

## Interfaith Rainforest Initiative holds first learning exchange between programs from Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Peru

For the first time since the initiative was launched in five of the world's most important rainforest countries, the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative held an in-person learning exchange between the leadership teams from Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Peru.

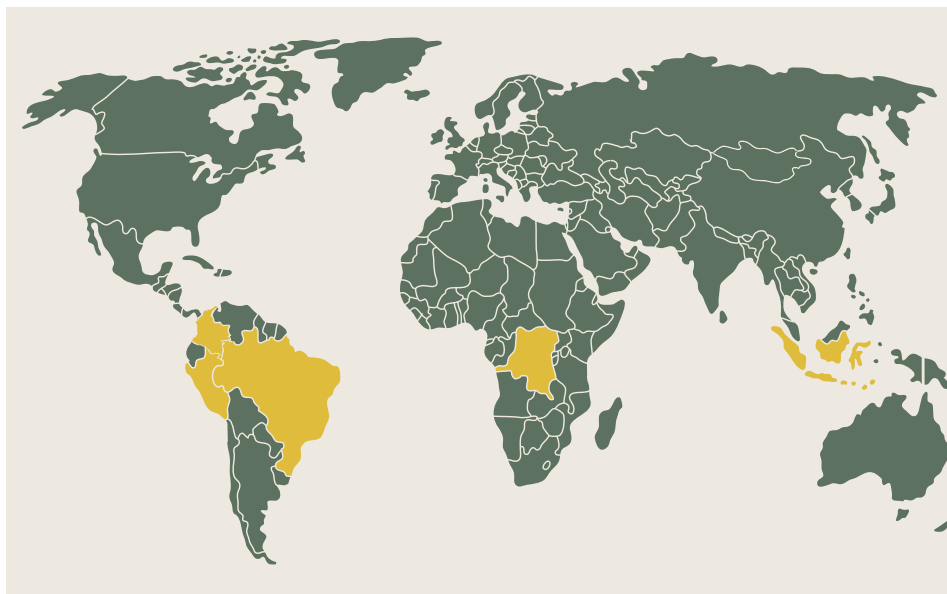
The exchange was held in Bogota, Colombia from 15-18 August 2022. "This is the first time that the IRI national facilitators and their teams have met in person," said Lars Lovold, Special Advisor, Rainforest Foundation Norway, who moderated the four days of the learning exchange. The purpose of the exchange was to share best practices and lessons learned across program countries regarding approaches, strategies and tactics in mobilizing faith-based action to protect forests and the rights of indigenous peoples.

The meeting was attended by the National Facilitators and leadership teams from IRI Brazil, IRI Colombia, IRI Indonesia, IRI Peru and IRI Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as representatives from the IRI global team from UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC).

The opening day of the exchange was facilitated by Dr. Charles McNeill, Senior Advisor, Forests and Climate, UN



From left to right, top: Elizabeth Duque, Diana Carvajal, Msrg. Donatien Nshole, Blanca Echeverry, Ben Meeus, Julieta Lahud, Rev. Matthieu Yela, Siham Drissi, Lars Lovold, Dario Mejia, Laura Vargas, Joseph Corcoran and Dr. Hayu Prabowo. Below: Carlos Lozano and Carlos Vicente



Lars Lovold  
Rainforest Foundation Norway



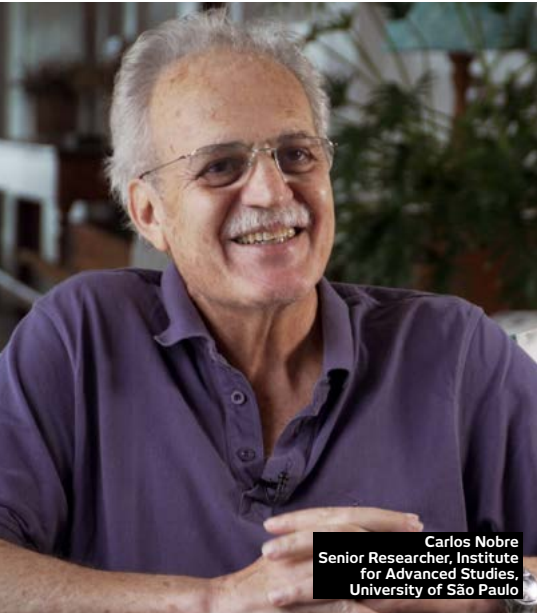
Joseph Corcoran  
UN Environment  
Programme - World  
Conservation  
Monitoring Centre

Environment Programme (UNEP). The day was dedicated to a series of briefings and lectures by leading scientists and issue experts, to equip the IRI leadership teams with the latest data on tropical deforestation, climate change and efforts to secure the rights of indigenous peoples and forest communities. The IRI leadership group received detailed presentations by Carlos A. Nobre, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Advanced Studies, University of São Paulo who provided an overview of the latest science behind rainforests and climate change, including the risk of surpassing an Amazon tipping-point; Frances Seymour, Senior Fellow at the World Resources Institute who presented on the state of the forests and global efforts to halt and reverse deforestation; and Dario Jose Mejia Montalvo, Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on the status of global efforts to guarantee the rights of indigenous peoples and forest communities.

*"A tree in the Amazon is not the same as one in another place. This is a very rich forest, which has no comparison. Forests are the expression of Creation at its highest level. IRI has the capacity to mobilize to protect them,"*

Lars Lovold, Special Advisor, Rainforest Foundation Norway.





Carlos Nobre  
Senior Researcher, Institute  
for Advanced Studies,  
University of São Paulo



Frances Seymour  
Senior Fellow, World  
Resources Institute



Dario Mejia Montalvo  
Chair, UN Permanent Forum  
on Indigenous Issues



Dr. Charles McNeill  
UN Environment Programme



Siham Drissi  
UN Environment  
Programme



Ben Meeus  
UN Environment Programme -  
World Conservation Monitoring  
Centre / Religions for Peace

Carlos Nobre was one of the first scientists in the world to investigate the link between deforestation and climate change. As a result of his research in the 1980s, he was able to determine that the Amazon is at risk of becoming a savannah if its forest cover exceeds a 25% loss. In the conference “Amazonia near the tipping point”, the renowned Brazilian meteorologist addressed the causes that have brought the Amazon biome to this point of no return and the reasons why a green economy is necessary in this region.

In her presentation, Frances Seymour reflected on the state of tropical deforestation in the world and the drivers in different countries and regions. Seymour shared that “the politics of deforestation are local” and encouraged IRI to keep a focus on efforts to influence laws, policies and legislation where deforestation rates are highest. She also reminded the group that there are an abundance of ongoing efforts focused on ending deforestation, that IRI should keep its focus on linking up with and adding value to these initiatives, and that IRI brings unique value to the coalition of partners working together on this effort.

Dario Jose Mejia Montalvo focused his remarks on the ongoing challenges and threats to indigenous peoples and forest communities around the world, and in particular in those countries where IRI is working. He emphasized the urgency of working together to address the climate crisis with indigenous peoples as full partners. “We have this planet, this Earth, this home. We don’t have a plan B,” he noted.

The day concluded with the IRI leadership teams reflecting on the expert briefings and setting goals for the next days of the learning exchange, considering how to bring needed urgency and action to efforts in their respective countries to mobilize religious leaders and faith-based organizations to advocate for forest protection.



Eliás Szczytnicki  
Religions for Peace



Julieta Lahud  
UN Environment Programme  
- World Conservation  
Monitoring Centre





Carlos Vicente  
National Facilitator,  
IRI Brazil



Rev. Matthieu Yela Bonketo  
National Facilitator, IRI DRC



Msgr. Donatien Nshole  
Secretary General,  
Episcopal Conference of  
Congo (CENCO)



Laura Vargas  
National Facilitator, IRI Peru

## IRI country programs share their experiences and lessons

The second day of the IRI learning exchange focused on distilling and displaying lessons learned and best practices from each of the five country programs in Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Peru and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the first session of the day, each IRI National Facilitator presented an overview of the main elements of their work plans, as well as the institutions that make up their Advisory Councils – the cross-sector bodies of indigenous peoples, NGOs, scientists and issue experts that guide the work of each IRI country program.

The second session of the day focused on working effectively across sectors through the Advisory Council, and was led by Blanca Lucia Echeverry, IRI Colombia National Facilitator and Carlos Vicente, IRI Brazil National Facilitator. They each focused on the strategies and approaches they have used to effectively engage, empower and enlist the organizations and leaders on their respective Advisory Councils. The session also featured a panel presentation and question and answer period with distinguished members of the IRI Colombia Advisory Council, including: Bishop Francisco Duque-Gomez, President of the Episcopal Church of Colombia; Reverend Edgar Castaño, President of the Evangelical Council of Colombia (CEDECOL) and Martin von Hildebrand, Founder and President of Gaia Amazonas. The panelists reflected on their commitment to the IRI Colombia program and how they work together, across faiths and sectors, to have a collective impact.

The third session of the day focused on best practices from each IRI program in linking up with existing efforts across sectors to protect forests. Each program displayed how they are working to surface the most influential efforts, initiatives and movements in their countries to protect forests and the rights of indigenous peoples, and then how they are using IRI to bring in the value, reach, influence and mobilizing power of religious actors to those efforts. Each National Facilitator also displayed and unpacked their most positive results and effective actions to date with the aim of transferring and replicating these approaches in other IRI country programs.



Joseph Corcoran, Dr. Hayu Prabowo and Carlos Henrique

IRI Brazil profiled its work facilitating site visits and trainings for senior religious leaders to the country's forest and climate institutes, where they could learn first-hand from climate scientists about the link between deforestation, climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as IRI Brazil statements and calls to action around priority legislation in the country.

IRI Colombia profiled its work launching and managing 36 local chapters in regions of the country where forests face the greatest threats, outlining how these chapters have been established to create powerful cross-sector coalitions that link religious leaders up with efforts in each region to protect and restore forests, including the creation of advocacy and pastoral action plans for each chapter.

IRI Indonesia profiled its work launching IRI resources guides and religious teaching books on forest protection for all eight of the country's official Religious Councils, as well as the effective application of fatwas (a legal ruling on a point of Islamic law) on protecting the environment and wildfires.

IRI Peru profiled its work launching a Parliamentary Front for the Amazon, where the program is mobilizing members of Congress to work together with IRI Peru to develop and champion specific policies and legislation that protect forests and the rights of indigenous peoples.

IRI DRC profiled its work on advocating for the adoption of the country's first law protecting the rights of Pygmy communities, bringing in the voice and influence of religious leaders and faith-based organizations at a critical moment when the policy was up for consideration and joining the coalition of partners from other sectors to ensure it was ultimately passed.



Blanca Echeverry and members of the IRI Colombia Advisory Council: Rev. Pastor Edgar Castaño, Martin von Hildebrand and Bishop Francisco Duque.



Eduardo Salas  
IRI Peru





## IRI Colombia shares its experiences and results



Blanca Echeverry  
National Facilitator, IRI Colombia



Carlos Lozano  
National Advisor, IRI Colombia

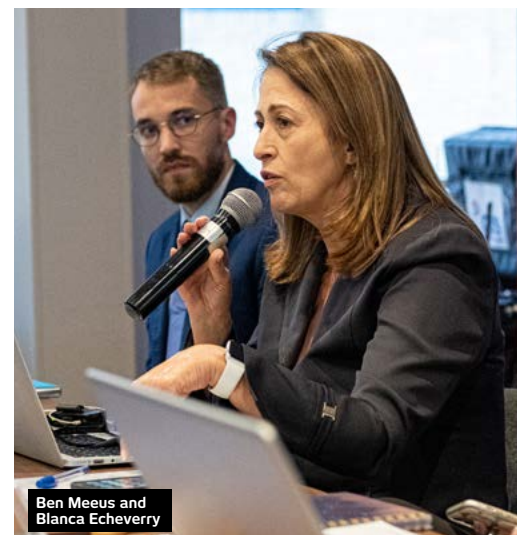
The third day of the learning exchange focused on training sessions by the IRI Colombia team, intended to lay out the methodology and approaches they have used in three key areas of work (education and training, mobilizing action in areas where forests face the greatest threats, and advocacy for laws, policies and legislation that protect forests) and to build the capacity of other IRI country programs to adapt and apply elements of these best practices in their countries.

Carlos Lozano of the IRI Colombia team led the workshop on IRI educational materials, training and awareness raising, designed to facilitate the uptake and transfer of good practices to the other IRI country programs. “Our strategy articulates results, activities and tasks that target each of IRI’s mission objectives,” said Carlos Lozano. He offered a detailed review of IRI Colombia’s pedagogical strategy, which aims to build environmental citizenship (through the lens of forests) by religious leaders and faith communities with conceptual tools, materials and resources to (i) raise awareness (and, in turn, sensitize their communities) about the seriousness of deforestation, (ii) inspire action to protect and restore Amazonian ecosystems, and (iii) and advocate for the adoption of policies in favor of forest protection and stopping deforestation.

Blanca Echeverry, IRI Colombia National Facilitator led a second workshop, which focused on displaying best practices from IRI Colombia on identifying, launching and managing IRI chapters (in areas of the country where forests face the greatest threats), again with the goal of facilitating the uptake and transfer of good practices to other IRI country programs. Blanca stepped the group through the process IRI Colombia followed to identify the 36 areas of the country where forests face the greatest threats, identify local religious leadership in key regions, officially launch the chapters, link the chapter launches to municipal and departmental elections, engage in

continuous capacity building and work planning (pastoral and political action plans), and manage the network as an extension of the IRI national program (and a territorial intervention strategy). “The application of the territorial approach has allowed us to identify and characterize the social, political and economic interaction of the relevant actors in the territory, and to determine how this interaction influences the rights of the people most affected by deforestation processes,” said Blanca Echeverry.

Blanca Echeverry also led a third workshop on political advocacy and influencing laws, policies and legislation related to forests and the rights of indigenous peoples. The session covered the IRI Colombia strategy, approach and successful outcomes around influencing policies, including their local political advocacy strategy and results (getting IRI representatives appointed to municipal councils), their regional political strategy and results, their national political strategy and results (including commitments to end deforestation as part of the National Development Plan), leveraging electoral processes to facilitate citizen oversight and secure commitments, bilateral meetings with policymakers, engaging with Congress, and the importance of developing a comprehensive policy map with the Advisory Council to establish policy targets where other forest partners are also focusing their efforts. Blanca Echeverry also relayed that IRI Colombia is currently focused on managing a parliamentary territorial front with members of municipal councils, departmental assemblies, the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Republic to advance and champion policies that protect forests and halt deforestation. “We also met with the chambers of commerce to promote the organization of socioeconomic activities that contribute to stopping deforestation,” added Blanca Lucia Echeverry, noting that their work also includes the private sector, civil society organizations and academia.



Ben Meeus and  
Blanca Echeverry

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Blanca Echeverry,  
IRI Colombia National  
Facilitator





## IRI Colombia shares its communications strategy

The morning of the fourth day featured a workshop on communications and outreach, focused on equipping the IRI leadership teams with the resources, training and guidance needed to develop and prepare flagship communications content. The workshop, which was led by the IRI Colombia communications team, covered an overview of the IRI brand toolkit and assets, the design and implementation of IRI Colombia’s internal and external communications strategies, outreach through television, radio and web broadcasting, their social media strategy, and the development of newsletters, bulletins, media advisories and press releases, event and activity announcements, social network templates, and an IRI Colombia website. “After conducting a diagnosis and identifying needs, we determined that our communications strategy should be developed on two fronts, each with specific objectives: one within our organization and the other to the outside world,” said Diana Carvajal. The workshop covered all details of the IRI Colombia communications strategy, how it was formulated and the main elements that determine the different communications campaigns. The IRI Colombia communications team also referred to the visual identity of the program and the graphic elements that compose it, and presented the main communication products developed by IRI Colombia, including graphic pieces, animations, radio spots and billboards, as well as a newsletter and a magazine.

The last session of the program focused on consolidating lessons learned and agreeing on how to sustain a community of practice between the IRI country programs that allows for ongoing learning, sharing and support. All programs agreed that the exchange marked a turning point for the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, with this group of leaders from five countries representing a powerful alliance deeply committed to supporting one another to unleash the transformational power of faith-based action for forest protections.

The exchange closed with a two-day immersion visit to La Macarena in the Colombian Amazon.

