

Palmas' peoples park by the people



WITH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CO-CREATION, PALMAS IS READY TO TURN 185 HECTARES OF DEGRADED LAND INTO A CLIMATE SOLUTION – RESTORING ECOSYSTEMS, COOLING THE CITY, AND PROVIDING A VIBRANT PUBLIC SPACE.



Palmas, Brazil



328,500 (estimated in 2025)



Category of climate action:

- Nature-based solutions & green infrastructure
- Water management & flood protection
- Buildings & urban infrastructure
- Urban resilience & social inclusion

Restoring the heart of Sussuapara

Palmas is unlike most Brazilian cities: it was planned and built almost from scratch in the early 1990s to serve as the capital of Tocantins state. Because it was a new city, its planners could decide where streets, housing, and public spaces would go. They were even able to set aside large green corridors and preservation areas within the city layout, which was an unusual step at the time. One of the largest of these was the corridor along the Sussuapara stream. A central stretch of land covering 185 hectares and 4 km in length, later named 'Parque Linear Urbano dos Povos Indígenas' (Urban Linear Park of Indigenous Peoples) in homage to the indigenous ethnic groups of Tocantins and the first edition of the World Indigenous Peoples Games, which took place in Palmas.

Yet despite this forward-thinking, the area still fell into decline. High population density, heavy foot traffic, universities, and government buildings nearby created pressure without adequate protection. The result was erosion, streams clogged with sediment, illegal dumping, wildfires, vegetation loss, and a lack of safe public infrastructure. For most residents, the space was no longer seen as a valuable public asset.

City leaders had long wanted to restore Sussuapara as a multifunctional park that felt tied to the community:



We want this to be a project of the people, not just the municipality. Our goal is to give the community ownership, so they see it as their park.

— Marcelo da Gama Grison
Biologist, Municipal Government of Palmas

Many voices, one park

Historically, the Municipal Environmental Foundation (FMA) had tried to bring partners together to create a vision for the park, but conversations were fragmented. Neighbourhood associations, universities, NGOs, and socio-environmental groups all had different expectations: some wanted sports and leisure facilities, others demanded reforestation, fire control, or safer public access. Without any technical evidence or a unifying design, the municipality could not respond clearly or build consensus for a direction.

The challenge, then, was not only ecological restoration but also creating a shared vision that could reconcile these competing expectations and turn Sussuapara into a park that truly belonged to the community.



Today, it is just a big green space with some degraded areas. There's no structure, no owner. We knew we had to restore it, but we didn't know how.

— Marcelo da Gama Grison
*Biologist, Municipal
Government of Palmas*



Turning a shared dream into a viable design

The EIB-Gap Fund began by supporting Palmas with diagnostic and topographic studies, which provided the first clear picture of the area and its potential. The studies estimated an investment need of around €5 million, phased over several years, which, if implemented, could help the park deliver:



Safer green space, cooler microclimates, protection from flooding and fire, and new opportunities for recreation and community for around 60,000 people living in dense central neighbourhoods

Indirect benefits that could reach the wider city population of 328,500

Restored ecosystems and permeable soil, cutting flood risk and reducing heat

Microclimate improvements of up to 2°C cooler surface temperatures in surrounding areas

1,500 tonnes of CO₂ avoided annually – a contribution to Brazil's national climate targets and to Palmas' own resilience goals



The greatest benefit from the Gap Fund was making the idea come from our heads to the paper – and then showing the mayor, the council, and the people that this park could be viable. With studies and data, we gained confidence.

— Marcelo da Gama
Grison, Biologist, Municipal Government of Palmas

Co-creating a park shaped by its people

With that foundation in place, Gap Fund consultants then developed sustainable drainage proposals and nature-based solutions, feeding into a conceptual design for the 4 km-long park. Crucially, this design was shaped through participatory workshops with residents, universities, NGOs, and neighbourhood groups, where people marked maps with their 'spaces of affection' and priorities. These sessions helped align the previously fragmented expectations of the community. Almost all of their suggestions were incorporated into the conceptual design, giving residents a genuine sense of ownership over the park from the start.



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Taking community vision to construction and beyond

Palmas has moved quickly to take the project forward. The city created the Clima360° Programme, a package of climate projects with Sussuapara park as its flagship, and secured federal approval through Brazil's COFLEX process for international financing. Negotiations are now underway with the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF) to sign a loan agreement that will help fund the park's construction.

To make sure the project belongs to the people as much as the municipality, a Participatory Committee is being established. This body will guide decisions during implementation and ensure accountability, giving residents, community organisations, and civil society a permanent role in shaping and managing the park. Meanwhile, the Municipal Environmental Foundation (FMA) will commission the detailed basic and executive designs, and is studying Public–Private Partnership models to guarantee the park's long-term sustainability. The city also plans to replicate the Sussuapara park methodology in other parks and watersheds, creating a broader network of integrated green infrastructure across Palmas.

Ultimately, the Gap Fund empowered the city to identify the technical and financial resources needed to further develop the park project and move into implementation. With financing in sight, designs advancing, and the community at the table, Palmas is turning the Sussuapara park from a vision into reality. Laying the foundations for a city-wide network of green infrastructure that can inspire other Brazilian cities to follow.