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THE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM ON INDIGENOUS TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE: BRINGING NEW VOICES TO INDIGENOUS TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

Graduation day was very special for Betsilda, a young Shipibo woman from the indigenous community of San Francisco in Ucayali, Perú. As one of 30 recipients of a certificate in territorial governance from the Amazon Intercultural University in Pucallpa, Perú, Betsilda was elected by her community to participate in the program the year before.

“This training changed my dreams. Now I know I can do more for my people and my community. I hope to be a woman leader of the community, to assume a position because nowadays women also have the right to assume a position in the organization.”

Betsilda is one of 9 women who have graduated from the Capacity Building Program on Indigenous Territorial Governance (PFGTI, by its acronym in Spanish) in Perú, and is part of the largest cohort of indigenous women, 48 in total, attending the same trainings in other countries across the Amazon.

These women, along with 73 other students, come from communities that have access to very few, if any, capacity building programs. Most training programs for Indigenous Peoples target the leaders of indigenous organizations rather than community members, who are often directly responsible for the daily challenge of managing their territories and community needs. Even though they represent nearly 70% of the Amazon region’s indigenous population, the voices of women and young people like Betsilda and many of her fellow classmates are generally excluded, as territorial governance issues are usually considered “men’s affairs.”

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Indigenous Peoples' capacity to govern their territories in a changing world, is critical for countless reasons, one of which includes a clear and important [connection to climate change](#). Deforestation rates within tenured indigenous lands are far lower than other tenure regimes, and with almost a third of all aboveground global carbon stores within the Amazon Basin located in indigenous and communally-held lands, having strong capacity to steward indigenous lands is critical to mitigate against climate change. Strong capacity to manage these lands also protects invaluable biodiversity and the livelihoods of local people who depend on forests for their food, shelter, and well-being. However, governing these lands comes not without major challenges, and indigenous communities in the Amazon must confront these challenges with scarce resources and almost no opportunities to strengthen their capacities.

The PFGTI provides practical tools to manage the problems facing indigenous territories in Latin America. The pioneer countries implementing this capacity-building program are Brasil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Perú. The Program was designed over a two year process by Forest Trends as part of the [AIME consortium](#), indigenous organizations, university partners, and WWF.

HOW THE PFGTI WORKS

The PFGTI offers a 12-month formal capacity building program for participants that are elected by community members, based on a set of program conditions specifically designed to reach out to members of the community that have not been traditionally included in territorial governance. For example, of the four participants that each community can elect for participation in the program, the PFGTI requires that at least one be a woman, one be a young person, one be an elder, and that the fourth participant be someone who

holds a leadership position in the community. With these participation conditions, the PFGTI hopes to support the women, youth, and elders of the community in assuming greater leadership roles in territorial governance.

For one week every other month, students gather in a central location with their professors for face-to-face learning on a diverse set of topics that span across Territorial and Community Governance, Indigenous Rights and Legal Frameworks, Indigenous Economy, Administration and Management, Climate Change and Environment, Development, and Public Policy, among others.

One of the most important components of the program requires that students also develop a territorial governance project for their community. These are as varied as each community's needs, and have included for example, in these four pilot programs (2017-2018), projects focusing on women's role in collecting native seeds as a strategy to increase food security, direct learning from community elders to strengthen traditional territorial management practices, and control and surveillance methods to protect sacred sites from external threats.

WHAT IS NEXT? THE NEED TO CONTINUE WITH THE PFGTI

Participation numbers alone illustrate the desire for this kind of training and support. The first cohort of students included 121 students enrolled across the four countries, ranging in age between 14 and 70 years, and representing a total of twenty different Indigenous Peoples .

Betsilda's fellow classmates also spoke to the need for this program. Leydi, a young

Quillasinga woman from Colombia, added, "Territory is the basis of our existence as Indigenous Peoples. In this capacity building program, we have studied many topics that strengthen us to be able to defend it against threats and protect it from harm. We will only achieve [stronger territories] if we unite -- it doesn't matter if we are men or women, young or old. Unity is what will make us succeed."

Carlos, a Shipibo leader, underscored the personal and community benefits from his participation. "Now I feel capable of facing any situation, and I know how to orient myself, where to go, and who I need to talk to. That is what was missing in my community, [but now] each one of us, as authorities, knows what is the right direction."

After the graduation ceremony, Betsilda and the other Peruvian, Ecuadorian, and Colombian students, returned to their communities with their certificates in hand and numerous governance projects already up and running. WWF-Peru and WWF-Colombia are already planning to expand the program into additional communities. Students in Ecuador and Colombia will earn their certificates by June, and in Brazil by the end of this year.

The PFGTI has shown to be a successful and strategic capacity-building tool for territorial governance. It is a critical and complementary tool for any climate change project developed with indigenous organizations at the territorial level. Forest Trends and WWF strives to ensure the continued impact of this work through the following activities:

- **Implement a new PFGTI** in the four countries, and study the conditions to implement it in a fifth Amazon country.

- **Identify ways to include the PFGTI** in the strategic plans of the Universities and Indigenous Organizations in order to offer the Program on a continuous basis.
- **Identify key partners** to scale up the PFGTI in the Amazon Region (for the time being) by linking the Program to multilateral and bilateral funds supporting the conservation of Indigenous Territories.
- **Produce easy-to-share materials** to promote and support the implementation of the PFGTI in diverse contexts; strengthen capacities at the local level to train facilitators and teachers in indigenous territorial governance; and
- **Develop technical capacities** within the project to support Universities, Indigenous Organization, NGOs, and multilateral and bilateral projects that wish to engage in this Program.

To ensure the continued success and to scale the impacts of this work, we envision to join efforts with donors and allies to develop these tasks in the next 30 months.

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