

Siekopai Project in Ecuador

For over three decades Save the Rainforest has been supporting Embera and Kichwa communities in Panama and Ecuador respectively. We have done this by incorporating overnight visits to their villages as part of our eco-trips. The visits generated income for the communities and imparted Indigenous knowledge to trip participants. One participant relates, “Mico showed us the plants he had collected that could heal snakebites, headaches and act as anesthesia. He instructed students to chew the stem of one of the plants. The plant instantly numbed their mouths. The plant, Mico said, was used to reduce pain when teeth needed to be extracted.”

What else can Indigenous people teach us? For one thing, they can show us how to live in harmony with our environment – how to be good stewards of the land. That is why in 2021 Save the Rainforest began to focus on supporting Indigenous people and the grass roots NGOs that have built trusting relationships with them. We started by reaching out to the Yakum Foundation and a Siekopai community in Ecuador. With Yakum’s help the Siekopai were trying to resist the overtures of a palm oil company that wanted to turn their pristine forest into a vast grove of palm oil trees. Most of the Siekopai did not want this, but some were being tempted by the company’s promise of prosperity and “progress”. 52,000 acres of rainforest and a way of life hung in the balance.

That’s when we stepped in and asked the Siekopai what we could do to help them save their forest. They said all they needed was an alternative to a palm oil economy. We were able to provide that in the form of emergency funding over an 18 month period during which a PES (payment for ecosystem service) project is being implemented. This project will reward the Siekopai for safeguarding the biodiversity of their forest and/or avoiding carbon emissions from deforestation. The money they will receive over the 20 year life of the project will help them to plant food forests, develop an oxbow lake fishery, install solar panels, map & monitor their lands and much more. Instead of an extractive palm oil economy they will have a sustainable bioeconomy, and the members of their community will flourish.

Granted, this is just one of 3100 plus Indigenous communities in the Amazon. But it is an example of what can be achieved when Indigenous people are consulted and supported. If you visit our website at www.savetherainforestnow.org you will see a list of our other projects.



Siekopai Elder



Embera Women