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NEW VOICES OF THE
Amazon

Young Indigenous People redraw the Amazon landscape
to insert it into a hyperconnected world

ALL EYES
ON THE **AMAZON**

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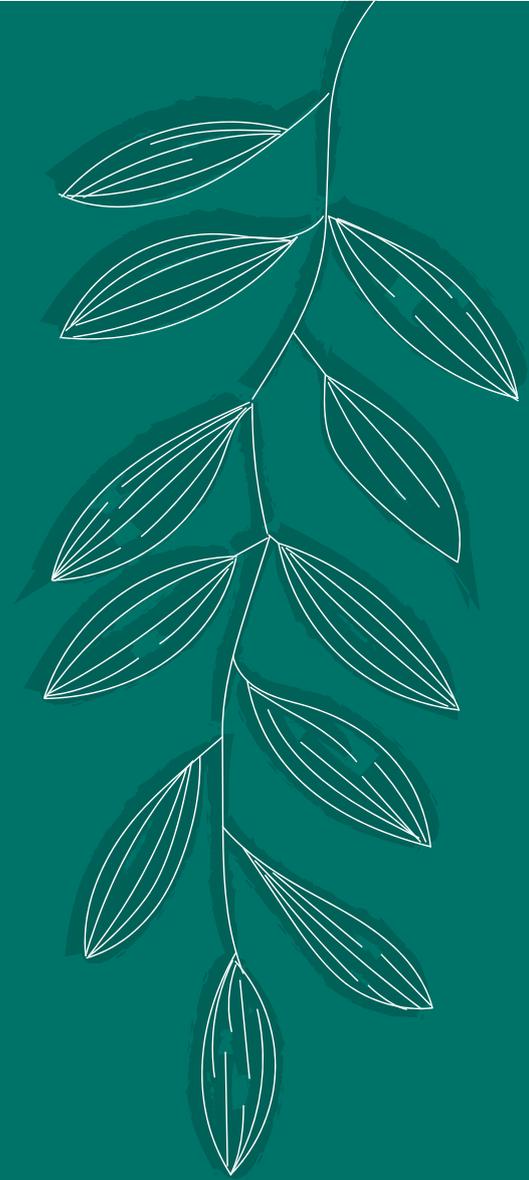
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EDITORIAL



There's only five minutes left until the start of my first online meeting, on my 67th quarantine day for the COVID-19 health emergency. I'm ready. I have my headphones, hot coffee on the table, and what seems like a good internet connection. My four-year-old daughter Maya sits next to me and tells me she wants to stay for the meeting. This makes me anxious and calm at the same time since having her with me during teleconferences is part of my new definition of remote work. After a few minutes, the meeting dynamic changes. Maya takes my headphones out, pays close attention, and navigates through the faces of the 60 young indigenous Amazonians who are the protagonists of the meeting. She listens, asks questions, and stands amazed. Through her reactions, I rediscover the power of diversity.

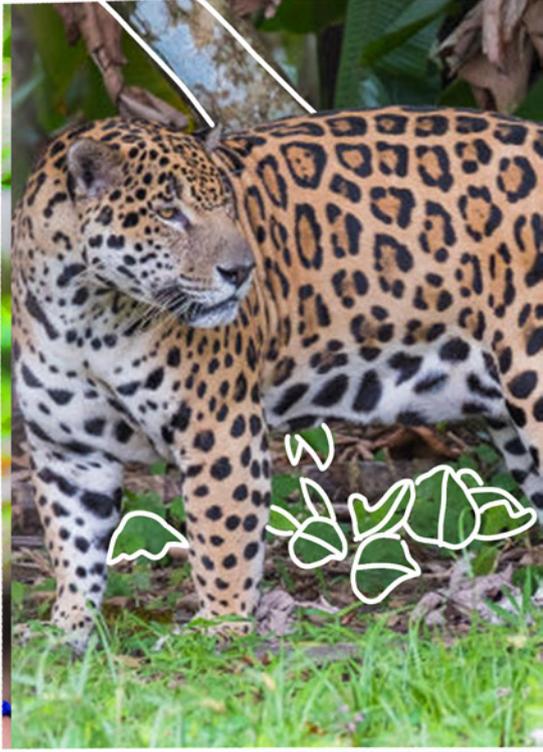
The meeting I'm referring to was part of the COICA Virtual Youth Meeting, where young people from the nine countries of the Amazon basin convened to talk about identity and culture. I listened while they talked about how they have seen their landscapes change over the years; how the ancient trees have been replaced with large machinery and the rushing rivers with polluted waters. I didn't know how Maya would feel if she were a young woman who couldn't know for sure if her territory and home would disappear in the coming years. I imagined how she would try to make sense of the loss of her land and her identity. I imagined how confused and frustrated she would be. At that point, I stopped thinking about *who* was there and started reflecting on *why*. Everyone, including Maya, was there because we dreamed of a human Amazon, full of life and diversity.

I sometimes feel like a stranger to the indigenous world. But what I heard and felt that day showed me, once again, the importance of different people coming together in defense of the Amazon. Most of the time, we look at ourselves in the same mirror. We are used to operating on our own, or with people who are very similar to us: environmentalists with environmentalists, defenders with defenders, leaders with leaders... It can certainly feel like this is simpler and more natural. However, the changes we need to preserve the Amazon, face the climate crisis and respond to the COVID-19 health emergency require a transformation of the values, norms, and beliefs held in all sectors of society. These changes are only possible if we start looking at ourselves in different mirrors. This work takes time since it involves building bonds sustained in trust, to generate actual collective action.

Despite all the suffering the COVID-19 pandemic has brought, and the deep inequity it has revealed, perhaps in the face of the "new normal" we could find new paths connecting to different actors. It is time to see social closeness amid physical distancing, weave new networks of collaboration, and reinvent the world despite the imbalance and uncertainty.

Let's take advantage of the fact that we live in a hyperconnected world and generate genuine connections with people from diverse realities. We can start by listening to the stories of Genaro, from the Shipibo people in Peru, [Samantha](#), Shuar from the Ecuadorian Amazon, Margare, Tom, Yulissa, Heriberto, Jenny, Jhomar, and Sindy. We will find that their voices, the "**New Voices of the Amazon**" are the key to building bridges between worlds and acting together in favor of the protection of the human Amazon.

By: Carolina Zambrano - Barragán
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CHAPTER 1

THE AMAZON UNDER THE THREAT OF CLIMATE CHANGE



*La lluvia de Manaus, Brasil,
es la lluvia de Riberalta, Bolivia,
es la lluvia de Santa Ana, mi
pueblo,
es la lluvia de Iquitos, Perú,
la lluvia de Leticia, Colombia.
Hilos de agua que caen sobre el
polvo,
juntos, agua y tierra,
arcilla somos para ya no
separamos jamás,
y no hay distancia
entre nosotros
y los grandes árboles
que mueren en la noche.*

*The rain in Manaus, Brazil,
Is the rain in Riberalta, Bolivia,
Is the rain in Santa Ana, my
pueblo,
Is the rain in Iquitos, Peru,
The rain in Leticia, Colombia.
Threats of water dropping onto
dust,
Water and earth together,
We are clay, and so
We no longer are apart.
No distance between us
And the big trees
Who die at night.*

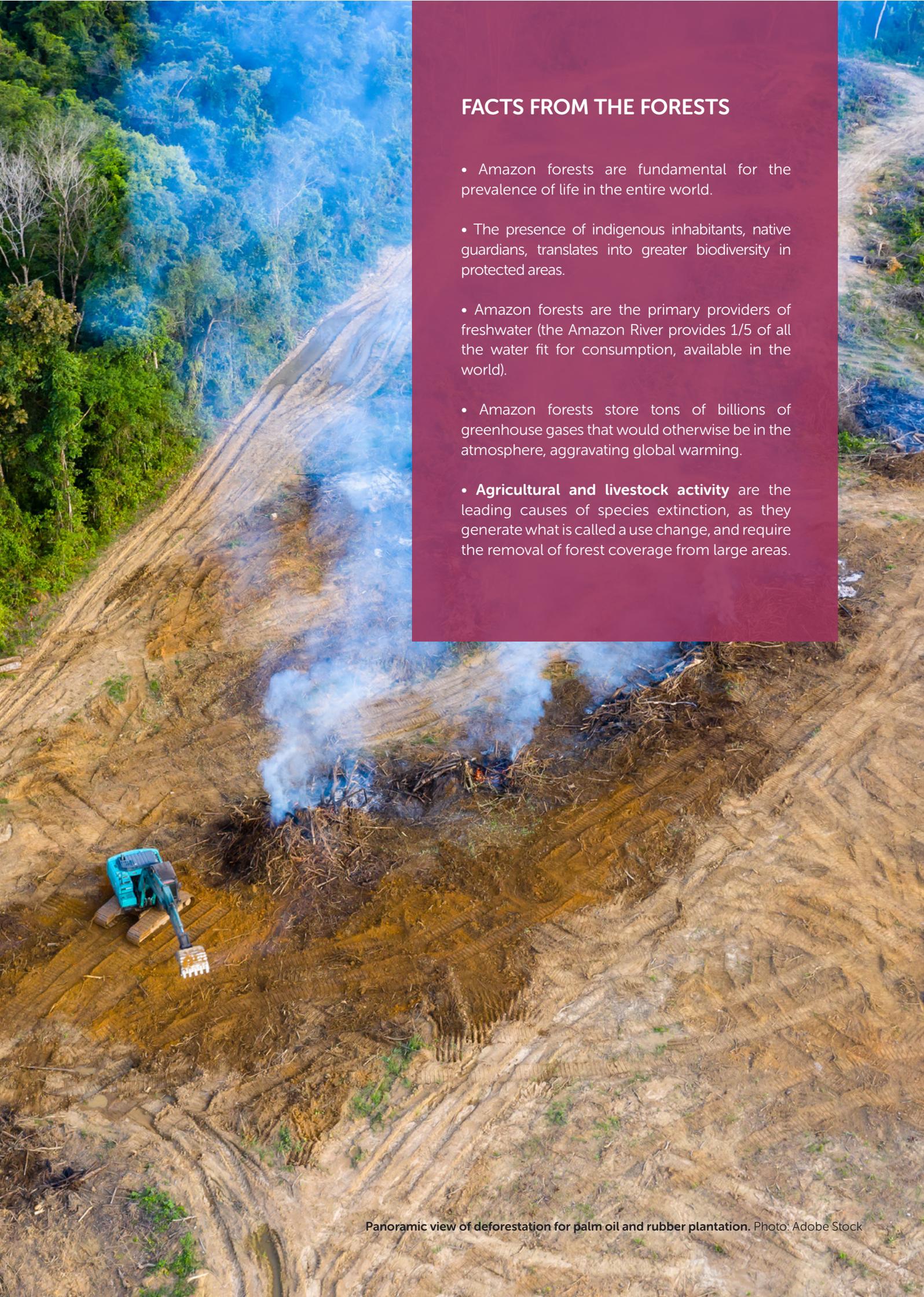
*NICOMEDES SUÁREZ “ELEGÍA DEL
ALBA” (SUNRISE ELEGY)*

The Amazon forest is crowded with rich, baffling [sounds](#). They are so many that it's virtually impossible to comprehend where they come from (which plant, waterfall, or bird). And it's not just the animals that hide in the jungle. It's as if the forest hid itself as well. The voice of the Amazon is complex and profound. What happens when it stops being heard? Can it survive if we don't perceive it?

Despite all the difficulties they face, indigenous communities in the Amazon try to keep their voices alive, looking for ways to continue walking together along a common path that's full of cracks. New generations reinterpret their grandparents' rich heritage, to redraw their fragmented landscape, and insert it into a hyperconnected world from a new perspective. After years of continuous abuse, their ancestor's more than justified mistrust towards foreign cultures gives way little by little thanks to human efforts focused on establishing strong and transparent ties.

It is no longer necessary to solely rely on ancestral knowledge and its methods that, although accurate and powerful (after all, have they not kept the jungle alive all these years?), can no longer be sustained on their own. Now, they must weave themselves into new ways of protecting the territories against a threatening global environment.

The wisdom young people carry is empowered by new tools: **formal academic education, new technologies, and empowerment** (i.e. training in rights and reporting tools). Armed with this knowledge, they can alert broad sectors of society and translate their interests into actions. Thus, in the virtual age, we can enter the jungle without being in it, guaranteeing that it will survive as a vital part of the hyperconnected world.



FACTS FROM THE FORESTS

- Amazon forests are fundamental for the prevalence of life in the entire world.
- The presence of indigenous inhabitants, native guardians, translates into greater biodiversity in protected areas.
- Amazon forests are the primary providers of freshwater (the Amazon River provides 1/5 of all the water fit for consumption, available in the world).
- Amazon forests store tons of billions of greenhouse gases that would otherwise be in the atmosphere, aggravating global warming.
- **Agricultural and livestock activity** are the leading causes of species extinction, as they generate what is called a use change, and require the removal of forest coverage from large areas.

ECUADOR LOGGING, EXPLOITATION AND THE CONSTITUTION OF 2008

In Ecuador, the Amazon is facing a critical state.

In 2008, the newly approved constitution granted rights to *Mother Nature* or *Pacha Mama*, seeming to give an example to the rest of the world. However, what seemed promising in theory, didn't accurately translate into practice. Pressure from the extractive industries surpassed the Government's commitment, endangering the Amazon's territory and the dignity of its people.

According to the FAO¹ report about the condition of the world's forests published in 2016, there was an annual net loss of 7 million hectares of forests in tropical countries from the years 2000 to 2010. During these years, they also registered a yearly increment of 6 million hectares of territories intended for agriculture and farm use. In Latin America, 70% of primary forest clearing is due to commercial agricultural expansion.

From then on, it was 13 million hectares in 2008 and 12.8 in 2014.

- The EME also stated that from the year 2008 to 2014, 64.9% of Ecuadorian forests became farming territory. This is mainly due to pressure from agrobusinesses. Other factors include oil concessions, growing mining activity, living infrastructure, and demographic pressure.

- In Ecuador, high deforestation rates are the consequence of the destination of land for agrobusinesses.

- Between the years 1990 and 2000, 99.4% of the deforested area was used for farming purposes. The rest became infrastructure and dense rural settlements.

- According to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Environment (EME), native forests were reduced from 14.6 million hectares in 1990 to 13.7 in the year 2000.

Most of the oil activity in Ecuador is centered on indigenous territory and even on protected lands, mainly located in the northern-center and north of the Cuenca Sagradas region (Siona, Cuyabeno-Imuya y Kichwa). This has resulted in severe negative impacts on the biodiversity of the zone.

Besides, the Shuar and Achuar communities in Ecuador and Peru, as well as in the Yasuni National Park, face increasing crude oil exploitation. Due to oil activity, there has been direct deforestation of 169 hectares intended for this industry's infrastructure. Furthermore, 248 cleared hectares are linked to colonization around the construction of a road meant to aid the extractive industries. Therefore, deforestation accounts for 417 hectares. This exceeds by far the approved area extension in democratic agreements².

1 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

2 Source: FAO, 2016

TEXACO'S SHADOW

The Ecuadorian Amazon continues to experience the ravages of one of the most severe environmental disasters in its history. The Texaco oil company, bought by Chevron in 2001, intervened in Ecuador between 1964 and 1990 and caused catastrophes in the Amazon territory. The irreparable damage made by Texaco affected an area as large as El Salvador. Around 2 million hectares of Ecuadorian jungle were affected by the spill of 59.9 billion liters over the 30 years of operation in the area³.

In 1995, Texaco signed a remediation action agreement which was never met. All they did was hide some of the oil pools, covering them with organic matter. These wells continue to pollute the water and soils of the Amazon. The Government has failed to protect the rights of Indigenous People living in the Amazon.

What has been established in the Amazon over the last few decades is a fastly growing ecocide. This means uncontrolled exploitation of primary forests, their ageless trees, and sources of pristine water. These forest resources provide life to the Amazon region and its 34 million inhabitants⁴. This rhythm, this demolishing drive, is also genocidal. Without the forest, without the jungle, the life of the indigenous communities, ancestral defenders of biodiversity, and balance in the Amazon and the world, simply cannot be. It's not only about the ecological and climate crisis, though that should be enough reason to combat it. It's also about a harrowing social emergency. One that shows the world is far from being just. We still need to learn a lot from our history and unlearn from the objectifying ways that use their power to take ownership over life and death.

-In 2019, *Colectivo Geografía Crítica de Ecuador (Ecuadorian Critical Geographic Collective)*, recorded 983 865.6 hectares with a total of 3028 mining concessions. This accounts for 38.8% of all grants in the country that affects 8.4% of the Amazon territory, of which 13.4% is Indigenous people's territories.

-Legal and illegal mining activity in the Amazon accounts for the majority of heavy metal pollution in the land and water. This directly affects human and non-human life in the region.



3 Source: MAE, 2015

4 Source: ACTO 2020



Communal Reserve AmaraKaeri, Credits: Pablo Tamayo - HIVOS

PERU OIL, PALM, AND LAND DEFENSE

For decades, the Amazonian peoples of Peru have fought against various threats to their life and territories. The Peruvian Amazon landscape has been violated by **oil extraction, palm oil plantations, terrorism, and drug trafficking**. This turned the original inhabitants of these lands - who have survived these attacks - into true defenders of life.

"Indigenous communities in northern Peru have been suffering from the effects of contamination by PlusPetrol activities for more than 40 years. Only after they physically protested (2006) did the company and the Government prepare to negotiate a solution. But with the minimal result: the company allocated some funds to clean up

the biggest spill, and mainly focused on avoiding their responsibilities", as stated in *Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide*⁵. The Government was of little use to indigenous communities, and the Amazonian inhabitants took matters into their own hands. Despite their efforts, until 2016, PlusPetrol had not cleaned its oil, and a bill that promised to give new hope to the communities was paralyzed.

Oil exploitation is just one of the many problems that Amazonian indigenous communities face on a daily basis. Deforestation also devastates the Peruvian forest's natural landscape, and Indigenous people cannot protect their territory while their land rights are denied. From a western point of view, the rainforest does not belong to them;

5 Conceptual proposal of All Eyes on the Amazon that is based on the use of technologies for monitoring and gathering evidence for the defense of the Amazonian territories.

they have no legal means to keep dam builders and logging companies away. Some communities can receive explicit possession of a small area in the forest, which helps ensuring the protection of that area. However, this rarely happens. The Government keeps agreements with indigenous communities (known as Communal Reserves and they are part of the Asháninka National Federations), yet more often than not they lack political commitment. This means sovereignty over the jungle is diluted in an abstract entity. Instead, it should be in the hands of the ancestral communities that protect and inhabit it.

For example, in Santa Clara de Uchunya, in the Peruvian department of Ucayali, the jungle has become a vast oil palm plantation. This is due to the interference of the Ocho Sur P SAC company, which has divided the lands on both sides of the river Aguaytia turning it into disputed territory. The Uchunya have denounced that they have had to stop hunting in the jungle, which could signify death.

THE ASHÁNINKA VS. THE PCP-SL AND THE MRTA

No less devastating (widespread, and documented), has been the presence of subversive and drug trafficking groups in the Peruvian jungle. Faced with these threats, the Asháninka resistance has sacrificed its own inhabitants to protect the Amazon. These conflicts have deteriorated nature and polluted social exchanges within the Peruvian Amazon cultures.

“Peru’s Central Jungle, given its geographical location, has been an area of great geopolitical importance for subversive groups such as Sendero Luminoso or the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA). **This area has optimal climatic conditions for coca cultivation.** Because of that, a strong presence of drug trafficking since the 1970s was generated. That’s why both Sendero Luminoso and the MRTA have tried to appropriate control of the region on numerous occasions. The arrival of settlers from the Andean areas of Huánuco, Pasco, and Junín (from the 1970s, due to the lack of land and opportunities), as well as settlers who came from the Ayacucho, Huancavelica, and Apurímac mountain ranges (expelled from their lands), was crucial in implementing programs of these subversive groups “,

describes the Report of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación del Perú) (August 2003).

Given the geographical context that isolates and alienates it from the rest of its country, the Peruvian Amazon rainforest struggles against the invasion of its lands. All in a legal ground full of gray areas challenging to navigate. **The new tools that the Amazon youths have accessed prepare them for this battle.**

Oil exploitation is just one of the many problems that Amazonian indigenous communities face on a daily basis.



CHAPTER 2

FUTURE ECHOES THE GAZE OF INDIGENOUS AMAZON YOUTH



“These new technologies have given me the hope of knowing that I can take action. We all have a cell phone now with which we can collect evidence.”
Aroteya Calderón

Because they live in one of the most diverse places in the world, young Indigenous people of the Amazon have been forced by modernizing history (and for some decades now) to take on the mission of not only protecting their home - a territory that exists in constant threat, a landscape that could cease to exist tomorrow- but to also preserve their **ancestral wisdom** and learnings. These are essential to the survival of people in times of climate debacle. Moreover, they face the challenge of having their voices heard in

a world that insists on silencing any viewpoint that contradicts exploitation projects and capital wealth accumulation. Therefore, it's essential getting the world to finally listen to the collective worldview of Ecuadorian and Peruvian indigenous cultures. This way, humanity could guarantee the defense of their rights and those of their territory.

“Nasankani atami (forest of my heart)” says Aroteya Calderón, (30 years old, Asháninka nationality, Masamari, Central jungle, Peru), allowing each syllable to gently settle, in a way that will enable someone to understand even if they don't know the meaning of the words. The same phrase was once pronounced by her mother, who also heard it from her mother, and so on. This young Amazonian indigenous woman's language and most of her **knowledge, legends, and traditions have been passed on verbally for generations**. In the Amazon, young people's education is based on an ancient framework of sounds, inherited from their ancestors. These new Amazonian voices seek to reconfigure those echoes, articulating them in modern languages for all the world to hear.

Encounter of participants of the Leadership Program with Gender Sensitivity for Young Indigenous People, Credits: Peacock Films





*“I feel like nowadays,
Indigenous people, young
people, must always be alert,
in defense of our territory
and our resources”
Aroteya Calderón*

In this context, the contributions from diverse organizations are crucial for Amazon inhabitants. One of the most significant achievements from recent training programs is to provide tools that transfer ancient Amazonian knowledge into modern global speech. Technology can be used to defend the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples from the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon. Some of the learnings that the All Eyes on the Amazon¹ program and Leadership Program with Gender Sensitivity for Young Indigenous People² have imparted to their participants range from cartography knowledge to the use of technology like drones, social networks, and virtual education. All of them are rights-based and understanding of the law. This creates specific links to the current communication trends and global exchange, which are essential for taking joint and solidary action.

The *Leadership Program with Gender Sensitivity for Young Indigenous People* treasures the [testimony](#) of its participants. Their feelings regarding the threats they face in their territories and communities have been synthesized in these pages. Their words and lively voices, however, are always expressed through resistance.

“I feel like nowadays, Indigenous people, young people, must always be alert, in defense of our territory and our resources. Because if they don’t find a strategy for entering our community the first time around, they will come to a second time with a new plan. We must continue

working and maintaining a daily dialogue with our leaders, our grandparents, and our women. We must do so to come up with the best solutions in favor of our territories and our mother nature, our home. For us, this is the home of all the people. It should be the home of all the people. We should not be destroying it as we are now,” says [Jhomar](#) Maynas (23 years old, city of Pucallpa, Peruvian jungle).

[Yulissa](#) Trigoso (25 years, Diamante community, Yine people Peru, Madre de Dios) agrees with Jhomar. According to her, access to new technologies that integrate ancient and modern knowledge allows for the creation of new policies within their communities, and operate as defense fences; taking into account that the formal legal framework is practically non-existent. The fight continues to be unfair: “Within the community, we defined and established rules on hunting when we saw that animals were beginning to scarce.” Faced with this statement, Aroteya adds: “These new technologies have given me the hope of knowing that I can take action. We all have a cell phone now with which we can collect evidence.” Thus, in the immediacy era, Amazonian expressions go beyond what’s verbal and begin to build different ways of perceiving reality and temporality, a new form of memory.

1 All Eyes on the Amazon (AEA) is a unique program that supports Indigenous people and local communities in their fight against deforestation and ecosystem degradation. It combines state-of-the-art technology, such as satellites, innovative apps and drones, to detect deforestation, degradation, and human rights violations, record them and eventually stop them.

2 Program specifically designed for young Amazonian leaders from Ecuador and Peru, focused on the development of leadership skills, legal knowledge and use of new technologies for territorial mapping and communication for the defense of their territories and culture.

CHAPTER 3

IMPACTS
WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE





Students of the Leadership Program with Gender Sensitivity for Young Indigenous People, Credits: Peacock Films

*chay lusiru kimirimukunmi
kintikunapash ña
pawanakunmi
pakchata yallik ñuka
shunkupash wakakunmi
chay kanpa shimiwan
allpata mutyachishami
wayrapash ñukanchikwan
pukllachun sakishunlla
-ama manchaychu
nachu urkukunapash
kuyarinmi
nishpami ñuka
mamaka- nin*

*Morning star rises
Hummingbirds flutter
Louder than the waterfall
roars my heart
With your lips, I'll soak the
earth
Let the wind frolic within us
-Fear not
Mother says even mountains
love each other-*

YANA LUCILA LEMA

"I never felt that being a woman was a limitation of any kind, and I have felt this way since I was a child. Since I was little, I went hunting with my grandfather, with other boys and girls. Nobody ever told me I had a role to play, no one ever said: stay home, you can't go hunting with your grandfather," Yulissa says.

When talking about the people from the Amazon, we are not referring to a homogenous culture. The people that live in the east of Ecuador and Peru are numerous and very diverse. Some communities have a strong matriarchal tradition, others are deeply patriarchal, and many others range somewhere in the middle. The situation for women in the Amazon is as diverse as the languages that populate these lands.

Some of the matriarchal indigenous communities have created an environment in which women can feel free to act without the limitations of gender imposed roles. However, due to the constant threats to the territory, some positions have shifted to a binary form of organization. Some men are forced to leave the community for material gain to respond to the growing needs, so women stay home to care for the kids and the *chakra*¹. This makes women more vulnerable to the presence of invaders and extractivist company workers. This is one reason why there has been an increase in sexual assaults, rapes, and human trafficking in the Amazon in recent years².

Modern history created an abyss between material riches owners and those who merely perform as a workforce (sometimes hardly even that). Precarization of life inflicts brutal pressure on men in patriarchal societies. Among the masculinity demands, being the sole provider is one that weighs heavily on them.

When a man feels impotent, castrated by a system that exploits, he releases his repressed violence and claims his manhood by exercising control over the more vulnerable bodies around him: those of women and children. Often the masculinity demands include the need to prove himself and others that he is potent. The "normalized" road to do

1 A *chakra* (kichwa) is a small rural piece of land used for growing crops and farm animals. Not to be mistaken with the Hindi word "chakra" which is spelled exactly the same, but has a completely different meaning.

2 In this regard, there are several investigations, including the documentary 'Victims are needed: after the gold route and exploitation from Cusco to Madre de Dios' (2016) or the study of Gender Relations in the Ecuadorian Amazon by Alicia Garcés Dávila. The gender reality in the Brazilian Amazon, however, has been, until now, the most documented.



Leadership Program with Gender Sensitivity for Young Indigenous People, Credits: Peacock Films

so is usually sexual. That is why most of the abuses inflicted on women are sex crimes, although the root of the problem is structural:

“Women are always more vulnerable to threats, but this affects us all. We are a family; if one person is affected, we all feel it,”

Sindy Cerda

“Girls, young women, are often captured as sex objects. We have seen this happen when mining companies come. Some women are driven to prostitution. Women are more vulnerable to this kind of violence,” adds Yulissa.

Other times, the violence experienced by women has a different nature, one that is still profoundly destructive: “The foreigners that come here have realized that the power is not in men’s hands but

in women’s. So, their strategy has been to work with the sons of female leaders who have a strong voice in our community. For example, there is a female leader who is very respected and listened to in my community. The authorities who want to build the road have started to get close to the sons of the leader. They have received support and job offerings, for example. Now we don’t hear her voice anymore”, continues Yulissa.

The reality of women in the Amazon is arguably similar to women around the world if we understand the patriarchal system and its sexist practices as a global structure that expresses itself almost everywhere.

Through war and imposition of power, the ancient conquest of territories has mutated over time into overexploitation of natural resources, which relies on territorial displacement: logging, and forest fires, drilling, mining, and killing those who defend the jungle. The colonial appropriation practices have somewhat changed without ever leaving their matrix. The abuse that objectifies women,

that writes its patriarchal laws on their bodies, is parallel to the one inflicted by the oil company or the logging business that enters the ancient forest to devastate. Under the instrumental logic of capitalism, profit is a lot more valuable than life.

This eroded economic and cultural model that has exercised its power for centuries has got to make room for new ways of leadership. This is why female leaders need to become more visible in their roles within and outside their homes and territories. The young women leaders whose voices enrich this book have an essential role in the survival of humankind. They understand the immense value of their ancestral knowledge, they feel the sacredness of their land and know that the future is only possible if we all remember that we are just a part of this Earth we all share.

“The Yine people believe in the power of nature, of these ancient trees. For us, it is so difficult to overthrow them. They have mothers like us. To bring an ancient tree down is to kill ourselves,” Yulissa says.

“Every community is different, but mine has had a Western view of leadership since long ago. My people believe that leaders should be men. Five years ago, this view started to change; an inclusion process started. Now, for the first time in my community, we have a woman for president. She is my cousin. Now the history of our community has changed, and it is since we have many women actively participating and playing an important role in the federation. Besides, I am proud to say that the Indigenous People and Native Communities Counselor is my sister,” says Genaro Escalante (28 years old, Shipibo, Madre de Dios, Perú).



“The Yine people believe in the power of nature, of these ancient trees. For us, it is so difficult to overthrow them. They have mothers like us. To bring an ancient tree down is to kill ourselves”
Yulissa Trigoso



CHAPTER 4

THE INDIGENOUS YOUTH IN THE DIGITAL ERA



“There is no noise in the jungle; only sounds. We hear everything; from the tiniest to the largest creature”
Samantha Wampanti

Resilient is one of the adjectives that describe the Amazonian Indigenous young people. Over the years, they have learned to distinguish their shamans’ power chants, hidden in the middle of the deafening roaring of an oil driller, the wailing of the agonizing wildlife, the logging, even the shots of the firearms of invaders. To them, their words tell us so, the past wounds and scars are something to show with pride and respect. They are survivors, they are the resistance. “I would give my life for my territory. My parents have received threats, in the middle of all the conflict, I would even call it persecution”, Yulissa declares.

In this context, the use of new technologies is an effective way to refine land defense strategies. “The use of drones has allowed us to clarify the limits of our territory, the amount of land that is ours to protect, and if invaders come to our community, we have a better idea of how it will affect us and our future,” Jhomar observes.

Given the Amazon circumstances, knowing the landscape, being able to redraw it digitally becomes fundamental: “In the cartography class,¹ we did fieldwork. There I learned how to use a drone, and I realized that we can use technology to monitor our forests and take good care of the territory. We can get more evidence of deforestation of areas, soil trafficking, or any other problem that arises. That is how we can take action, apply mechanisms to denounce what is happening to institutions that can help,” explains [Aroteya](#). Her message is loud and clear: we live in the jungle, but we are part of this connected world.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE ANCIENT: THE FIBERS OF TIME

Analyzing the possible tensions that exist between technology and the ancient invites us to reflect on time. To understand the contemporary time, the present, one has to have a degree of anachronism. In the essay *¿What is the Contemporary?*, Giorgio Agamben states that “It is as if that invisible light that is the present, projected its shadow over the past, and it, touched by this beam of shadow, acquired the capacity to respond to the darkness of the present.”



Learning Journey at A'i Cofán Community, Credits: Mátéo Barriga - HIVOS

In other words, the past and the present are part of one continuity. Ancient history and the knowledge of a community have no relevance without their current expression. The light of the present isn't perceptible without its shadow projected over the past. Past voices dialogue with the present ones, and nourish them. History has shown that it repeats itself; that we are not on a straight road to a brighter future; that humanity makes the same mistakes over and over again, and that perhaps many of the keys to happiness for humankind reside in the convergence of past and future.

The Amazon youth and their grandparents' dialogue is increasingly vital since their cultural heritage is in constant danger of extinction. This is why many leaders, old and young, study their culture, embody and defend it as if their life depended on it, and it does:

It's important to say that our culture can disappear. From the Black River basin, the triple frontier with Brazil, Peru, and Colombia, we have to protect our territory. You are called upon. There is no one else. Who is going to fight for this in the next ten years? You have to do it! Many of us are no longer young

leaders; we could be your parents or uncles, and we don't give you enough space to act. We have not allowed the young leaders to take control of our organizations. We say: the young don't have experience. But the young have proven they have the capacity, the strength, and the voice to fight for their people. Do you know your origin? Will you defend your identity? Your culture? Would you be willing to give your life to protect your land? Gregorio Díaz, Leader of COICA², during the Virtual Youth Meeting, May 21, 2020)

Programs like [All Eyes on the Amazon](#) have invested in the optimum use of technology to benefit Amazonian needs. One of the main goals of this initiative is that the communities affected by all the issues use satellite images and field information as part of their strategies to defend their territories. The aim is to use the collected evidence and act quickly with the help of the judicial system for the defense of the Amazon.

These must be joint actions. Local communities, public institutions, and allied organizations must use technology that can penetrate the thick cloud coverage and map each area at any time of the

year. Along with the correct use of technology, there must be a precise use of information to notify authorities about any illegal usage of the land and natural resources.

The initiative partners³ systematically promote an exchange of knowledge, experiences, and learned lessons from the program's implementation. These findings are shared with other similar communities to create a wave expansion effect of the achieved benefits.

The amazonian youth is capable of seeing itself as a change agent that uses technology without compromising its identity. "I always talk about an adaptation process. I believe that the new ways of working and even farming the chakra are very different today. I also believe that as Indigenous people, we should be prepared for a change to do effective work," [Genaro](#) observes.

PROTECTING THE TERRITORY: COMPLEMENTARY AND OPPOSING

To equip the Amazon communities with technology is a way of assisting exploration of their nature, far from the moral and simplistic view that tends to stereotype them. Perhaps the latest technological findings are not central to the Amazonian communities. However, they are still present and intertwined with ancestral practices to create a new reality. The use of technology could be a tool to enhance the preservation of territory, ancestral knowledge, and culture.

When speaking about technical development in the Amazon, one should also acknowledge that the **ancestral wisdom and methods are also a form of technological evolution**. "When I was fourteen, I tried Ayahuasca. I turned into a boa, I traveled through nature and saw many things.

³ Led by Hivos, and Greenpeace, All Eyes on the Amazon is developed by an alliance of eleven international and sixteen local organizations that protect human rights, especially Indigenous peoples rights, as well as environmental sustainability, technology, law execution, communication and incidence.



Years later, I took it one more time and saw the graves of people who were soon to be dead. I have healed my sisters with plants and eggs”, [Jenny](#) Piruch shares (25 years old, Shuar, Llamana, Ecuador)

The implementation of the *Leadership Program with Gender Sensitivity for Young Indigenous People* means to have access to an education that respects their culture and worldview, something that has been historically challenging, if not denied to the young Amazonians.

Access to proper education is still a cause for struggle and one of the main aspects of their resistance: “Many people think that because we are Shuar, we do not possess knowledge. I want everyone to know that the Shuar are educated. It has been tough for us to get access to education. Sometimes there isn’t enough money, sometimes there isn’t even enough food (her voice breaks). But my father fought for us to be recognized as an indigenous nation, and that helped the Shuar”, Jenny says. “Finishing a career is a great sacrifice. Many leaders say that after enrolling in college, they can reach up to the second or third semester, but can’t manage to go further because of the money. Only four years ago, the bilingual schools were reactivated. Before that, **we couldn’t learn in our mother tongue**. They impose a language on us. To finish middle school and high school, I had to leave my community so I could later apply for university and graduate at a public school,” Aroteya adds.

As stated before, breaking through the education system is, in many cases, a tour de force for the indigenous youth: “I managed to enter a university and was the administrator of a municipality by the age of nineteen,” Genaro states. “Only one out of ten indigenous students get to graduate. Thanks to my community, I am a professional leader, so my work is directed to it. We have achieved great results working together as the team that conforms the federation: anthropologists, sociologists, lawyers. We have faced many challenges, especially the access to a proper education for our people, which is a fundamental cause for struggle in our communities”, he concludes.



“It’s important to say that our culture can disappear [...] The youth have proven they have the capacity, the strength, and the voice to fight for their people”

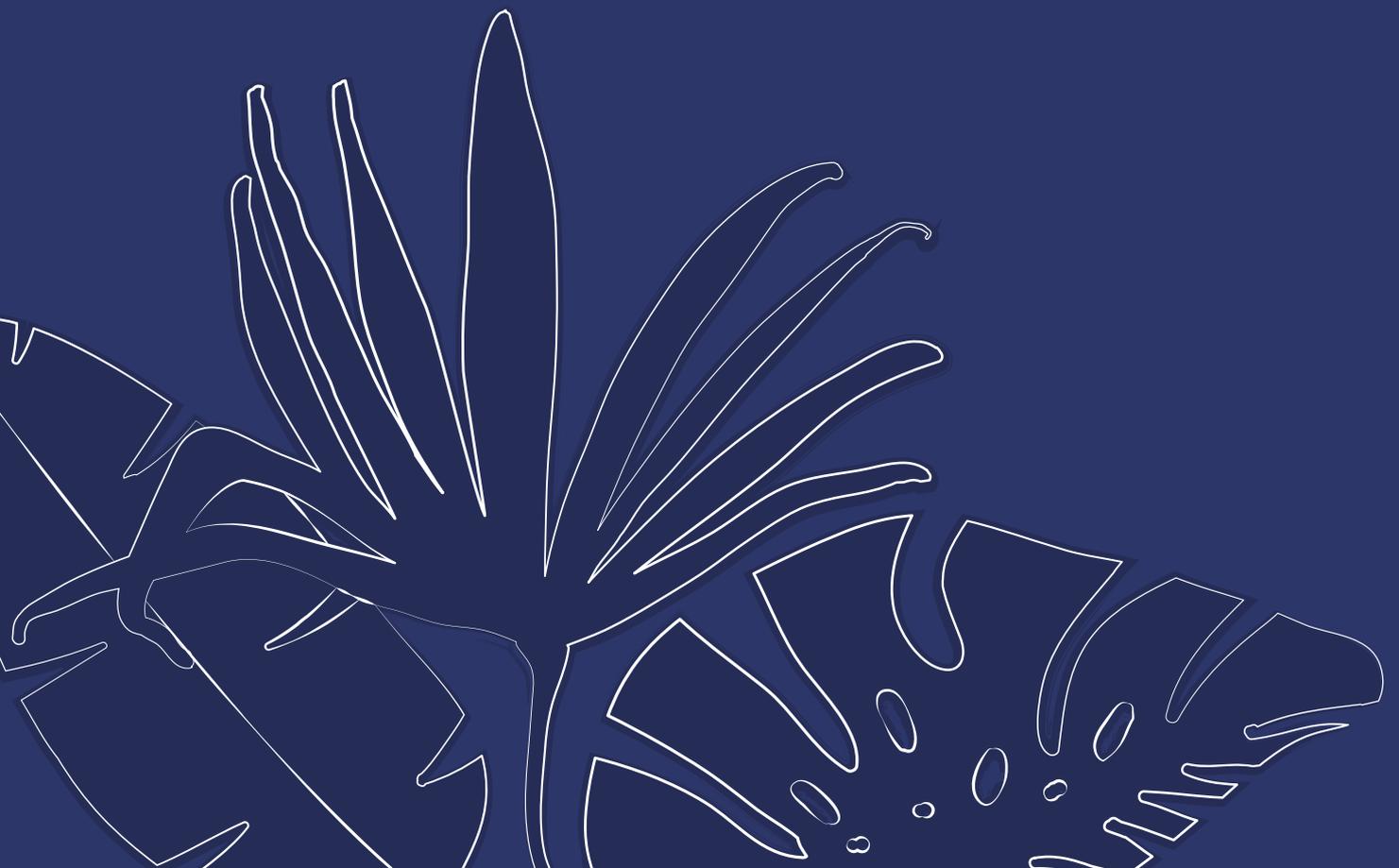
Gregorio Díaz Mirabal, COICA



Isabel Gonzales, Tikuna youth, Credits: Peacock Films

CHAPTER 5

SURVIVAL, IDENTITY, AND LAND



“It was implied that indigenous communities promoted resource extraction. But who granted the concessions to the mining companies? Was it us, the indigenous communities? Or was it the Ministry of Environment?”
Genaro Escalante

When tracing highways, the concepts of connection and exchange usually come to mind as the main goals. Not in the Amazon. **Here, roads are built to fulfill hidden agendas of destruction, exploitation, and separation.** “The highway came around 2018 when its construction started. Some think having a highway here is a good thing. Others say it’s a bad thing. Phase one, the “deforesting” phase, is done. We’ve witnessed this lady’s sorrow during this first stage: the road will break her house in two. She’s a widow and has three kids.” recalls Yulissa.

And who’s responsible for this absurdity? “On the one hand, Indigenous people haven’t prepared themselves to face an imminent generational transition, an adaptation process we’re already going through. On the other hand, though, it’s the Government that has the last say in this; they have the power. During our visit to the Minister of Environment four years ago, someone implied that it was us, indigenous communities who didn’t do a good job protecting our land, that we even promoted resource extraction. Then, one of us broke the silence and asked: but who granted the concessions to the mining companies? Was it us, the indigenous communities? Or was it the Ministry of Environment?” says Genaro.

When looking for “suspects” (people or institutions who make it easy for companies to raze the Amazon), unexpected threats surface the conflict that sparks as a result of settlers interacting with native indigenous communities and imposing their culture, religion, and their views on the economy, politics, education, and medicine. Doubt slowly crawls inside the communities and turns into disagreement. Some feel the urgent need to defend their land and its ancestral knowledge. Others are willing to give up their land, for crumbs of the so-called “well-being” the 9 to 5 life has to offer. There are also the ones whose minds are constantly changing, swinging from one possibility to the next one.



The rainforest, its timeless sounds, and the voices of the elder are still standing. Some of them are already gone, some have left unfinished battles behind. They parted without knowing the taste of victory, without being able to assure their people's right to live in their peaceful, vast jungle. Their lights went out fighting for a way of life that's seen as precarious by the short-sighted:

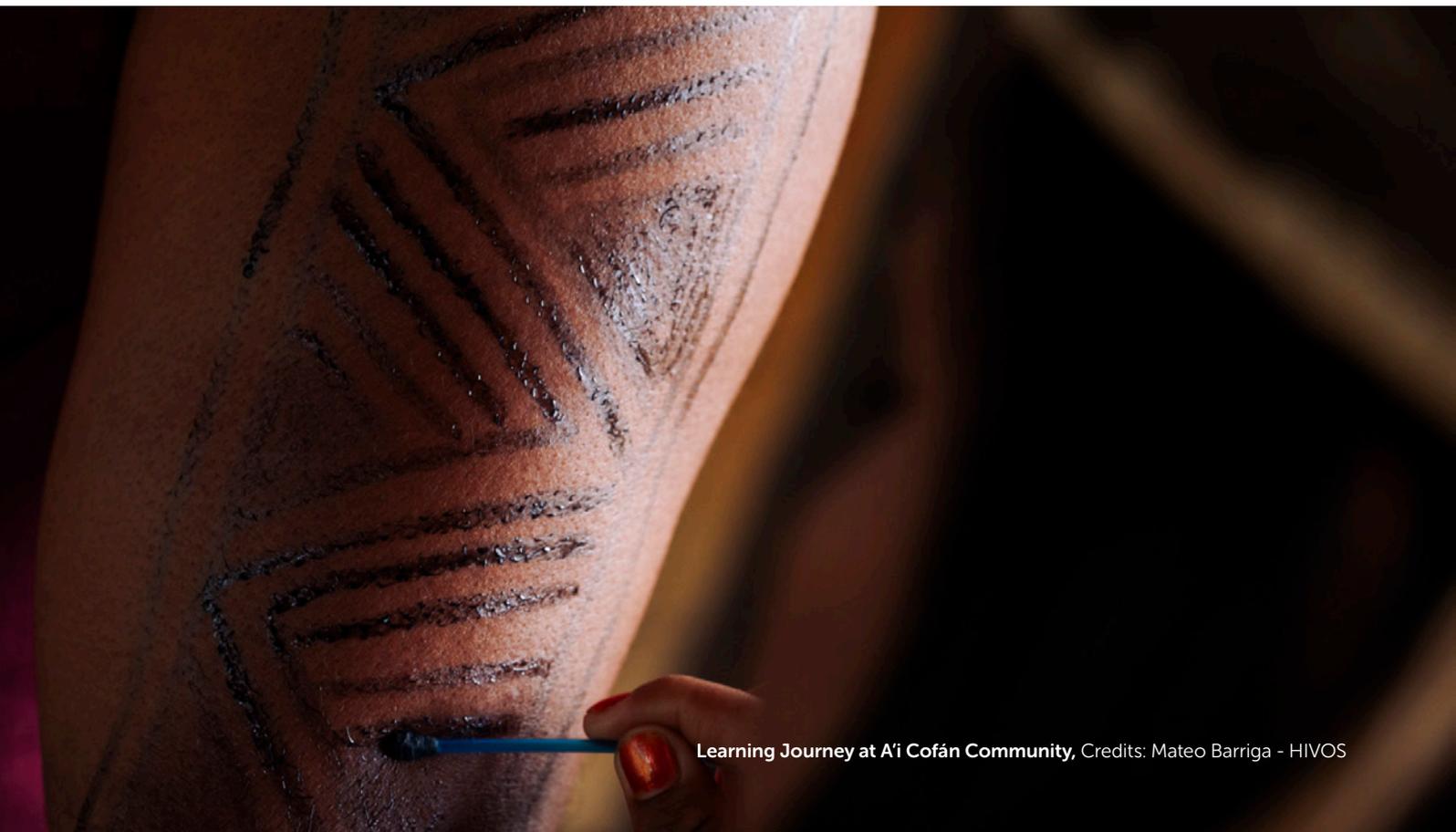
The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has established that the citizen Alejandro Calderón Chávez, leader of the Asháninka communities, was kidnapped by members of the MRTA on December 8, 1989. To date, his whereabouts have not been determined. As a consequence of this fact, the "Asháninka Army" was organized, led by Alcides Calderón, son and successor of Alejandro Calderón, which launched, between January and May 1990, a campaign against alleged members of the MRTA.

[...] December 8, 1989, in order to carry out exemplary punishment, members of the MRTA, hooded and dressed in black, assaulted the town of Kirichari, in the Puerto Bermúdez district. At that time, the villagers were celebrating the anniversary of the community with the primary native leaders of the nearest towns. According to witnesses, the members of the MRTA apprehended Alejandro Calderón Espinoza, Pinkátzari (chief) and President of ANAP (Apatyawaka Nampitsi Asháninka),

a federation that brings together the fifty-two Asháninka communities of the Pichis Valley. They led him against his will to Puerto Bermúdez and Palcazu, where he was last known to be alive. Since then, news about him are unclear, and he is presumed dead.

The previous excerpt is part of the chapter "The disappearance of Alejandro Calderón, Asháninka chief" from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru (August 2003). "When I was a little girl, my grandpa, Alejandro Calderón, chief of the Pichis river basin, used to say that us, our community should always remain united, because one cannot make it on their own. That's what keeps me going; that's what moves me to help," says Aroteya Calderón, revealing she is the granddaughter of this historical leader, who fought for the survival of the Peruvian Amazon.

Yes, there is an ongoing war, inside and out, and it's been decades now. Communities are exhausted and fractured, but they are also incredibly tenacious, and their power lives now in the young gaze of the new leaders who give their life for the quest of new solutions that assure the survival of their culture. The 400 indigenous nations that live in Amazonian land deal with conflict every day: they fight against a world that doesn't understand them, and they also fight each other: their sisters and brothers who are also disparaged and misunderstood.





Humanity will always have to look into the void that is this existence. Each culture will have its own way to face it and understand time and change, creating ways of living that need symbols to subsist. Landscapes will always be essential symbols that hold identity together, not only for indigenous nations but also for every nation. Nevertheless, very rarely, will a culture have the need to redraw its map, or relocate its coordinates, as frequently as the indigenous nations. Not so often will a nation be confronted with these questions: Should we offer our lives to defend our land? Should we adapt to the new means of production and consumption? Should we stop believing nature holds everything sacred? What is our place in the world? Is there an us without this place?

THE LINK BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND MANAGEMENT

Climate anxiety is a reality that more and more people are beginning to experience throughout the world. The more the alarming data, the bigger the angst. Lots of us feel powerless when facing the path, the economic landscape has traced for all living beings. We worry about the present; about

the dramatic changes in our climates, massive flora and fauna extinction, ocean acidification, and the rise of greenhouse effect gases. We worry about what's coming, and the quality of life we are building for those who come after.

Apocalyptic neurosis is no longer an overstatement. Living in the 21st century means feeling the harms of global warming every day. Yet it is vital realizing we still have time to reverse this ecocidal process, and we can start by defending the Amazon: the home of more than 34 million people, and more than 420 indigenous cultures, each one with its different types of knowledge. We should also understand that 40% of current environmental issues are happening in indigenous territories¹. All these conflicts are undeniably linked to the new economic frontier and a lot of the products displayed on the market. That means a lot of what we consume in the world has consequences on the Amazon. But most importantly, it's directly linked to the pressure the Amazonian land, and its people go through every day.

As citizens of the world, of one interconnected, interdependent planet, we must check our consuming habits. We should learn the origin of the

1 Environmental Justice Atlas

products we buy and demand the guarantee of a responsible, sustainable commercial exchange that respects life in all its forms. Excessive and underregulated oil drilling, livestock practices, illegal crops farming, illicit and legal mining, and primary rainforest fires, set on purpose by settlers to create monoculture crops; all these practices occurring in the Amazon are connected to what we consume in our cities. If we aim to stop global warming and help preserve the richness of the Amazon and its inhabitants, we should change our consuming habits. We can also support initiatives like AEA to assure the protection of the jungle and the indigenous communities that live there, by promoting constant training of young indigenous leaders, and we can strengthen the bonds with other organizations that focus on conservation supporting social movements that persuade governments to act on the global climate and ecological emergency.

In this context, indigenous communities living in the Amazon have developed a conflictive relationship with the idea of the western economy, a relationship built upon years and years of voracious abuse, and the inconsistencies of a faltering system that has used indigenous culture to exploit its resources, giving nothing in return. On the contrary (and it's become more apparent than ever during this pandemic²), each time indigenous communities have reached out and demanded access to essential human services (health, education, etc.), they have been rejected and discriminated against. Amazon natives often hear the settlers say their jungle is precious, only to see it being used, exploited, and razed.

"People in my town, and in different towns have discovered the power of money. Money has become a breaking point that has led to the loss of our culture, our costumes, and even our mother tongue." recognizes Genaro. "Some people rent their farms to outsiders, without previously consulting with our authorities, and that is creating a lot of conflicts. This topic has been discussed in our assembly. Foreigners come and deceive our people. Commoners see the money and get excited; they don't fully comprehend that our forest has a different kind of value; it can't be bought. If these activities continue, we will take this to national authorities," explains Aroteya.

Damages go from the atrocities of ecocide and genocide to milder (but not less important) effects of climate change that can be perceived on a daily routine: "We're already facing the effects of climate change. There are sweltering and stormy days, and now we don't know what's the best day for sowing, anymore. Plus, there are diseases we haven't experience before, because of the constant rain. People get colds and flu." says Jenny.

2 Covid-19 has shined a light on an already alarming situation: indigenous communities living in the Amazon have little to known access to public health services and they are also limited by confinement and aren't able to protect their land as they usually do.



CHAPTER 6

IS THERE STILL TIME TO
SAVE THE AMAZON?



“Every minute I spent in the city, I felt the strong need to go back to my forest and replenish myself. This is my land, my mother. It fills me with energy when I need it. My land will always be food for my soul,”
Yulissa Trigoso

In most Western cultures, society and nature are perceived as two different notions¹. Urban living has very little to do with the natural balance and rhythm of the forest. Maybe that’s why talking about indigenous cultures feels somehow strange to those who aren’t part of them; these cultures have had the bravery to accomplish that which we haven’t. Despite the fray, the killings, the abuse and hurt, the forest and its people haven’t given up. The Amazon is the land of resistance, one of the few remaining on this planet.

When talking about the Amazon, and our role in its protection, the critical question is: do we still have time to save ourselves? The answer is a resounding yes. But to win the battle for human survival depends mostly on a change of paradigm: one that makes the best out of Western technological conquests and uses them in favor of a return to a collective worldview.

The arrival of the digital era has driven humanity to take on more ambitious enterprises. Learning to manage in areas other than their own, became a challenge for many indigenous young women and men, as well as their families. They began to see formal education as a tool to demand their rights with higher assertiveness and create a language that exists somewhere between the ancestral knowledge and the artifices of the Western rational thought that connects them with the rest of the world:

“This land’s still alive. As long as it exists, our community will also exist, and with it, our legacy. If we learn to deal with the adaptation process, we will see satisfying results. Now we are reaching local, regional, and national governments’ representation. That used to be unusual. It’s not anymore. One of the accomplishments of our organization is having a say not only in economic but political matters. Many of our national congresswomen and congressmen identify themselves as part of the indigenous nations. They don’t just stand there with their traditional costumes to earn some votes, like some used to,” says Genaro, who thinks the key to saving the Amazon has a lot to do with the educational process and indigenous representativeness and political action.

1 For these societies of hunters and farmers, (the Achuar), most of the beings we call “natural”, like grown plants and most animales, are born with the same attributes as humans. These attributes are contained in one common predicate: having a soul” Philippe Descola (2003)

Previous victories, the spirit of the warriors who came before, and the unshakable conviction of the elders bring hope to the younger leaders: "To learn that the Sarayaku nation won in the battle against the government made me proud" says Mireya Tsakimp, Shuar from Morona Santiago, as she shared her views during the COICA Virtual Youth Summit 2020.

As shown in the documentary film "CONFENIAE: 40 años de Resistencia Indígena" released by the organization *If not us, then who* (2020), the indigenous nations of Ecuador haven't caved into the pressure of constant threats: "The main reason for indigenous communities to organize collectively was the defense of their territories and collective rights. A nation without culture cannot exist. A nation without territory cannot live; a nation without language would not be a nation. Positioning at the forefront of the social struggle, the organization will fight to promote the union of all nationalities, defending their lives, their culture, and their territory, resisting against companies." So is mentioned in the documentary piece that summarizes some of the most important battles fought since CONFENIAE² was founded in August 1980:

-The Chevron/Texaco case (1964-1992). Lago Agrio-Esmeraldas pipeline: "We want to keep Amazon clean. We jungle keepers. Because of that, we scream for life, for land, for water!"

-In March 1992, Allpaymanta Kawsaymanta Jatarishun led to the legalization of over two million acres of Amazonian land.

-Sarayaku vs. Ecuador (2002-2012), before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica. "We've come from distant lands, from Sarayaku, the river of corn, we are descendants of the great jaguar."

-Mining in the Condor mountain range 2012-2020

-The Waorani case 2012-2019

-The Piatúa case 2019: "Piatúa is not for sale. We have said it before: we will defend Piatúa with our blood, brothers."

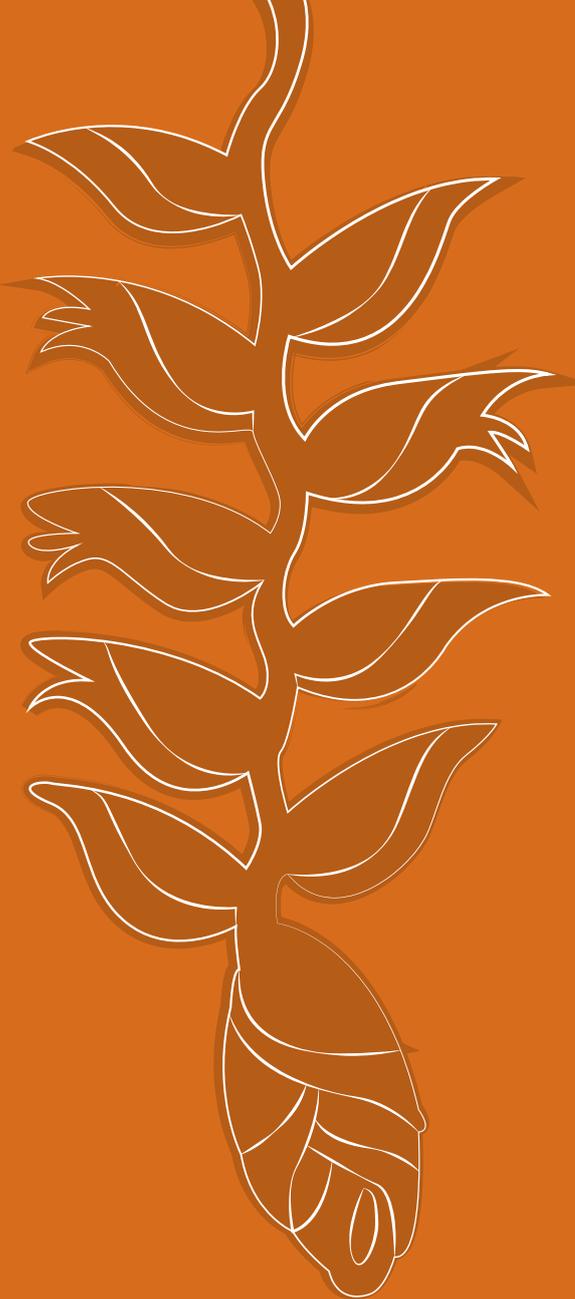
-The National Strike in October 2019. "In the name of every Amazon woman, we want to say that we've walked all the way from the jungle, leaving our children alone, leaving our house duties undone. We want the Ecuadorian State to respond to the needs of the indigenous people and nationalities of Ecuador," said Miriam Cisneros, president of the Sarayaku people during the indigenous demonstration in October 2019.

The Peruvian Amazon also has several conquests under the belt. The most relevant is, undoubtedly, the Asháninka resistance and the tenacity with which they expelled the PCL-SL and the MRTA from their territories: "It is estimated that by the beginning of 1991 some 10,000 Asháninka men were kidnapped by Senderista elements. This forced the population to organize into Rounds or Self-Defense Committees that, in coordination with the Armed Forces, launched a counter-offensive, severely hitting the PCP-SL. In this way, they managed to recover areas and free the kidnapped natives who were part of the Open Popular Committees. The actions carried out by the subversion were considerable until at least 1993," as described in an excerpt from the Report of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (August 2003).

For young Indigenous people, it's important that we understand that historically speaking, the Amazon rainforest belongs to the indigenous communities that protect it. We must not cease our efforts to fight against the extractive industries that invade them. "I am currently working along the people affected by Texaco. We are looking for alternative solutions to ease the damage on the soil. We must stop settling for the easiest choice. Choosing oil is easy, but it's bad for our people" says [Ramiro Ortiz](#) (Cofán nationality, Dureno community, Ecuador).



Sample testing for water pollution, Credits: COICA Communication



CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS



*Yo soy el río que viaja en las
riberas,
árbol o piedra seca
Yo soy el río que viaja en las
orillas,
puerta o corazón abierto
Yo soy el río que viaja por
los pastos,
flor o rosa cortada
Yo soy el río que viaja por
las calles,
tierra o cielo mojado
Yo soy el río que viaja por
los montes,
roca o sal quemada
Yo soy el río que viaja por
las casas,
mesa o silla colgada
Yo soy el río que viaja
dentro de los hombres,
árbol fruta
rosa piedra
mesa corazón
corazón y puerta
retornados.*

*I am the river that travels
along banks,
past trees or dry stones,
I am the river that surges
through your ears,
your doors, your open hearts.
I am the river that travels
by meadows,
by flowers, by tended roses,
I am the river that travels
along streets,
across earth, under the
drenched sky.
I am the river that travels
by mountains,
rocks and burnt salt.
I am the river that travels
through homes,
tables, chairs.
I am the river that travels
inside men
tree fruit
rose stone
table heart
heart and door
everything turned over.*

*JAVIER HERAUD
THE RIVER*

The Amazon voice is complex and profound, and its land and culture are difficult to access, but that shouldn't talk us out of our desire to explore it and understand it. Our survival depends on it.

The main threats to the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon are **mining, oil extraction** (with its collateral damage), **and the cutting down of primary forests** in order to establish monocultures and crop farms. On top of this are outdated social policies that refuse to understand forests as sacred properties of their inhabitants.

Amazon youth speaks a language that lives in a time where ancestral knowledge and modern technologies meet. Based on these two pillars, the initiatives of All Eyes on the Amazon and the Leadership Program with Gender Sensitivity for Young Indigenous People have managed to impart knowledge such as cartographic understanding, use of technologies, drones, social networks, virtual education and notions of law and rights. Using these tools, young people are determined to redraw Amazonian landscapes into the worldview of a hyperconnected era. Being better informed is essential to save the Amazon jungle.

Indigenous nations are not all the same. In fact, they are as diverse as their environments and languages. Within the gender approach, each town has its specificities. Some are matriarchal, others deeply patriarchal, and some have mixed values. However, the pressure from the West to accumulate goods (within a system that privileges some and oppresses others) and the presence of settlers and extractive companies have caused the exacerbation of sexist practices throughout the Amazon.

The past and the present are in constant dialogue. Philosophers like Giorgio Agamben have emphasized it. This is something that many indigenous Amazonian people understand, and that programs like AEA want to amplify. The technological tools that Indigenous young people acquire help them take care of their territories and cultures in innovative ways. They also allow the West access to the ancestral knowledge of these cultures, essential for our survival.

Climate change and its multiple threats affect everyone, but they are most evident in rural settings where people depend on nature for their livelihood. Amazon forests also suffer at the

hands of neo-extractivist state policies. The logic of capitalism promises access to an apparent level of comfort in a world full of uncertainties. Under the voracity of capital, indigenous Amazonians are expected to sacrifice their irreplaceable lands and even their culture and identity. Is the existence of these ancient cultures possible if they are torn from their territories?

Despite being very clear about the powerful threats against their territories (as well as the rest of the ecosystems on earth), the indigenous young people of the Amazon have an optimistic message: we are in time to save nature. No one knows how to care for the forests better than its ancient inhabitants. So, it is time to be allies of Indigenous peoples' fights and voices. Indigenous women, from their particular vision, have a lot to contribute to the eco-feminist struggle. Despite having different female representation levels depending on each indigenous culture, there is a trend towards the leadership of women who not only demand equality and freedom but also propose sound alternatives for the improvement of the world's quality of life.

“We want you to come to visit our communities, to live with us for a while, and discover that our territory is worth it. We want you to help us defend it from those who have invaded us,”

Jenny Piruch



EPILOGUE



This first edition of “New voices of the Amazon” was finished 117 days after the first official case of Covid-19 was identified in Ecuador. Social distancing, a measure commonly adopted to prevent the spread of the virus, has been experienced differently in each corner of the world. We witnessed the start of the pandemic in China in early December 2019. We watched, with concern, how it arrived in Europe and its disproportionate expansion in Italy, Spain, and other Southeast Asian countries. It finally reached the Americas in February 2020. By June, the virus had already penetrated the green infrastructure of the Amazon tropical forests, where hundreds of Indigenous peoples live.

The virus has gone around the world in 80 days, Jules Verne’s style, entering societies’ depths and uncovering the most enormous inequities and injustices that many thought had already disappeared or were minimized. Do we still believe that social isolation is the best measure?

During these 80 days, while the virus has traveled and expanded: have you ever wondered what social distancing means for Indigenous peoples? How to stop living in a community when the virus threatens this lifestyle? In some cases, this measure manifested itself as the relocation of the most vulnerable into the depths of the forest. Healthy, profound, and even magical, the amazon forest is the highest form of protection against the virus’s fearful expansion.

As of the closing date of this edition, Covid-19 has infected 7.5 million people and has killed 420,000 people. COICA reports more than 6,000 cases of infection in the Amazon Basin. If we have not yet reached the peak of the contagion curve on this side of the world, there is reason to keep a close eye on how things unfold.

The pandemic canceled hundreds of plans, paralyzed projects, and separated families. In the case of our organization, it prevented us from returning “to the territory” to accompany our local partners’ work. We had to stop going to the forest in order to protect ourselves and protect them. We stopped traveling there physically, but mentally and spiritually, we always return. Sometimes, filled with nostalgia for the leaves, the humid soils, and the rummaging secrets. Other times we’ve returned to support our friends and local partners facing the ghost of the pandemic.

From the depths of this physical, economic, human, and spiritual chaos, we seek to rescue the voices of a group of young people from the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon, whom we had the honor of meeting a year ago. Their voices and stories show us their hearts, their intentions, their concerns, and their illusions. Their stories teleport us to their homes, communities, territories, and even their dreams of Ayahuasca. Their words and tone of voice speak to our own nostalgia, and in this world of somewhat teleportation, I can see these young people united and hand in hand: overcoming their differences, fighting for a more sustainable, just, and healthy Amazon.

These New Amazonian Voices tell part of what it means to be a young person in the Amazon. We hope that they will transport us to their forests and communities and inspire us to join them in protecting and conserving the Amazon forests and its populations.

Connie Espinoza
Coordinator in Ecuador and Peru
All Eyes on the Amazon

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