



AMAZON
SACRED
HEADWATERS

SEEDING SOVEREIGNTY, ACTIVATING LIVING ECONOMIES PROGRAM

A territorial initiative designed to strengthen culturally grounded food sovereignty in Amazonian communities. Conceived as a community-driven process to restore balance between people and territory, the program enables biocultural regeneration, self-determination, and ecological stewardship. Rooted in ancestral knowledge and grounded in local realities, it activates reciprocal benefits between communities and their living forests.



Photo: The Earthshot Prize

What We Seek

To strengthen food and nutritional sovereignty and contribute to the conservation of the Amazon biome through the creation of agroecological gardens that protect agrobiodiversity and honor ancestral wisdom.

Why Now

In the Amazon region, 27% of children under the age of five face chronic malnutrition, and poverty levels are critical, with over 70% of the population in some territories living under multidimensional poverty. In the face of accelerating climate impacts, it is urgent to strengthen local adaptive capacities, reactivate traditional knowledge systems, and contribute to halting biodiversity loss through integral, place-based solutions led by Indigenous Peoples.

How We Work

This model brings together ancestral knowledge and appropriate contemporary tools to reinforce community resilience and territorial well-being. It begins by securing food sovereignty through the establishment of agroecological gardens, community nurseries, and small-scale animal husbandry or aquaculture initiatives—developed in response to local needs and priorities, with the goal of strengthening nutrition and local economies.

From this foundation, the program expands into forest and landscape regeneration through reforestation with native species, laying the groundwork for bioculturally rooted value chains.

These interwoven stages are sustained by active community leadership and stewardship, contributing to the emergence of a forest-based economy grounded in reciprocity with nature, fair exchange, and the responsible trade of high-value cultural and ecological products such as cacao, vanilla, and other locally important species.

Model Phases

Community Dialogue and Family Engagement

The process begins with a visit to the territory to establish dialogue and identify participating families. These families engage in a collective planning process that includes training, intergenerational knowledge exchange, and the co-creation of short-, medium-, and long-term actions.

Design and Implementation of Agroecological and Livestock Systems

Agroecological gardens are designed with native species of short, medium, and long growth cycles to improve nutrition and empower families, while enriching local biodiversity. In a later stage, protein sources such as fish or poultry may be introduced, depending on cultural relevance and ecological context.

Implementation of Exchange Systems and Biocultural Value Chains

This phase strengthens Indigenous economies by facilitating the exchange of surplus produce and co-designing pathways to bring high-integrity local products to broader markets. It promotes intercommunity solidarity, food self-sufficiency, and economies anchored in biocultural values.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

The program includes continuous evaluation of key indicators related to food sovereignty, biodiversity, and nutrition. Monitoring extends for up to a year post-implementation, with community-led assessments of garden productivity, livestock systems, exchange mechanisms, and local nutritional outcomes.

Expected Results

- Increased food and nutritional sovereignty and security
- Strengthened community cohesion and self-determination
- Reaffirmation of cultural identities linked to territory
- Advancement of forest-based economies rooted in biocultural practices
- Increase in local biodiversity and protection of culturally significant species
- Creation of peer-learning and community-to-community knowledge exchange spaces
- Measurable improvements in child nutrition and household well-being

Beneficiaries and Impact

The program aims to be implemented across the 11 Indigenous nations of the Ecuadorian Amazon. In its initial phase, it will work directly with 22 families to deepen understanding of the model's impacts and draw lessons for broader application.

Impact will be assessed primarily through two lenses:

1. The number of families that express interest in joining the program after the initial phase; and
2. The long-term resilience and continuity of practices among participating families, including their ability to sustain and evolve the processes initiated through the program.

About the Amazon Sacred Headwaters Alliance

The Amazon Sacred Headwaters Alliance is a coalition of 28 Indigenous organizations and allied partners working across borders to protect one of the most biodiverse and culturally rich regions on the planet. Together, we co-create innovative, territory-based strategies that are rooted in ancestral governance and the defense of life.

Join Us

We invite all those passionate about regeneration and the creation of a new, resilient economy to join this transformational initiative.

To learn more about supporting this program and the broader vision of the Amazon Sacred Headwaters Alliance, please contact:

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