

CASE STUDY

Natural Climate Solutions



The Importance of Youth-Led Education and Awareness-Raising Campaigns: Digital CoBosques Collective and Fundación Tierra Montemariana in Colombia

Raising awareness among youth about the importance of biodiversity and sustainability is a necessary first step in mobilizing young people to develop green skills and seek green jobs that protect or restore ecosystems. This is especially the case in contexts where young people lack the education, capacity, and resources to see conservation work as a sustainable livelihood.

In Colombia, the Chemonics-implemented USAID-funded [Natural Wealth Program](#) is supporting youth-led organizations to educate and engage young people in protecting the country's immense natural resource endowment. Among these youth-led organizations are the **Digital CoBosques Collective** (CoBosques), located on the edge of the Amazon rainforest in the southern central department of Guaviare, and the **Fundación Tierra Montemariana** (Tierra Montemariana) that works in the northern Caribbean Montes de María region. CoBosques and Tierra Montemariana both use a variety of communication strategies to raise awareness among youth about the importance of protecting biodiversity and the reciprocal benefit their local ecosystems can provide them through sustainable livelihoods.

One of CoBosques' main goals is to encourage youth to stay in Guaviare by showing them the job opportunities that exist connected to the Amazon, such as those in agriculture, sustainable forestry, and ecotourism. At present, many young people from the region migrate to urban areas for school or work, as jobs in the Guaviare are not in large supply. CoBosques hopes to raise awareness about green jobs and advocate for the creation of more green jobs in Guaviare to support youth livelihoods, help protect the rainforest, and foster a stronger sense of belonging among youth in their community to encourage them to stay and help develop the area sustainably.



Photo credit: Digital CoBosques Collective

Through social media campaigns and training sessions, CoBosques seeks to sensitize youth to the green job opportunities that exist in their region. They conducted a series of environmental awareness and education training sessions at schools in their region, providing ninth and tenth graders with information about the Amazon rainforest, the natural resources and processes it harbors, and the importance of monitoring the impacts of human activity on this ecosystem. The training also included discussions on deforestation to demystify the topic and introduce students to sustainable alternatives to indiscriminate logging and forest clearing to expand agriculture, such as the production and sale of non-timber products like honey or palm fruits and fronds.



Photo credit: USAID Natural Wealth Program

Under its collaboration with Natural Wealth, CoBosques produced videos, podcasts, and interviews and installed local billboards to promote awareness around the preservation and sustainable management of regional rainforests. One radio program specifically targeted ranchers, including youth ranchers, providing information on sustainable livestock management practices. The radio program was broadcast early in the morning during the work week, when many ranchers tune in before starting work.

The Natural Wealth Program also worked with Tierra Montemariana to produce social media campaigns like “Heroes of the Tropical Dry Forest” and “Wildlife Daily Story,” which boosted their social media following on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. In 2020 alone, Tierra Montemariana reached nearly 140,000 people on Facebook. The organization has even engaged its social media audiences in a “selfie challenge,” inviting their predominantly young viewers to post a photo of themselves with the message #YONOCAGONCONSUMOFAUNASILVESTRE [I DO NOT HUNT OR EAT WILDLIFE]. Such use of social media has empowered young people to become knowledge brokers in their communities to initiate public conversations around protecting wildlife and preventing the hunting and illegal trafficking of animals in the highly threatened tropical dry forests of Colombia’s northern coast. In the wake of COVID-19, volunteers leveraged Tierra Montemariana’s social media platforms to post stories that highlight what young people can do at home to promote environmental conservation, such as composting, recycling, and reducing their use of plastic products.



For rural areas, where internet connectivity and technology penetration are low, Tierra Montemariana uses different strategies to reach young people who are integral stakeholders in ending harmful forest practices like unsustainable hunting and burning. For example, they linked young people directly with local owners of private nature reserves and with foundation and organization leaders to promote collaboration on conservation issues. Tierra Montemariana has also promoted ecotourism among rural youth, hoping to provide a sustainable livelihood alternative for those communities that currently rely on wildlife trafficking to subsist.

The work of CoBosques and Tierra Montemariana highlights young people’s commitment to educating their peers and communities on sustainable development issues, and the important roles youth play as natural climate solutions champions. Their volunteer-run efforts also point to the need for more income-generating opportunities to convert their passion and skills into jobs that also sustain their own livelihoods. At present, such green jobs have been slow to materialize. International development organizations can support youth-led organizations like CoBosques and Tierra Montemariana by providing them opportunities to apply for grants and projects, turning their volunteer activities into funded work.