

World Dignity University initiative: Co-creating Sustainability in the Amazon rain forest with the Kichwa community

Introduction: This initiative aims to build upon and strengthen the members of the Kichwa community to be leaders of sustainable forest management in their region, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps. This initiative is designed in three stages: 1) Survey of the land, giving the Kichwa community the legal rights to own their lands; 2) Eco-tourism and Natural Medicine initiative; giving the Kichwa community a livelihood; and 3) World Dignity University to establish a branch at the Kichwa communities. This sustainable way of preserving the rainforest is through the entrustment of the Kichwa community. Currently, the Constitution of Ecuador protects indigenous people, the Amazon rainforest and their rights. But, unfortunately these indigenous populations do not know how to interact with the current system in order to preserve the Amazon rain forest.

Why: Currently indigenous communities in the rain forest are experiencing the forces of globalization by the intrusion of mining, logging, oil companies in their territories. Corporations go into the Amazon rain forest and take its resources; and the livelihood of these indigenous communities is destroyed.

Who: Under the leadership of Principal Researcher Mariana Vergara, technicians, scholars, students and practitioners to support indigenous community in a pilot to co-create a sustainable intervention to protect the Amazon rain forest.

What: We are reaching out to you as part our *action reflection collaborative inquiry* to guide us from your perspective about how it would be possible to develop this initiative.

How: Through *action reflection collaborative inquiry*, this type of collaborative action inquiry is co-inquiry. This type of collaborative research has long traditions in Latin America and it is about doing research “with” people, rather than “on” them. In order to deal with the mental demands of modern life, adults thinking needs to continue to evolve through higher level of consciousness. All of us (indigenous, scholars, practitioners, and students) to co-create a sustainable mechanism to protect the environment with the main goal of building a belt around the Amazon rain forest.

Where: In the Ecuadorian rain forest, this belt will begin with a pilot with Indigenous communities.

When: In July 2009 this intervention began at an emergency community meeting due to the intrusion of a mining company in Rio Blanco. At this meeting, we applied *action reflection collaboration inquiry* with the Kichwa community of Rio Blanco; as a result by July 2010 this indigenous community has built a road to provide access for tourists and got rid of 4 mining companies without violence.

Outcome: This project will provide a sustainable way to preserve the rainforest from the threats posted by the extraction of crude oil, biopiracy, unauthorized miner and lumber companies; while entrusting and promoting financial stability among indigenous populations living in the Amazon.

For more information please contact mariana.vergara@tc.columbia.edu