights.

The social work carried out with families is of a continuous nature, with the purpose of strengthening the protective function of families, preventing the rupture of their bonds, promoting access to rights and contributing to the improvement of their quality of life. This service also provides for the development of the families' potential and the strengthening of family and community bonds, through preventive, protective and proactive actions. In addition, the social assistance service uses actions in the cultural areas to fulfill its objectives, in order to expand the information universe and provide new experiences for the beneficiary families.

During home visits, questionnaires are applied to monitor data regarding housing conditions, health conditions, school status and family relationships. The information obtained helps to determine strategies to overcome the specific vulnerabilities of each community.





Figure 5: Home visit. Source: Dicara Collection. Photo: Luiz Madonnet

The socio-educational workshops aim to bring knowledge about the Statute of Children and Adolescents and provide information on sensitive topics for children and adolescents from the riverside, such as the use of alcohol and drugs, the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancy.

Always carried out in partnership with the municipal departments of social assistance, the socio-educational workshops also promote the strengthening of community bonds and encourage the protagonism of children and adolescents, who are invited to speak about the proposed themes. In this way, the socio-educational workshops contribute to the creation of a network to protect the rights of riverine children and adolescents.

In addition, the socio-educational workshops are used as a space for continuous assessment of the DICARA Program, as the residents of the communities served have space to express their perceptions about the implementation of the Program, exposing challenges and co-creating the solutions.



Figure 6: Socio-educational workshops. Source: Dicara Collection. Photo: Reni France



Sport is also a strategy to attract the target audience for the DICARA project, recognized by the United Nations Union for Education, Science and Culture (Unesco) as a tool capable of promoting social transformation and human development, stimulating skills, creativity, socialization and well-being in childhood and adolescence.

Sports practices are fundamental for the integral and equitable development of children and adolescents. In addition to the benefits to health and human and social development, having access to sport is also a right guaranteed by law in Brazil by the ECA. And with the objective of stimulating integral development and guaranteeing the right to sport for children and adolescents from the riverine that the DICARA Program develops its sports activities.



Figure 6: Sporting event. Source: Dicara Collection. Photo: Dirce Quintino

These activities are of great value to the DICARA Program, which has already held more than ten sporting events, such as the Olympics Games with the amazon forest's thematic. In these competitions, the youngsters practice various modalities, such as football, volleyball, kayaking, archery, athletics and table tennis, all modalities adapted to the local reality. The events count with the participation of residents from all participating communities and become moments of great celebration, interaction and appreciation of the sport.

### **Final Considerations**

The DICARA Program accumulates enriching experiences and learned lessons on how to carry out activities towards the integral development of riverine children and adolescents from the Amazon. It nurtures a close relationship with the base from its beginning to the end of its implementation. As a result of a demand from the territory, the Program has great credibility with the riverside communities, which are understood not only as beneficiaries, but as true partners. Such proximity to the base allows the Program to always be in line with the demands of the riverside communities, ensuring that activities are the most adapted to the local reality.

In this way, the proximity to the communities allows the Program to be understood as a true achievement of the communities, who understand the need to make the community counterparts, which stimulate empowerment and accountability on the part of the residents. As a result, riverside communities are responsible for providing suitable study areas, boats

for the transport of children and adolescents, cooks and cooks, in addition to contributing part of the students' lunch.

The choice to conduct participatory processes in the planning of the DICARA Program is an extremely positive strategy for the success of the activities. By inviting communities to integrate planning, it is possible to add the traditional knowledge of the local residents to the Program. An example of this was the establishment of dates for activities that respected the climatic and geographical conditions of each community, avoiding logistical problems generated by drought or flood.

The DICARA Program understands that it is only possible to seek the integral development of children and adolescents with the involvement of their families. Thus, with strategies that recognize and value the role of the family and strengthen family bonds, the DICARA Program brought fathers and mothers close to activities, stimulating interaction between generations and contributing to the strengthening of the protection network for children and adolescents in riverside communities. This strategy allowed fathers and mothers to encourage their sons and daughters to participate in activities, allowing, for example, their children to stop going to their cultivated land to participate in the free courses offered by the Program.

The DICARA Program understands that children and adolescents must be considered not only as beneficiaries, but as protagonists. In this way, children and adolescents always have guaranteed speech space in all activities, which allows the phrase "DICARA is ours" to be heard in all communities where it is implemented.

The work with riverine children and adolescents the Amazon is still a major challenge to be faced by everyone. Thus, the Program understands that it is necessary to think of strategies to continue the process of integral development of children and adolescents.

Teachers have a fundamental role in the development process of children and adolescents in riverside communities. That is why it is important that actions are developed specifically aimed at riverine teachers, aiming at building capacities related to the rights of children and adolescents. With this, the Program understands that it will be possible to increase and continue its impacts.

The work with riverine communities brings challenges in several ways, one of them is the possibility of monitoring activities and assessing impacts throughout the implementation of the Program. For this reason, the DICARA Program has invested, and should continue to invest even more, in tools that allow it to monitor its actions and assess impact more robustly.

In this way, DICARA program aims to promote the protection and guarantee of the children and adolescents rights, empowerment and the development of socio-emotional skills and potentials for a more sustainable life quality for everyone.

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