

REVIVING WATER

MÚNEKAÑ MASHA



Field work team report
July 11-14 2022



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02

Purpose and development



1. Introduction

This report summarizes the main highlights, developments, and conclusions of the first official fieldwork for the project “Munekan Masha: Revitalizing Water in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta”. It is a collaborative, intercultural ecological restoration project endorsed by the international sustainability science coalition UNESCO-BRIDGES. The project is jointly developed and managed by the Kogi People, represented by their Indigenous Organization (Organización Gonawindúa Tayrona, OGT), and the Tairona Heritage Trust (THT), a British NGO supporting the Kogi for more than 30 years. Current institutional allies include the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and the French NGO Tchendukua. Múnekan Masha intends to put Kogi indigenous ecological practices and natural scientific conservation into dialogue, supported and mediated by anthropological expertise, to jointly identify, assess, and regenerate degraded pieces of land, in particular dried water sources. The title “Munekan Masha” follows the Kogi premise that their ancestral territory is a living, conscious entity that guides its own regeneration, constituting forces that humans need to allow to be (re-)born. The overall aim is to develop an intercultural and interdisciplinary sustainability model based on knowledge exchange and mutual understanding that, although emerging from a specific context, can be replicated in other situations, places and communities.



A. PURPOSE

This is report on the first visit of a designated project team from the Tairona Heritage Trust (THT) to meet with the Kogi of the Organización Gonawindua Tayrona (OGT), and review potential sites selected by them on which Múnekan Masha can take place. The purpose of the visit was for:

1. team members to know each other and initiate a way of working together,
2. introduce the team to the Kogi community, its representatives and their indigenous organization,
3. gauge how the natural scientists invited to the project can interact productively with the Kogi, based on their approval,
4. initiate the process of intercultural and transdisciplinary dialogue and understanding,
5. visit lands selected by the Kogi for a preliminary cultural and environmental assessment to determine their suitability for purchase and restoration work,
6. enable a baseline for land purchase, our collaborative regeneration model, and work plans.

Points 1 and 2 were carried out successfully. On Point 3, a promising relationship was established and the visiting scientists were authorised by the Kogi to work on the project. Point 4 is now underway. Point 5 was done and forms a key part of this report. The report will provide valuable input for point 6.

B. STAGES AND MAIN EVENTS

July 11 Meeting with José María Conchacala

At this meeting in the Casa Indígena the THT team reviewed the main objectives, stages, and logistics of their visit. They also learned more about the Kogis' perspective, and were introduced to the legal, cultural and cartographic process of acquiring and regenerating land. "Chema" (José María Conchacala), OGT's land co-ordinator, explained the scope of restoration the Kogi have been working on for over 20 years, acquiring lands and demonstrating their capacity to restore and increase biodiversity in their territory.



July 12 Visit to the community of Kuizhimakke



A coast drive to Mingueo (approx 2 hours) and then uphill to Kuizhmakke. To enter, the team was introduced to Mama José de la Cruz at a sacred site, La Loma, and we had individually to silently present our thoughts and feelings to the territory. Then we met with the community. 40 or so Kogi men came to this meeting, with Chema's brother Fernando, a law student, translating. (Kogi men exclusively occupy public space to meet outsiders. They later report to their wives, who have their own houses, in private.) We asked permission to document the visit, and then visited the lands. We saw the significance of coca bushes. At night, the Kogi sat until late discussing the project, the lands to be bought, and related community matters.

July 13 visit to the lands selected by OGT

The THT and OGT teams, accompanied by two Mamas, visited three lands which form the vereda (*scattered hamlet*) of El Mamey. They are Mano de Dios (13.5 ha), Las Flores de María (13.8 ha) and La Fortuna (16.7 ha). El Mamey is owned by two campesinos (*peasant farmers*), father and son. The lands are not far from the Kogi community of Kuizhimakke.

J Before leaving, we shared our impressions and expectations with the Kogi attendees;



Mama Fermín spoke on the relevance of working with youth in order to inspire and sustain life and diversity. We were told about meanings in weaving, and Mama José María gave us an encouraging insight into the Kogi approach and the desire to keep working together

July 14 Meeting with Arregocés Conchacala at the Casa Indígena



In the final meeting in Santa Marta with the Kogi Council Governor, Arregocés Conchacala, the results of the field visit were presented, and the need to make progress with the purchase of lands was discussed.



03

Local conditions and cultural context

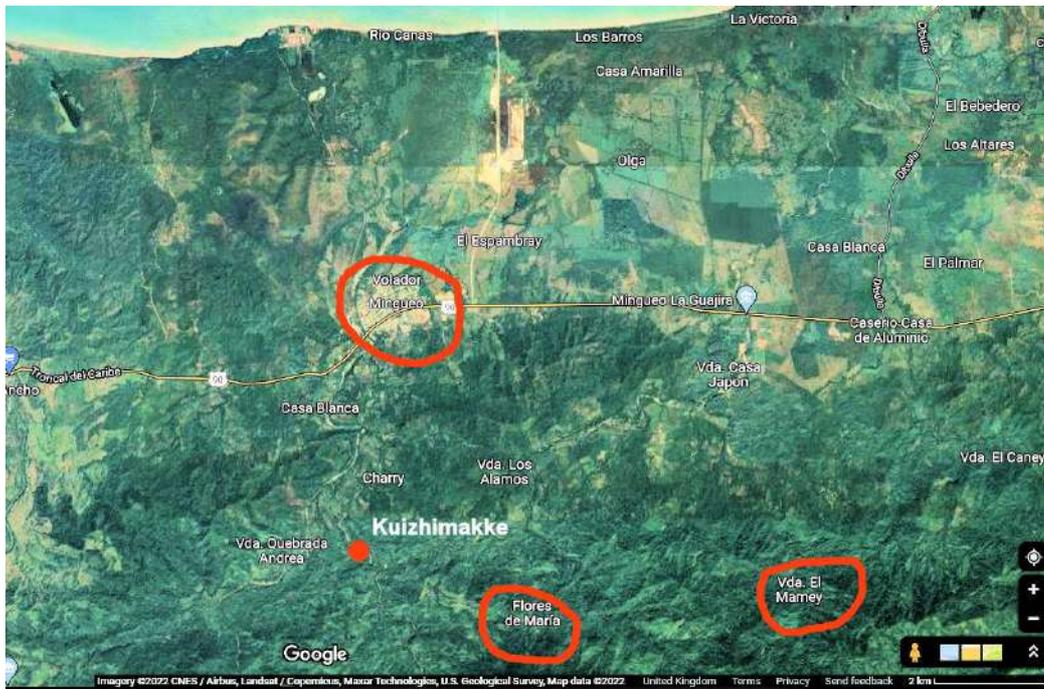
Our field visit was based in the Kogi village of Kuizhimakke, which means “to weave a hand fan in the flatlands”. It was founded in March 2013 as part of a process to recover, occupy and extend the Kogis’ governance to the lowlands. This community began with eight families from Pueblo Viejo and from other communities who already lived in this area. Today Kuizhimake is home to 90 Kogi families. In geographical terms, Kuizhimakke is located in the valley of the Santa Clara river on the northern face of the Sierra Nevada, above Mingueo. There is a sacred site right by the entrance to the village, while coca plants (ayu) grow along cassava (yuca), malanga, and a few papaya trees. Most of the food that is consumed in this community is not harvested by the Kogi them

Kuizhimakke is one of the “frontier” settlements established at low elevations in the Sierra Nevada. The frontier’s steady move down from Pueblo Viejo began after the BBC film made with Alan Ereira in 1990, which led to the founding of the THT. The funds that came in were used to buy land for a new lower frontier town called Bonga, on the site of an old settlement. More villages were subsequently established and the Kogi have been steadily reclaiming lower parts of the mountain massif all the way to the sea, with the occasional help of the government and of NGOs such as Tchendukua and the Amazon Conservation Team. This is a reversal of the centuries of retreat and isolation that was practiced in response to conquest and colonization. Such settlements are hence also buffers between Kogi tradition further up the mountains, and the non-Kogi population below. In fact, Kuizhimakke is the lowest Kogi village of this valley, and one of the lowest on the whole northern side of the Sierra Nevada. de Santa Marta. elves but is obtained from shops and traders in Mingueo.

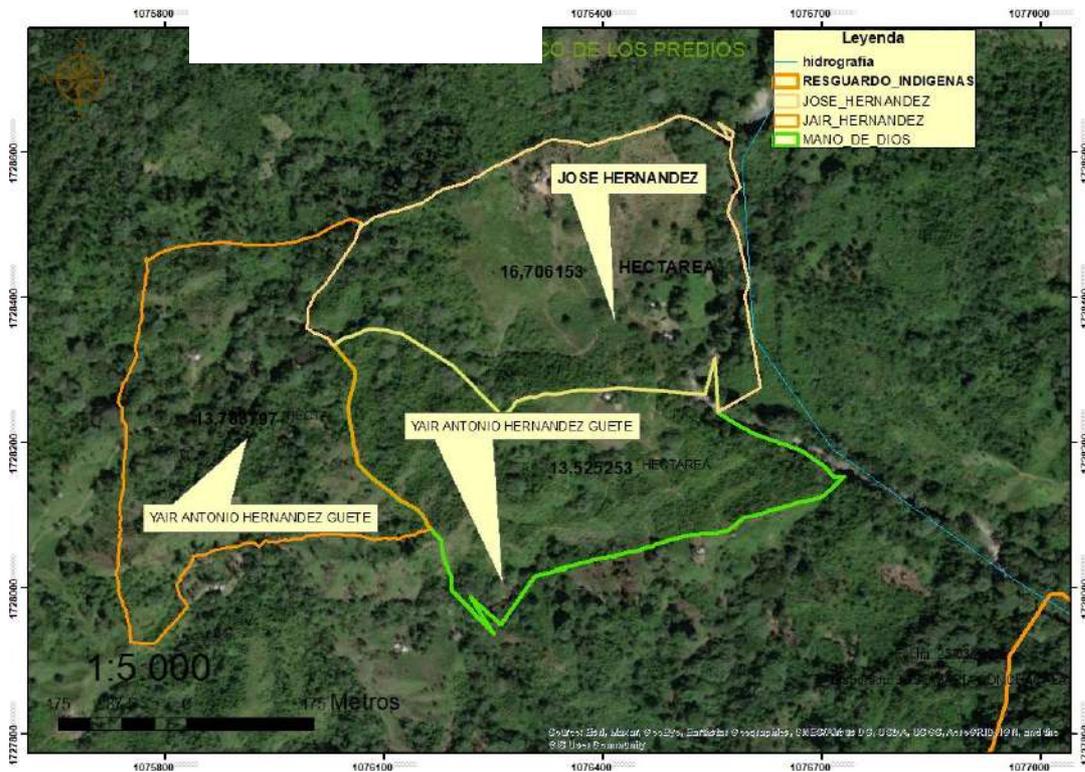




Areas for the Munekan Masha project



Source THT. August, 2022.



Source OGT. March, 2022.



THT has been involved with the Santa Clara river valley, which extends down from above Pueblo Viejo to Mingueo, since its inception. The TV programme that gave rise to it was made there. At that time (1990), Mingueo was a hot-spot in a country with far the highest murder rate in the world. The mule track to the coast carried marijuana, and then cocaine, while the coast road through Mingueo (the Troncal) was used by large-scale smugglers from Venezuela as well as to transport coal from the open-cast mine of Cerrejón. It was contested by guerilla and para-military groups and was effectively outside Colombian law.

From a different perspective, the Kogi call the valley a “jurisdiction” of original law, i.e. one of the main spiritual-geographical structures of territorial order. Jurisdictions are headed by very important sites called “eizumas”, this one being Kuamaka, and incorporate a number of Kogi communities. Our meeting in Kuizhìmakke, then, was attended by Kogi authorities and representatives of communities from this valley (Kuizhìmakke, Dumingueka, Pueblo Viejo, San Francisco, Mamey and others), plus a few villages from adjacent valleys.

These lowland areas are now the subject of land speculation linked to tourism. The Kogi see tourism as a threat to diversity and systems of thought that sustain biodiversity in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.



On the Kogi side, the fieldwork was coordinated by José María Conchalaca, who heads the section at OGT responsible for the acquisition, monitoring and mapping of Kogi lands, and is also leader of Kuizhímakke. He introduced the project team to the Kuizhímakke community, who would benefit directly from the outcomes of Munekan Masha. His brother Fernando, who studies Law, acted as translator. Carmen, José María's wife, is also renowned in the community, a skilled weaver, and one of the few Kogi women fluent in Spanish.

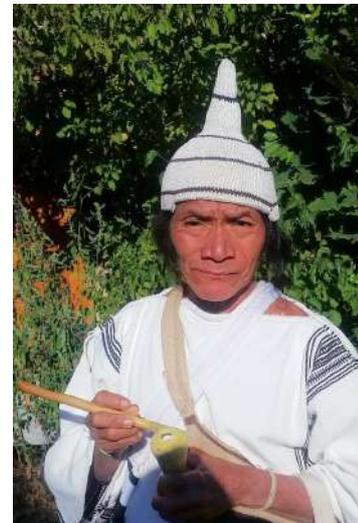
According to the Kogis' land management plan, Kuizhímakke and the lands immediately around it are regarded as living space and food source for these families, while the lands located in the nearby area of "El Mamey" are meant for restoration. This restoration is part of a wider strategy to recover the entirety of the ancestral indigenous territory as an integrated cosmological, ecological and cultural entity demarcated by the "Black Line", a chain of interconnected sacred sites surrounding the base of the Sierra Nevada. Although located in hilly terrain, the lands identified and visited for this project, are just a dozen or so kilometers away from this Black Line.

The Kogis' interest in El Marney dates back to 2009. The lands are connected to Kuizhímakke via paths and ecological corridors that intersect with a mix of farmland, forests, rivers, cattle ranches, and pastures. A section of forest bordering El Mamey was recently acquired for the Kogi with the help of Tchendukua. El Mamey contains three contiguous parcels: Mano de Dios (13.5 has) and Las Flores de María (13.7 has) owned by Jair Hernández, and La Fortuna (16 has) owned by José Hernández. Paperwork establishing ownership of these lands is still being sought by OGT. The only document that has been provided prove a "possession" but not clear title of the finca Las Flores de María.

Following informal conversations with the owners, the Kogi, and the team's observations, it is clear that the parcels identified show different states of restoration and degradation due to partial transitions from cattle ranching to a rewilding process over the last fifteen years or so. This is evidenced by shallow creeks, native trees, and vegetation cover that help to mulch the soil, while other parts are only covered in grass or are eroded. We noticed a good relationship between the owners and the Kogi who joined us, who know each other and have been negotiating the price of the land.

The price of the land is under negotiation between the owners and the OGT.

Our visit was accompanied by two Mamas, traditional spiritual leaders and knowledge experts: Mama Fermín from the nearby village of Awiaka, and Mama José de la Cruz, who lives in Kuizhímakke. He is a son-in-law of another Mama who has been involved with THT from the beginning: Mama Shibulata (the original Mama of Bonga). Both agreed to the acquisition of the farm La Flores de María during a “consulta” ritual that took place on (and with) one of its hills.



Mama Shibulata

The relevance of these lands for an intercultural restoration process includes the following elements:

- Perceived connectivity between sacred sites on these parcels of land and many others located throughout the valleys, mountains, and coasts.
- A high degree of biological diversity in the surroundings
- The possibility of incorporating Kogi and non-Kogi youths in the restoration process
- Working with women to understand the links between their work, knowledge, and the landscape.
- Good access from Santa Marta and Mingueo.
- Proximity to a coastal area that has been regenerated by the Kogi with assistance from the Amazon Conservation Team and can serve as an example and inspiration.
- The involvement of representatives from a wide range of Kogi villages.
- The location between mountains and sea.

The project's title signifies that life develops according to natural principles that also direct human activity. 'Munekán Masha' means to "let (things) emerge or be born", indicating how humans should assist the territory in regenerating itself. It was said that the Sierra Nevada is to once again "wear its own clothing", and this means "creating the space for nature to grow again". The lands visited were identified both according to the priorities of the OGT, and through discussion with, and consultation by, Kogi Mamas (cultural leaders and knowledge experts) in March and April 2022.

Divination, the Mama's consultation with the territory through a meeting of minds in water, reading the bubbles from an ancient stone bead.



The Mamas' divinations, which they understand as a process of direct communication with the territory, indicated that these lands are suitable for project work and ecological regeneration according to cosmo-geographical criteria, and the location and character of sacred sites.

Their consultations and indications state that an integral part of the project has to consist of regular payments that serve to ask for permission to work there, nurture the land to encourage its regeneration, re-balance forces out of place, and perform a reparation for previous damage.



Following José María Conchacala, we are not dealing with separate parcels of land, but with "sectors" or areas that the Kogi view as parts of a living whole. Streams of water and parcels of land do not have edges.



Carmen spoke of how the patterns woven into the fabric of mochilas (bags) by women and clothes made by men, may be read as texts that express what lives in the landscape. These patterns can be taken as personal and collective “writings”, mnemonics that map the structure and functioning of the territory and their relationship with it. The act of weaving therefore fosters a mental map and memory that helps keep the territory alive through necessary practices, such as “payments”, that give back to nature what we take and feed it.

Restoring and nurturing bodies of water, some of which have survived exploitative practices, is central, because water is the primary element through which the universe “emerged” from spiritual darkness and became physical. It is liquid thought and the most basic life-force.





04

Environmental evaluation

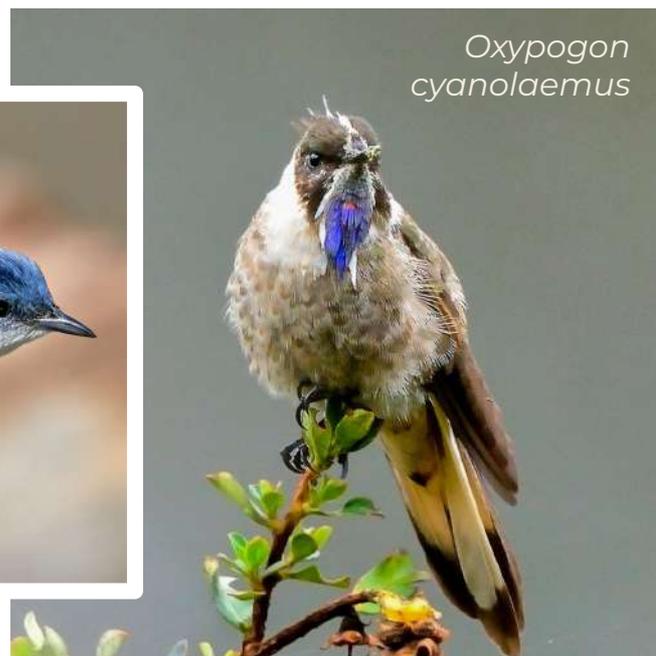
A. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

We consider that the pre-selection of lands by the Kogi is ideal to carry out the restoration project. First, we explain the general considerations of this assessment and next (see section b.) we give a more detailed overview of each site, according to the scientific and Kogi view.

1. The sites are located in the north-west flank of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, this is the wettest area of the Sierra. The Sierra is rapidly losing fresh water. Therefore preserving and managing water sources in this region is of paramount importance.
2. This flank of the Sierra provides habitats for numerous animal and plant species. For instance, ProAves recently reported that at least 10 endangered bird species occur in this region, including the only migratory species under threat (*Setophaga cerulea*) and a critically endangered hummingbird (*Oxygogon cyanolaemus*). That report stresses the urgent need to extend protected areas in this flank of the Sierra.



*Setophaga
cerulea*



*Oxygogon
cyanolaemus*

- 3.** Air humidity is high and present throughout the whole area, even in areas that have very little or no forest cover. Such humidity is highly beneficial to avoid the occurrence and spread of fires which could make restoration very difficult.
- 4.** The lands were selected to serve as intermediary patches of recovering forests located between areas of undisturbed forests at higher elevations and areas that have been recovering as part of a decade-long Kogi project in a mangrove area near Dibulla.
- 5.** Connectivity is a fundamental aspect that must be considered in any restoration project. Having areas of preserved forests nearby will secure the natural provision of propagules for the area being restored. In turn, the recovering area will increase habitat availability for forest animal and plant species.
- 6.** The Kogi explained that their selection of lands was first done by the Mamas. After this, the territorial leaders (e.g., Chema, the son of Arregocés) searched for properties within this predefined area. Their search did not prioritize fully devastated areas. This is because they understand that effective restoration requires selecting lands with a disturbance gradient. We find that this view coincides with ideas from restoration theory which underscore the importance of promoting habitat connectivity among patches of different succession stages to accelerate ecosystem recovery. Finally, the Mamas made spiritual consultations on those specific lands to confirm their suitability.





B. DETAILED ASSESSMENT OF EACH SITE (TRADITIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC)



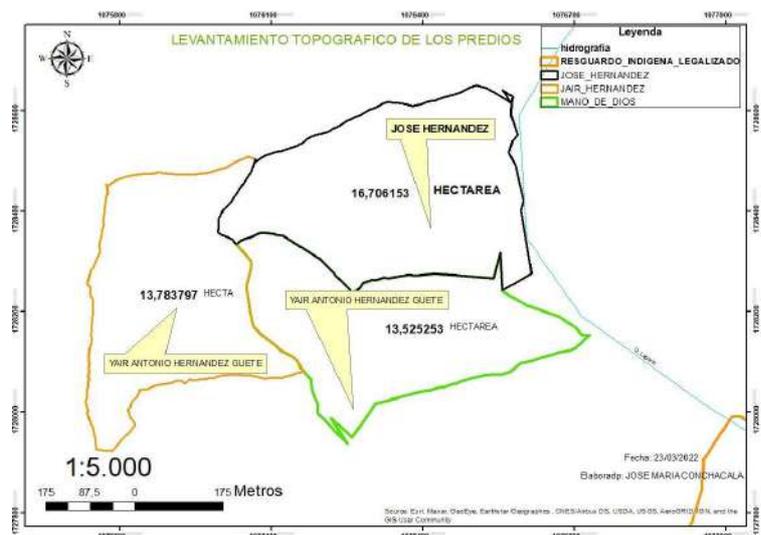
3 PARCELS VISITED

PARCEL: “La Fortuna”.
Owner: Jose Hernández

PARCEL: “Mano de Dios”. Owner: Jair Hernández

PARCEL: “Las Flores de María”. Owner: Jair Hernández

AREA: El Marney



PARCEL: “La Fortuna”. Owner: Jose Hernández.

Kogi assessment

(translated from their technical report from March 28.2022)

“In general, the property includes forest and pasture for livestock”

“In the lower part bordering the farm Flores de Maria we find a stream.”

“It is verified that within the area there are crops of bitter palm and native trees. The owner considers these valuable in increasing the environmental quality of the area, improving it and increasing its value. It is adequately managed.”

Scientific assessment

This is the most eroded area of all the sites we visited, with a strongly dissected topography. It is profoundly affected by sheep and cattle grazing, and has some areas of bare soil, and patches of rocks. However, there is presence of forest patches and water streams in the property, which make the restoration of the land promising.



PARCEL: “Mano de Dios”. Owner: Jair Hernández

Kogi assessment

(translated from their technical report from March 28.2022)

“We verified the impact of livestock farming in the area. Livestock affects the water source of the area, therefore, an analysis to minimise these harmful effects is needed.”

“We observed two streams that supply the land.”

“We identified sacred sites and their stone characteristics which are strategic sites to conserve.”



Scientific assessment

The site has several hilly patches of grasslands that have been used for sheep grazing. There are clear signs of erosion and bare soil is common. In terms of water abundance, the hilly grassland has a spring that is dry. While crossing the dry spring, one of the Mamos noted that with the restoration of these grasslands we will see the recovery of this spring and with time it will look more like the stream we saw in the secondary forest (although the former is much smaller). Adults of the massive palm *Attalea butyracea* were found across the grassland. Some of these individuals have signs of recent fires, but in spite of this they also showed complete recovery.

Trustee comment

The Mama’s confident observation that their restoration work would naturally result in the revival of a dried spring makes this site particularly significant and thus an excellent starting place.

PARCEL: “Las Flores de María”.
Owner: Jair Hernández



Kogi assessment

(translated from their technical report from March 28.2022)

“The environmental status has its varieties of native species within the property, it also has a grassland where there is livestock in the lower part by the edge of the river Maluisa, it has a sacred site where we can strengthen the environmental quality and especially the species within the property.”

“The owners have identified the value and importance of their property, with the varieties of native species within the area, and two streams within the property.”





Scientific assessment

-This area is a mixture of grasslands and secondary forest (recovering for approx. a decade) in low-lying terrain that is crossed by a fully-running stream.

-After asking the landowners and Kogi they all confirmed that fires are not common in the area. These are only caused if needed for establishing crops or grazing areas.

-In the secondary forest, the landowner stated there are populations of capuchin monkeys. Which species they refer to remains to be confirmed. One potential species could be the endemic and “endangered” Santa Marta white-fronted capuchin (*Cebus malitiosus*). Whether this species occurs here needs to be confirmed in the next visit. If so, the project could consider explicitly addressing the conservation of this threatened and charismatic species.

-There are howler monkeys (*Alouatta seniculus*), important for seed dispersal as they consume a wide variety of fruiting trees, and deer (*Mazama americana*), ñeques (*Agouti paca*), and jaguar (*Pantera onca*).

-The secondary forest has massive higuerón (*Ficus* sp.) and caracolí (*Anacardium excelsum*) trees, as well as *Attalea butyracea*. All these plants produce numerous fruits that attract animals.

-The secondary forest patch has a permanent forest plot established and monitored by the local government organization CORPOGUAJIRA. We obtained contact information for the CORPOGUAJIRA worker. It will be important to contact them if this site is purchased.



05

Emergent themes and conclusions

A. REFLECTIONS ON THE ENCOUNTER

- For both Kogi and our scientists, land evaluations determine the extent and character of autonomous regeneration and human assistance.

-Kogi and scientists agree that each site has its own conditions that define the nature of restoration; there is no one recipe.

-In the Kogi case, this includes sacred sites that correspond to different natural elements, connect with one another, energetically sustain the land, and serve as recipients for Kogi spiritual-ecological practices and divinations that guide action.

-Characterizing these sites is therefore of paramount importance according to Kogi knowledge, as well as understanding that recuperation is not only a physical process.

-In addition, the Kogi will be engaged in continuously “asking the sacred sites and spiritual entities for permission” to do this work, as well as making “payments” to them as reparation and as ways to re-balance forces out of place and out of sync.

-From a natural scientific perspective, it was discussed how the main indicators of composition, structure, and functioning of an ecosystem can be expressed and monitored with respect to Kogi categories.

-Voice from the Kogi community:
“Before we used to act in a certain way, but nowadays we can also integrate two types of knowledge and thereby learn about other perspectives and how they see the physical world. This can complement the spiritual side of things and how we read that”.

-The challenge then, is how to establish a strategy and methodology that integrates Kogi and non-Kogi readings, which entails the question of how to “physically show what is spiritual”.



- The team had expected to visit finca La Esperanza, proposed in the first report provided by the OGT. They were told it is no longer available to the Munekan Masha project. This land was acquired recently by Promigas (gas company) following consultation between the Kogi communities involved. Instead, the OGT has proposed a new finca owned by Mono Camilo. Agreements on a future visit, documents and price have not been completed.



PH: OGT. Finca used for cattle rearing owned by Mono Camilo.

B. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

-The question came up of how the practical process of carrying out this regeneration work is to be carried out, and hence this kind of stewardship of nature.

-In a related fashion, we explored ways of communicating and presenting scientific biological insights to the Kogi, whether through posters, pictures, presentations, conversations, etc. This should be part of a wider process of mutual understanding and handling of information in our methods.



C. TRANSFERABILITY

-It was agreed that the project should be transferable and provide lessons for use in other territories, as a pilot study that combines unique site-specific Kogi practices and knowledge with more universally applicable methods and ideas.

D. HISTORY AND CONTEXT

-The Kogi see the project as part of the process of defending the Sierra Nevada, regaining land, and interacting with the outside world. It should be aware of the development of indigenous organizations of the region and study restoration work undertaken in the area with other NGO's to learn from related collaborative experiences.

E. MAPPING

-José María Conchacala then gave the team an impressive demonstration of how the OGT is using the latest mapping systems and digital tracking tools with satellite imagery to keep a detailed and highly interactive record of all pieces of land regained so far, as well as those to be acquired. The Kogi integrate these procedures in what they call “cultural monitoring of the territory”, which includes all sorts of Kogi and non-Kogi markers and classifications.

-We agreed that these tools and maps should be part of the contextualization of modern Kogi land acquisition and management that can help describe and promote the project.

F. EDUCATION AND EXCHANGE

-Since the parcels in the area of “El Mamey” exhibit a mixed set of ecological characteristics (see relevant section), they are expected to provide ample material for the knowledge exchange and educational aspects of the project.

-In this respect, José María Conchacala suggested that the small plateau on top of the lands visited can be the site for an intercultural “school” or meeting place where project work is shared with farmers, students, and other visitors.



G. SPIRITUAL CONSIDERATIONS, SACRED SITES

-One of the Mamas joining us, Mama José de la Cruz, noted with a smile on his face how the wind was telling him that this was a good place to work and it would go well.

-These kinds of differences in ways of knowing landscapes should be a central component of the insights and discussions developed during the project, and should be taken into account for monitoring and evaluation purposes as biocultural variables

-The other Mama joining us, Mama Firmín Simongama, acknowledged the damage present in these lands, but stressed how they are just a few of many more territories affected by human intervention that require attention to recuperate. Examples are logging of trees, in particular especially important ones that are “fathers” of other trees, and the damming of rivers.

-For the Mama, regenerating the land is not just for animal and plant species, but also for humans and “our children”. He spoke of sacred sites in the area that are of special importance for foodstuffs, hence being “mothers of food”.

-Understanding what such sites are and the role they play in ecosystem composition, structure and functionality will be a recurring theme during the project. One implication is re-establishing connections between the upper and lower parts of the Sierra Nevada, where our work will take place.

-This includes processes of “apologizing” to the land and repaying what has been taken from it, for which reason regeneration also means “reparation”, as to any person that has been mistreated. For this reason, the Kogi say that simply buying and possessing the land will not regenerate it without these activities.

-By recovering sacred sites, water springs, and ponds, the physical domain is also affected, and there will be a strengthening of all things in nature. If we only preserve material things, without regard to sacred sites and what is on them, we would not make progress and nature would not be well strengthened. These things exist.



H. THE OGT VIEW OF PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

-What the Kogi Council Governor, Arregocés Conchacala, stressed that the next main step is to buy the land. Without this acquisition the project cannot start and we lose credibility. This applies to both national and international audiences, to Kogi communities themselves, who have put their hopes into our offer to help them regain and regenerate these lands as part of the wider Kogi imperative to restore their ancestral territory.

-Initially there was some tension and team members wondered whether our presence was therefore premature, but after some time, understanding was reached.

-For the Kogi, project activities need to start by acknowledging that the territory is conscious, directs its own processes, and has the forces to regenerate itself. OGT is advised by Mamas, who are guided in their awareness of the connections within the territory by inscriptions on certain rocks, which are in effect ancestral maps which tell them the importance and characteristics of the surrounding area.

-The basis for all this work to begin, then, is having proper access to the land. Once that is accomplished, Arregocés reiterated, we will be in a better position to establish a management plan, develop dialogue and collaboration, think about educational activities, and determine how to regenerate the land based on spiritual consultations there.

-He acknowledged that our presence was good and thanked us for it, following our intention to establish a baseline that can help us seek funds, create schedules, promote the project, and acquire the land.



For José María Conchcala this visit and the project team's presence was important. He is aware that now this information has to be processed by THT as the basis for further management, negotiations and fundraising. "From our side", he said, "the Mamas and the Kogi community from these lower parts will continue to determine how to proceed, including the spiritual aspect". Speaking also on behalf of the Kogi authorities present, he is optimistic that we will make progress and continue the work together. In Kogi terms, the project is part of a wider strategy of a regeneration and recovery process that together we can build toward and show the world. We will see how far we can go. If possible, once we have made more progress, a next or second step would be to also work on or approach the matter of sacred sites, and where they are (on these lands).

Overall, the visits to the lands were a successful first exercise in joint appraisal of these ecosystems, taking the form of excursions during which both parties explored the surroundings, exchanged observations, and spent time with one another. Both parties left with a positive feeling, especially about the lands in the area of El Mamey.



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