

TEN QUESTIONS

to Bia Saldanha, president of Treetap® Amazon Wild Rubber Company

Fashion and design create alternatives

Treetap® Amazon Wild Rubber Company produces fashionable bags of wild rubber from the rainforest. 'The product must be aesthetically pleasing, desirable, sustainable and of high quality. It must respect each step and person involved in the production process.'

1. **What drives you to deal with sustainable products from the Amazon?**

In the beginning, it was the ideal of making the world a better place in which to live that drove us. Now more than ever, it's conscience and responsibility. Conservation of the Amazon is no longer a romantic dream. It's urgent for us to save and protect the health and life of the rainforest and the people; not just those who live there but for all who live on our planet.

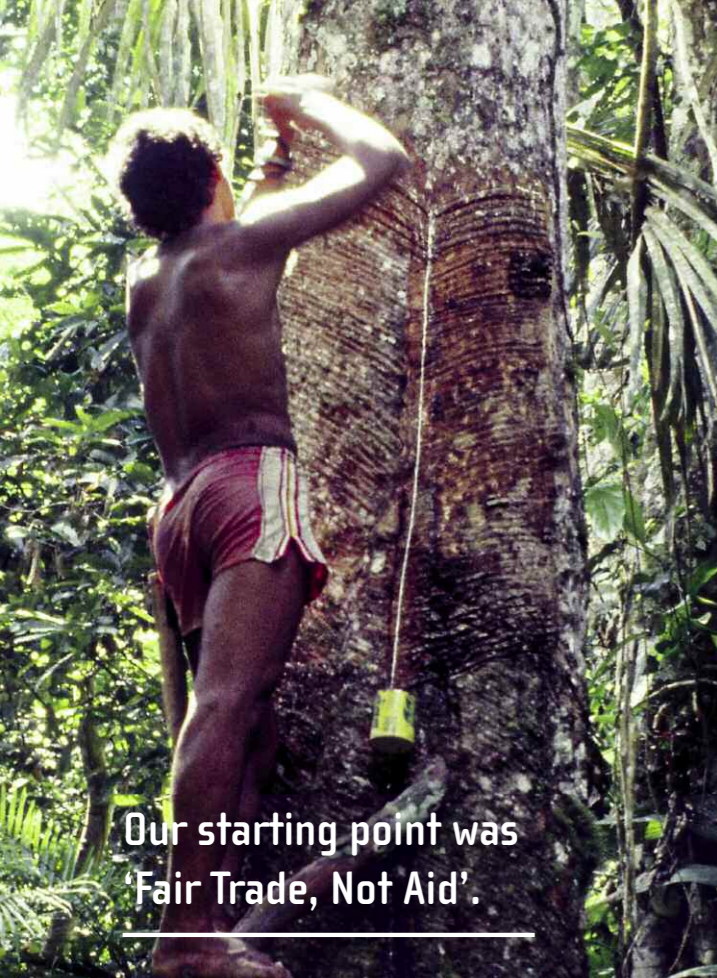
2. **Why do you call your products 'sustainable products'?**

Treetap® is an economic alternative for traditional rubber tappers and native rubber extraction. Rubber extraction has been practiced in the rainforest for centuries, while at the same time conserving its biodiversity. Treetap® production is based on fair trade principles, linking conservation and social development.

What is your definition of a 'sustainable product'?

It's good and profitable for all people involved in its





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IMPACT INDICATORS TREETAP

- 64 families – 320 people in total – benefit from producing wild rubber for Treetap.
- Treetap pays 4 times more than 'traditional' market prices.
- Treetap's business activities contribute to sustainable management of 4800 hectares of rainforest.
- 5 production units operating in 1500 hectares of forest are FSC-certified.
- Qualitative impacts: preservation of traditional rubber tapping which had almost disappeared. Empowerment of forest communities.

production, and the use of renewable resources is guaranteed for future generations.

3. What are the criteria with which your products have to comply? You can name any criteria you want.

The product must be aesthetically pleasing, desirable, sustainable and of high quality. It must respect each step and person involved in the production process, thereby linking producers and clients and permitting forest conservation. Ethics and sustainability are necessary in all businesses, including fashion.

4. How can you guarantee your clients that your sustainable products really are sustainable?

Treetap® production technology is based on an ancient model of rainforest exploitation. The native rubber extraction activity has been practiced for centuries and has never caused any damage to the environment.

The main goal and challenge has been to introduce native rubber into the market. Its cultural and ecological value will drive social development and improve rubber tappers' quality of life. Treetap® is a new economic alternative for rubber tappers who had lost the traditional market for rubber as it began to come from plantations abroad. Treetap® technology was also certified by the FSC.

5. What is your business philosophy, your concept of doing business? Has it changed over the course of time? If so, how?

Rainforest Conservation. That has never changed. Our starting point was 'Fair Trade, Not Aid'. We believe that the people of the rainforest must have access to the market while also respecting their needs: culture, environment, timing, costs, etc.

We use fashion and design as tools to create new commercial alternatives from native rubber. We link traditional knowledge and technology to produce contemporary products for customers looking for not just beauty and quality but ethics and sustainability.

Our mission is to generate profit by offering our clients the opportunity to contribute to rainforest conservation.

Our mission is to generate profit by offering our clients the opportunity to contribute to rainforest conservation. It's an alliance with the people of the rainforest and a way to be part of this environment.

6. Was it hard to develop your sustainable product(s)? What were/are the barriers? What were/are the opportunities?

Yes, it was hard, especially for Amazon sustainable products. The costs of product development and production are too high. There should be tax incentives from the government and grants to establish such products in the market.

As pioneers we should learn and develop our own channels and processes. We had to overcome differences in culture and deal with long distances and difficult logistics. To manage production, quality control and communication within the rainforest, without roads, energy or a telephone is not easy. But now we know more and we have built good alliances in order to achieve our goals.

7. Do you also sell products which you do not consider sustainable? If you do, do you include them with your sustainable product line?

The cotton we work with is not organic, as much as we would like it to be, since there is no regular offer of this product in the Brazilian market. We work to do the best we can, and better when possible. We are not afraid of making mistakes and work daily to improve and search for alternatives.

8. What does the future of the Amazon sustainable products' market look like?

For rainforest products, the future is unclear, particularly because the effects of deforestation have been far greater than the positive results of the emerging sustainable businesses. These businesses must be really encouraged and stimulated by governments around the world, but they haven't. We cannot guarantee that the same rainforest will still

be there in the next ten years.

Another barrier is the customers' awareness of the sustainable development issue. Customers should be aware of their purchasing power, understand what sustainability means, why these products are more expensive than others and that they should receive incentives for their consumption.

At the same time, the number of people who are interested in these kinds of products is increasing. The market for sustainable Amazon products will grow significantly over the next ten years. There are big opportunities for companies who are able to overcome the barriers.

9. Who or what inspires you in your professional life?

Chico Mendes above all, due to his peaceful fight to preserve rainforest life. We are still oriented by his message that the people of the rainforest are its guardians. Their culture and ways of living in the forest

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contain the answers to maintaining it for the following generations.

Katherine Hamnett with her political attitude, and for using fashion to promote and communicate pacifist and ecological principles.

Anita Roddick, for her devotion to 'Trade, Not Aid'.

10. What does the Amazon rainforest mean to you?

The Amazon region is one of the pillars of our planet's well-being and we all depend on the success of its conservation. For me, it is a source of life.