german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Co-funded by
Norway

Implemented by
giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

As part of
NBSAP accelerator partnership

From the Amazon to the Negotiation Table: A young Indigenous leader brings ancestral knowledge to global diplomacy

Luene Karipuna is only 27 years old and is already fighting on the world stage. As the first young woman to serve as General Coordinator of the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples and Organizations of Amapá and Northern Pará, her leadership qualities are rooted in her family heritage: her grandfather and mother are pajés, traditional spiritual authorities, while her paternal grandparents were prominent community leaders. Born in the Uaçá Indigenous Territory in northern Brazil, where the rainforest meets the Atlantic Ocean, Luene grew up learning to read the seasons, the rainfall cycles and the periods when the waters require rest – an upbringing that shaped a connection to the land extending far beyond physical boundaries. As Luene explains: "For us, Indigenous territory is not a parcel of land meant for real estate development or commercial extraction. It is a living organism, a place of healing, learning, and spiritual balance. It holds the memory of our ancestors, sustains the species that regulate our climate and rainfall, and serves as our shelter and medicine." Protecting the land and the knowledge, she says, means protecting life far beyond her own community: "Caring for our territory means caring for life on Earth."

Increasingly, that territory is under pressure. A federal highway cuts through Indigenous land, hydropower plants affect river basins, and the oil company Petrobras has sought to revive offshore drilling plans off the coast of Amapá. An accident or oil spill could threaten mangroves, marine ecosystems and the artisanal fisheries on which communities depend, with consequences reaching the Uaçá Indigenous Territory.

Learning to speak the language of diplomacy

When Luene tried to raise these concerns with public authorities, she encountered barriers: institutions were not prepared to listen to or accommodate Indigenous perspectives. Luene realised that protecting her territory was more than a local struggle: "Pushing back against fossil fuel expansion at the mouth of the Amazon was never just a local issue confined to northern Brazil." The question was much bigger: "Why do the communities that emit the least carbon and preserve the most forest always end up paying the highest price for global crises?"

> "Indigenous territory … is a living organism, a place of healing, learning, and spiritual balance."
>
> Luene Karipuna

Her search for answers took Luene into a world of international climate and biodiversity negotiations. Supported by the Amazon Cooperation Network (RCA), an Indigenous-led network strengthening cooperation and advocacy across the Amazon, Luene was able to participate in COP28 in Dubai. She discovered that negotiations involved technical drafting, political discussions, formal protocols and a complex language of international diplomacy. English was another barrier. "I was fortunate to walk alongside seasoned mentors," she says, particularly Sinéia do Vale of the Wapichana people. Sinéia's message was clear: "Regardless of language barriers or technical jargon, we have to be in these rooms. If we do not claim these seats, others will decide the fate of our lands without us." That idea became a guiding principle for Luene. Indigenous representatives need not only to be heard, but also to understand the processes and have the skills to participate in shaping decisions.

Building this capacity and creating opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to take part in these processes is also part of GIZ's work. On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), GIZ implements the project *Strengthening National Implementation of Global Biodiversity Targets*. Its aim is to ensure that those who know and protect their territories are not only consulted, but have a meaningful voice in shaping the decisions that affect them. This work extends beyond Brazil to seven other countries: Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Laos, Madagascar, Namibia and Peru. Across these eight countries, the project has enabled more than 3,000 people from Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth groups to contribute directly to conservation efforts affecting their lands and livelihoods.

In Brazil, this includes supporting Indigenous Peoples and local communities to participate more meaningfully in the updating of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). GIZ supported a participatory consultation model that enabled Indigenous Peoples and local communities to help shape the consultation formats and bring their priorities into discussions on biodiversity policy. Their perspectives are reflected in Brazil's NBSAP, launched in December 2025, including in cross-cutting themes related to participation, traditional knowledge and rights-based approaches.

Another example of strengthening Indigenous participation in Brazil is *Kuntari Katu*, a programme implemented by Brazil's Ministry of Indigenous Peoples and Ministry of Foreign Affairs to strengthen Indigenous diplomatic capacities around the three Rio Conventions. With support from GIZ, the programme combined training at Brazil's diplomatic academy, the Rio Branco Institute, with mentoring to help participants understand and navigate international negotiation processes. In 2025, 33 Indigenous representatives took part. For the first time, grassroots Indigenous leaders trained alongside career diplomats and diplomats-in-training, learning how international negotiations work and how to navigate their technical and procedural demands. GIZ also co-facilitated the mentoring component alongside specialized experts and experienced Indigenous leaders, helping to connect the technical knowledge of the training with participants' own priorities and experiences.

A seat at the table – and a voice for the future

For Luene, this opened doors that had long been closed: "Entering the Rio Branco Institute and UN global conferences means claiming spaces that have historically been hostile and inaccessible to us. Sitting at the table as equals and knowing 'we belong here' represents a monumental victory for every community on the ground." The experience gave her the knowledge and confidence to bring Indigenous priorities into spaces where decisions about their territories are made.

Today, Indigenous representatives are no longer merely passive observers. They are becoming agenda-setters, bringing ancestral knowledge into dialogue with modern environmental science. As Luene puts it: "Safeguarding biodiversity requires combining satellite imagery and multilateral diplomacy with the boots on the ground of those walking the forest floor." She hopes to take this work even further, far beyond Brazil, and continue engaging in global climate and biodiversity processes. As Indigenous Peoples gain the knowledge, access and confidence to take their place in decisions that affect their territories, Luene sees cooperation not as charity, but as "the smartest pact the international community can make to keep life possible on Earth."

> "Safeguarding biodiversity requires combining satellite imagery and multilateral diplomacy with the boots on the ground of those walking the forest floor."
>
> Luene Karipuna

Published by:
Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices
Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

GIZ Global Project GBF Implementation

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32+40
53113 Bonn, Germany
T +49 228 4460-0
F +49 228 4460 1766
E info@giz.de
I www.giz.de/en

Authors:
Steffi Noelting
Isabela Resende

Design:
Agnes Weegen, Cologne

Photo credits:
page 1 © Luene Karipuna
page 2 left © André Corrêa, right © Luene Karipuna

GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.

September 2026