

IFIP Connections: Forging New Allegiances to Protect Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia

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As one of Amazon Conservation Team's (ACT) founders, I have long observed IFIP with a feeling of affinity, as both organizations were born in the last decade of the 20th century—certainly a more idealistic time in the NGO world—with a focus on Indigenous empowerment.

ACT officially joined IFIP as an affiliate in early 2014. Shortly thereafter, we co-hosted a funders briefing where Kogi political and spiritual leaders spoke about their vision to protect and manage sacred sites located on the northern coast of Colombia. In September 2014, we participated in IFIP's largest conference in history, the World Summit on Indigenous Philanthropy in New York City. One of the sessions, "Reclaiming Land and Preserving Culture: Innovative and Collaborative Approaches in Colombia and Mexico," allowed both the Kogis and ACT to present some of our work before a wonderful audience interested in innovative and replicable strategies, especially intercultural education and Life Plan creation (Indigenous perspective of their collective development/community plans or aspirations). We spoke on the promotion of Indigenous culture and land management, emphasizing the role of women leaders. I paneled with our longtime partner, Flora Macas Zhigüe, principal of the groundbreaking Yachaikury School of the Inga people in Colombia. The panel also included speakers from Semillas, an organization that supports women's groups and Indigenous leaders in Mexico, and representatives of both the blue moon fund and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, who helped moderate the discussions.

Through our engagement in the Summit, we found a support system of like-minded individuals dedicated to empowering and collaborating with Indigenous groups, in support of initiatives



ACT works with the Kogi in providing training in the latest technology so they have state-of-the-art knowledge to manage their territory.



Sacred Places in the Sierra

that acknowledge the critical role Indigenous communities play in biodiversity protection. ACT was introduced to the Crevier Foundation, who we currently work with, and also reconnected with LUSH Cosmetics. Together, with matching funds from other ACT friends, we are improving the management and living conditions in Jaba Tañiwashkaka, the first Kogi coastal sacred site to be protected. This support makes education and outreach by Kogi spiritual authorities to neighboring communities, schools, and municipalities possible; we are also installing a water system to provide potable and irrigation water to Kogi families who are responsible for the stewardship of the site. Gradually, we will restore and reconnect Jaba Tañiwashkaka to other sacred places within the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, ensuring the perpetuity of a place that all four groups in the Sierra—the Kogi, Arhuaco, Wiwas and Kankuamo—can benefit from and the abundance which it offers on both physical and spiritual levels.

IFIP describes its bridging strategy as “initiating meetings that otherwise would never happen.” In the case of the Summit, this



These Kogi young men are defining the coordinates to install the aqueduct needed to fulfill the drinking and irrigation needs in Jaba Tañiwashkaka Sacred Site.

is certainly true—nowhere else would we have found such a concentration of philanthropists and donor agencies with a primary interest and passion for Indigenous issues. We are grateful for the unique opportunities presented, and look forward to furthering these new relationships in 2015 and beyond.

As part of the outreach effort, the Kogi exchanged information about the role of Jaba Tañiwashkaka with the Wiwa, a group that also lives in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

