Uniting Places of Worship and Faith Communities throughout Colombia to end Tropical Deforestation
In Colombia there are approximately 247,000 deforested hectares (MAAP).

Causes of Deforestation 2019

Deforestation is the largest cause of greenhouse gas emissions, in fact, slashing and burning of the forest produces 25% of emissions on the planet.

Main engine of deforestation:

1. The land grabbing
2. The expansion of the agricultural frontier into large areas
3. Extensive Livestock
4. Illegal constructions of ways
5. Illicit crops
According to official sources, in 2017 the country lost 220,000 hectares of forest; and in 2018, another 198,000 hectares.
IRI PROGRAM LAUNCH IN THE COUNTRY

BOGOTÁ
19-21 November 2018
Number of trained leaders: 365
THE COMPOSITION OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL
In the jurisdiction of SIX departments, 81% of the deforestation in 2018 is concentrated.

The department with the greatest decrease in deforestation was Caquetá with about 13 thousand hectares.

The department with the greatest increase in deforestation was Meta with about 8 thousand hectares.
By 2018, 644 municipalities have registered at least 1 ha of deforestation.
In the jurisdiction of 25 municipalities, is located the 76% of the national deforestation.
The municipality with the greatest decrease was San Vicente del Caguán with 7,000 hectares mint.
The municipality with the largest increase of deforestation was La Macarena with about 4 thousand ha.
Strategy for installing IRI-Colombia

The construction of the strategy was based on a clear guiding principle as well as 4 conceptual categories. Together, these would inform the Action Plan for 2019 and 2020 in a “step by step” process.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE
The guiding principle was to build on existing religious and socio-environmental experience and networks. The story did not begin with us, but with existing networks that we had to identify, build on, bring together and enhance.

- The Pan-Amazonian Social Forum, a strong social and indigenous socio-environmental movement.
- The Interreligious Council of Colombia, a growing interreligious movement for peace, with the capacity to convene and influence faith communities.
- The Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), promoted by the Laudato Si of Pope Francis.
- Several national indigenous organizations, each aware of the importance of protecting nature with the same commitment as they defend their cultures and their existence.
CONCEPTUAL CATEGORIES

INTERFAITH
Establish collaborative dialogue between different churches and faith communities, on the basis of equality, understanding and mutual respect.

Keys to success:
Building trust: This is generated by mutual knowledge, ethics and transparency in relationships, and concrete joint action for expected results.
Theological and scientific training: This training is done under the principles of protection of “Creation” and the rights of nature, as defined in Colombian law.

SPRITUALITY
Establish a common spiritual basis for action with indigenous peoples, whose ancestral knowledge is present in all the spaces of Mother Earth (the Pachamama) and manifests itself to them in multiple ways.

Subcategory: Conversation of Spiritualities:
Through spaces of encounter, dialogue and exchange, the interreligious and spiritual subject that is at the center of IRI is consolidated.

ADVOCATING FOR PUBLIC POLICIES
Training and education events for faith leaders that combine the defense of Creation (including tropical forests) with workshops on forests, climate and indigenous peoples, which give conceptual support and environmental awareness. These events also define and advance political advocacy priorities in terms of policies, plans, programs and projects, both at the national and municipal levels.

Sub-categories:
National advocacy training:
Creating an understanding of the importance of the National Development Plan (PND) and how best to directly advocate with the Executive branch of government (President of the Republic and Minister of Environment)
Training for local advocacy:
Training on how to influence implementation of Municipal Development Plans (PDM) and Departmental Development Plans (PDD), and opportunities to advocate for programs and projects that protect forests in their territories.

REGIONALIZATION
Establish interreligious action networks (IRI chapters) in the most deforested municipalities in the country, since their inhabitants, in particular the religious leaders, have a direct link with the territory in which they live and work with their communities and families.

Sub-category:
IRI chapters in the territories
The work is focused on the municipalities because they are the fundamental territorial entity of the political-administrative division of the State, with political, fiscal and administrative autonomy. Four municipalities were selected as priorities in 2019 and seven new municipalities have been prioritized for 2020. In each selected municipality, one IRI-local chapter will be installed in the urban area and two IRI local chapters in the rural areas of maximum deforestation, for a total of 33 IRI local chapters at the end of 2020.
METHODOLOGY USED

- Assessment of political entry points in the country: Identified the beginning of a new national government and the call for elections to elect departmental and municipal leaders as the opportunity, which allowed for the creation of an IRI advocacy plan on focused on the National Development Plan.

- As congress considered the National Development Plan, with the support of the IRI Colombia Advisory Council a group of parliamentarians was created who share the objectives of IRI Colombia. IRI Colombia convened this group of parliamentarians to consider and approve text committing to the protection of forests, which was then officially incorporated into the text of the National Development Plan (2019-2023).

- Additionally, IRI Colombia identified the political opportunity of influencing the candidates for political office in the municipalities, to be elected in October 2019 for a period of 4 years.

- At the same time, criteria were defined to install IRI local chapters in the municipalities with the highest deforestation rates. To do this, IRI Colombia worked together to map areas of greatest deforestation, the presence of churches and faith communities in these territories, and the threats and risks to the Amazon forest.
Workshops for religious leaders

Creation and installation of the IRI Colombia country program and four IRI local chapters

Dialogue with the private sector for collaborative work on the protection of tropical forests

Strategy for influencing national, territorial and local public policies

Communications strategy and promotion of IRI Colombia

Elements of the IRI Colombia strategy of action plan

Photo: Mike Arney, para Unsplash.
Creation and installation of the IRI Colombia country program and four IRI local chapters

- Launch of IRI "local chapters" in the four regions of the country facing the highest deforestation rates
- Election of coordinators and Advisory Councils for each IRI local chapter
- Development of an Action Plan for each IRI local chapter

Workshops for religious leaders

- Nine thematic workshops were held in each of the four IRI local chapters for a total of 36 workshops

Themes included:

a) Scientific understanding of the importance of protecting tropical forests (Level I and II)
b) Theology of Creation (Level I and II)
c) Indigenous peoples’ leadership and spiritualities (Level I and II)
d) Awareness of public policies (development plans, land use plans and local finance plans).
e) Functions of the Territorial Planning Councils and importance of having IRI local chapters included in its structure to accompany the policymaking process
f) Distribution of educational materials prepared by the IRI global team (fact sheets, issue primers and faith toolkits)
Strategy for influencing public policies

National
- Identify and map national and local political leaders
- Monitor the national legislative agenda and candidates for governor and mayor in the selected municipalities
- Call to Congressmen for IRI Colombia input into the National Development Plan 2019-2022
- IRI Colombia meetings with the President of the Republic of Colombia, Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development
- Elaboration of IRI Colombia position papers and advocacy documents on the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and the National Policy on Climate Change.

Local
- Candidates for local mayor are called by IRI Colombia to participate in a public forum called “The Amazon region and deforestation: actions to contain deforestation, new leaders, new plans, new opportunities”
- From these events, declarations (or covenants) are signed by political candidates for office (governors and mayors) committing them to, if elected, take actions protect tropical forests
- Working meetings with Mayors and Councillors elected for the period 2020-2024 to (i) secure inclusion of these commitments into their territorial development plans and (ii) appoint, for a period of eight years, two members of the IRI local chapter to each Territorial Council of Municipal Planning.
ELEMENTS OF THE IRI COLOMBIA STRATEGY OF ACTION PLAN

Dialogue with the private sector for collaborative work on the protection of tropical forests

- Mapping of the main productive, extractive, and agro-industrial industries that impact tropical forests
- Approval of a strategy to create spaces for dialogue with unions and the private sector, starting from the local level, to the departmental level and to reach the national level

Communications strategy and promotion of IRI Colombia

- Formulation and development of promotion and dissemination campaigns
- Creating alliances and networks with national, regional and local media
- Publication in mainstream national media outlets of "opinion columns" signed by members of the IRI Colombia Advisory Council
- Participation in interviews with local, regional and national TV and radio stations
- Promotion and education through social networks
Achievements 2019

- An inclusive IRI Colombia Advisory Council with strong collaboration around the training, advocacy and communications phases.

- National, regional and local media coverage for IRI Colombia and the forests agenda.

- Establishment of trust between IRI Colombia and political leaders, public institutions, universities, social leaders, indigenous peoples, NGOs and environmental organizations across the country.

- Distribution of educational materials (fact sheets, issue primers and faith toolkits) to the Churches and faith communities in relevant territories.

- Participation in national and international events, positioning IRI Colombia.
ACHIEVEMENTS 2019

- Briefings on IRI Colombia provided to the President of the Republic and to Ministers and Vice-Ministers, including the delivery of a proposal from IRI Colombia to include commitments to forest protection and the rights of indigenous peoples in Colombia’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

- Establishment of a permanent working table with the team of parliamentarians and with their Technical Legislative Units.

- Securing a commitment to ending tropical deforestation in the National Development Plan.

- The launch of four IRI local chapters.

- Four public policy debates (each with the participation of more than 300 people) with the 28 mayoral candidates (2020-2024) of seven of the selected municipalities.

- Appointment for eight-year terms of two IRI local chapter delegates in each of the four Territorial Municipal Planning Councils.

- Commitment of the religious leaders to the “Faith for Forests” declaration and campaign.
IRI PROGRAM LAUNCH IN THE COUNTRY

SAN VICENTE DEL CAGUÁN
6 June 2019
Number of trained leaders: 44
The local advisory council was formed:
Coordinator identified: Weekly meetings focused on public policy advocacy

CARTAGENA DEL CHAIRÁ
20 June 2019
Number of trained leaders: 44
Local advisory council formed:
Coordinator identified: Weekly meetings focused on public policy advocacy

LA MACARENA
3 September 2019
Number of trained leaders: 45
Local advisory council formed:
Coordinator identified: Weekly meetings focused on public policy advocacy

SAN JOSÉ DEL GUAVIARE
8 August 2019
Number of trained leaders: 45
Local advisory council formed:
Coordinator identified: Weekly meetings focused on public policy advocacy
BY THE END OF 2020, 33 LOCAL IRI WILL BE INSTALLED

IRI LA MACARENA (META) 10,625 pop.
- IRI-La Cristalina del Lozada (18 veredas)
- IRI-Alto Morrocoy (27 veredas)

PUERTO GUZMÁN (PUTUMAYO) 22,679 pop.
- IRI-Santa Lucía (7 centros poblados)
- IRI-Mayoyoque (5 centros poblados)

PUERTO ASÍS (PUTUMAYO) 61,067 pop.
- IRI-Peñasora (40 veredas)
- IRI-La Libertad (29 veredas)

IRI SOLANO (CAQUETÁ) 9,091 pop.
- IRI-Peñas Blancas (4 centros poblados)
- IRI-Puerto Tejada (3 centros poblados)

IRI CARTAGENA DEL CHAIRÁ (CAQUETÁ) 35,473 pop.
- IRI-Remolinos del Caguán (21 veredas)
- IRI-Primavera La Y (14 veredas)

IRI SAN JOSE DEL GUAVIARE (GUAVIARE) 66,700 pop.
- IRI-El Capricho (32 veredas)
- IRI-Corregimiento Charras Boquerón (35 veredas)

EL RETORNO (GUAVIARE) 22,975 pop.
- IRI-Alto Cachama (28 veredas)
- IRI-EL Danubio (32 veredas)

MIRAFLORES (GUAVIARE) 14,439 pop.
- IRI-Buenos Aires
- IRI-Lagos del Dorado

CALAMAR (GUAVIARE) 9,091 pop.
- IRI-Puerto Colombia (20 veredas)
- IRI-Diamante Uno (15 veredas)

PUERTO RICO (CAQUETÁ) 14,439 pop.
- IRI-La Esmeralda (5 veredas)
- IRI-La Esmeralda (5 veredas)

IRI SAN VICENTE DEL CAGUÁN (CAQUETÁ) 56,674 pop.
- IRI-Campo Hermoso (27 veredas)
- IRI-Ciudad Yari (27 veredas)