

Rationale

For too long indigenous peoples have been defined by outside forces. They often have to contend with education systems that do not acknowledge their cultural specificity, and with government programs and development projects that prod them to adapt and to “progress” along preordained ways – or inversely, with initiatives that encourage them to remain “authentic” and not give in to any form of change.

Government officials, development experts, political or religious actors and even well-meaning activists often believe to know what is best for indigenous peoples – they speak for them, represent their interests, prompt them to organize politically.

Seldom is the time invested or the conditions created to enable these communities to work out by themselves what their way forward should be, to ascertain their own unique responses to the new challenges, and to redefine their place in a changing world.

OrigiNations strives to enable indigenous communities to better take control of their destinies, through:

- Empowerment to self-determination instead of top-down paternalism and assistance-based models of development
- Activation of local capacities and know-how in order to arrive at suitable answers to challenges, avoiding the uncritical introduction of ready-made solutions
- Strengthening of cultural self-esteem and positive assertiveness instead of indulging in a culture of grievance that over-emphasizes a history of victimization

Results

OrigiNations tries to respond to each situation individually. At the same time, communities themselves are encouraged to take control of the process, so inevitably each initiative will produce different outcomes. Some results of past collaborations include:

- The founding of youth organizations dedicated to the protection of the cultural and natural heritage of their peoples and the promotion of their rights
- The documentation of endangered knowledge and traditional practices and the establishment of cultural centers or historical archives
- The production of community maps that serve as instruments to protect cultural and natural resources threatened by external economic interests
- The development of innovative educational materials which acknowledge the cultural specificity of indigenous communities

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OrigiNations

Indigenous youth at a crossroads

Empowering Indigenous Youth to Protect their Natural and Cultural Heritage





Mission

OrigiNations is a non-profit organization created to support indigenous peoples and local communities in becoming effective protagonists in the protection and promotion of their natural and cultural heritage and in the defense of their rights. OrigiNations' approach is based on a decades-long experience of collaboration with communities in the most varied environments in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Objectives

- Strengthening of civil society structures and empowerment of local actors
- Protection and promotion of indigenous cultures and traditional knowledge systems
- Community-based nature conservation
- Furthering of indigenous rights
- Improvement of livelihoods, health and education, in accordance with traditional values

Background

Numerous indigenous peoples and local communities today face similar challenges: their traditional ways of life have come under immense pressure and the continuity of their ancestral practices and knowledge systems are being undermined. Furthermore, the destruction of their territories not only undercuts their economies and impoverishes their livelihoods, but also deprives them of significant places of worship and learning.

Acculturation through media and the education system, as well as the exodus of indigenous youth to the cities, further disrupt the transmission of time-honored values, knowledge and skills, including those needed for the protection of their territories' biodiversity. Just as the continuity of these societies depends on the integrity of the lands they occupy, the reverse is also true: the conservation and sustainable use of these areas can best be secured through the cultural vitality of the peoples that inhabit them and know them best.

Yet to reverse the erosion of their cultures and to adapt to rapid change while retaining their distinct identities and traditional values is a daunting challenge for these communities.

Approach

OrigiNations believes in the potential of indigenous youth and elders working together to become powerful agents of change for the benefit of their communities. Its initiatives draw on the human and cultural resources existing locally, bringing into play the creativity, restlessness and courage of the young alongside the experience and historical memory of the elderly in order to generate processes of self-reflection and search for solutions.

Through immersion workshops, excursions, and practical projects, youth and elders find a space that enables them to debate issues of concern to their communities and develop strategies to tackle the challenges that confront them. In the process, they discover their own talents and learn to appreciate the achievements of their ancestors. The resulting pride and cultural self-esteem are the bedrock on which their commitment and future endeavors rest.

Partners

OrigiNations works directly with indigenous and local communities, collaborating with grassroots organizations, local governments, and various national and international institutions committed to furthering human rights, cultural heritage and nature conservation.

