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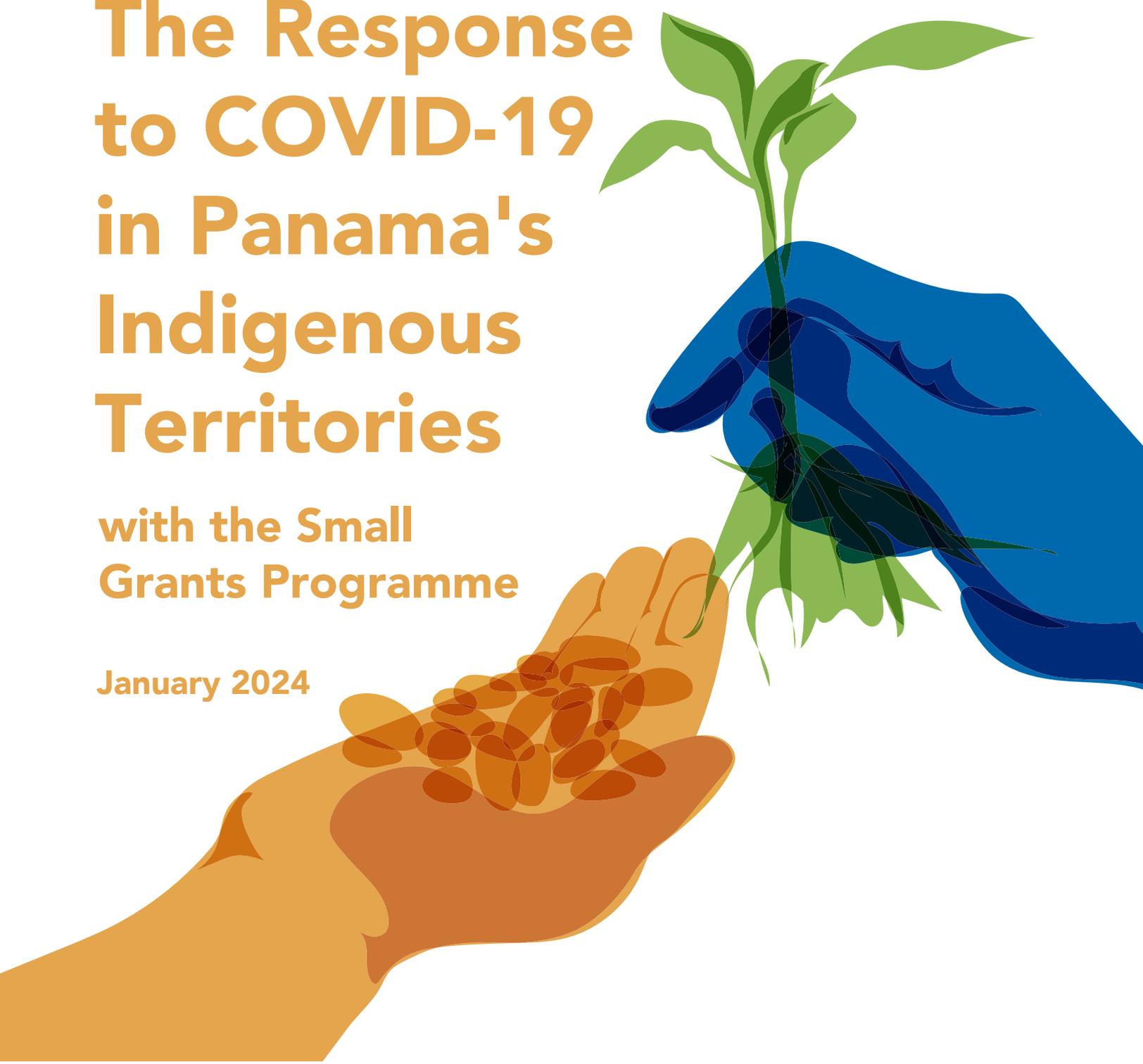


based on a decision of the German Bundestag

# The Response to COVID-19 in Panama's Indigenous Territories

## with the Small Grants Programme

January 2024







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**Citation:** SGP-UNDP/GEF, Ministry of Environment, 2023. The response to COVID-19 in Panama's indigenous territories with the Small Grants Programme. Republic of Panama.

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# Índice

- 1** Acronyms
- 2** Introduction
- 4** The SGP in the face of COVID-19 and the Global Support Initiative to ICCAs
- 5** Panama's Indigenous Territories
- 6** The COVID-19 Pandemic and the SGP's Response
- 7** Implementation of the Global Support Initiative to ICCAs
- 9** SGP Panama's projects in ICCA territories in the face of COVID-19
- 10** Panamanian Center for Studies and Social Action Association (ACEASPA)
- 11** Cultural Action Ngäbe (ACUN)
- 13** Foundation for the Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge (FPCI)
- 14** Foundation for the Development of the Wounaan People (FUNDEPW)
- 16** Kuna Yala Research and Development Institute (IIDKY)
- 18** Kuna Youth Movement (MJK)
- 19** Kunas United for Nabguana Association
- 21** Organization of Indigenous Women United for Biodiversity of Panama (OMIUBP)
- 22** ICCA Fund Projects by the Numbers
- 26** Lessons learned from project implementers
- 28** Conclusions and reflections on the implementation of this fund
- 30** Publications generated by the projects and contact List



# Acronyms

## **ACEASPA**

Panamanian Center for Studies and Social Action Association

## **ACUN**

Ngäbe Cultural Action

## **BMUV**

Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, Government of Germany

## **CBD**

Convention on Biological Diversity

## **CBO**

Community-Based Organisation

## **CONAMIUP**

National Coordinator of Indigenous Women of Panama

## **COONAPIP**

National Coordinator of Indigenous Peoples of Panama

## **FPCI**

Foundation for the Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge

## **FUNDEPW**

Foundation for the Development of the Wounaan People

## **GEF**

Global Environment Facility

## **ICCA**

Territories and areas conserved by Indigenous Peoples and local communities

## **ICCA-GSI**

Global Support Initiative to ICCAs

## **ICT**

Information and Communications Technology

## **IIDKY**

Kuna Yala Research and Development Institute

## **IKI**

International Climate Initiative

## **IUCN GPAP**

Global Protected Areas Program of the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

## **MIDA**

Ministry of Agricultural Development of Panama

## **MINSA**

Ministry of Health of Panama

## **MJK**

Kuna Youth Movement

## **NASA**

U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration

## **NGO**

Non-Governmental Organization

## **NSC**

SGP National Steering Committee

## **OBC**

Community-Based Organizations

## **OMIUBP**

Organization of Indigenous Women united for the Biodiversity of Panama

## **RMIB-LAC**

Regional network of Indigenous Women on Biodiversity in Latin America

## **SGP**

GEF Small Grants Programme implemented by UNDP

## **U.S.**

United States of America

## **UNDP**

United Nations Development Programme

## **UNEP WCMC**

United Nations Environment Program World Conservation Monitoring Center



# Introduction

This publication seeks to show the implementation of eight projects led by indigenous organizations throughout Panama that proposed to face the consequences of COVID-19 with an intercultural perspective and based on traditional medicine and food sovereignty. The projects are part of the Global Support Initiative to territories and areas managed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities (ICCA-GSI) funded by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) as part of the BMUV's [IKI Corona Response Package](#)<sup>1</sup>. The ICCA-GSI works at the global, national, and local levels, and through the Small Grants Programme (SGP), direct financial support is provided to address the local response to the global pandemic from the indigenous bases.

A presentation is then made of the reality of indigenous territories in Panama to continue with the background of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country and how the response of the SGP to the

confinement that Panamanian society experienced led to the selection of Panama to be part of this global fund. The eight projects are then introduced, their voices and the most innovative elements are highlighted, and the main indicators derived from implementation are presented.

Based on a process of reflection on the implementation of the projects with the executing organizations, a meeting was held between all the projects that were part of the fund ICCA-GSI. This publication shows the cross-cutting conclusions reached by Panama from the implementation of the projects and concludes lessons learned that are part of

the basis of the work of the SGP with indigenous peoples to help them build the future of their territory from their knowledge, culture and ancestry.

<sup>1</sup> International Climate Initiative (IKI). Corona Response Package - rapid assistance for sustainable recovery. N. d.





## What is SGP?

The Small Grants Programme is a corporate programme of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It is present in 125 countries and finances projects directly to local communities and indigenous peoples through community-based organizations.

In Panama, the SGP began in 2006 and works with communities suffering from social exclusion and linked to high levels of poverty, with an emphasis on women and indigenous peoples, in rural areas and areas surrounding protected areas, watersheds and

micro-watersheds of environmental and social importance, marine-coastal areas with high degrees of biodiversity, biological corridors and areas of high ethnic-cultural value. In 16 years of work in the country, the SGP invested more than \$6 million in more than 300 community projects.

The SGP works through operational phases. Each operational phase corresponds to a National Country Strategy, which specifies the components, activities and indicators on which the work will be carried out during the period.

The SGP operates through a National Steering Committee (NSC) for the

approval of all project proposals.

In the case of Panama, it is made up of 16 members, of which two are permanent positions represented by UNDP and the Ministry of Environment and the rest are members of the non-governmental and scientific environmental sector, with experience in various issues such as gender, youth, indigenous communities, among others. NSC members do so in the spirit of volunteerism and are not paid for their services and contributions.

A man wearing a dark cap and a dark button-down shirt over a light blue t-shirt stands in a lush green forest. He is holding a branch with several green leaves in his right hand and a small, pink and white flower bud in his left hand. To his right, the arm and shoulder of another person wearing a light blue t-shirt are visible. The background is filled with dense green foliage and tree trunks.

**The SGP in the face of  
COVID-19 and the Global  
Support Initiative to ICCAs**



# Panama's Indigenous Territories

In Panama there are seven indigenous peoples (Ngäbe, Buglé, Wounaan, Emberá, Guna, Bri Bri, Naso Tjerdi) with a history of struggle where land claims led to the creation and recognition of six comarcas and<sup>2 3</sup> five collective lands<sup>4</sup> (there are another 25 in the process of requesting recognition), with delimited geographical and political boundaries and with their own system of traditional governance, which are recognized by the National Constitution (arts. 90 and 127).

The indigenous peoples of Panama are organized "into 12 structures, which are named below: the Gunayala Congress, the Guna Congress of Madungandí, the Guna Congress of Wargandí and the Congress of Tagargunyala (Guna Peoples), the Ngäbe Congress, the Buglé Congress, the Emberá-Wounaan Congress, the Emberá-Wounaan Collective Land Congress, the National Congress of the Wounaan People, the Emberá Congress of Alto Bayano, the Naso Tjer-Di Council and the Bribri Council."<sup>5</sup>

There are also entities that bring them together, such as the National Coordinator of Indigenous Peoples of Panama (COONAPIP), which integrates all the country's indigenous peoples, and the National Coordinator of Indigenous Women of Panama (CONAMUIP). Since 2013, the country has had a Vice-Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, attached to the Ministry of the Interior to deal with indigenous affairs, and in 2000 the Executive Branch created the National Council for Indigenous Development as a consultative body on public policies and actions aimed at indigenous peoples<sup>6</sup>.



<sup>2</sup>ANATI, Leyes Comarcales. S. f.

<sup>3</sup>Presidencia Panamá. Presidente Cortizo sanciona ley que crea la comarca Naso Tjër-Di. 4 de diciembre 2020.

<sup>4</sup>ANATI, Resoluciones Tierras Colectivas. S. f.

<sup>5</sup>Ministerio de Ambiente, PNUD, FCPF, Informe de la participación de las 11 estructuras de Congresos y Consejos de los Pueblos Indígenas de Panamá en la Construcción de la Estrategia Nacional REDD+, febrero 2017.

<sup>6</sup>Viceministerio de Asuntos Indígenas, S. f.



# The COVID-19 Pandemic and the SGP's Response

In 2020, the world was immersed in a pandemic that took on global dimensions, forcing each State to take preventive and action measures in the face of the threat of the COVID-19 disease. In Panama, these measures took the form of a strict confinement with sanitary fences in cities and rural communities that prevented the movement of anyone outside their residence. These measures were also implemented in indigenous regions and

socialize valuable tools created by partners and allies for decision-making on their projects based on natural resources, indigenous knowledge and the conservation of the social tissue

. Some examples of this were the dissemination through social networks such as Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp and email newsletters of informative material on care, instructions for making masks, publications on indigenous medicinal plants, an interactive map of COVID-19 in the country developed

collective lands, where biosecurity and isolation measures dictated by the Ministry of Health of Panama were adopted, while traditional knowledge and practices were applied to face the pandemic and associated crises.

by SGP<sup>7</sup> allies and examples of projects and partners of the program to continue with reforestation, environmental education and protection of territories activities during confinement.

Faced with the need to zoom in on how indigenous peoples were facing this threat in their territories, the SGP and civil society allies began holding virtual meetings to share experiences and testimonies.

The SGP sought ways to adapt the program to the global health crisis to continue its work of community building and biodiversity protection from the grassroots. This involved the use of virtual channels to ensure communication with the projects and to

<sup>7</sup> The National Coordinator of Indigenous Peoples of Panama (COONAPIP) as a partner of the Rainforest Foundation US in Panama, developed this Interactive Map that presents a broad characterization of the situation of different indigenous peoples, and has the efforts of several local, foreign, indigenous and non-indigenous allies, as well as local governments.



What began organically with virtual meetings every Wednesday at 2 pm to generate ties in the face of what the world was going through, became the "Collective of Indigenous Allies" that brought together different indigenous groups, civil society, anthropologists, national government such as the Vice Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Sustainable Development and academia to exchange practices and plan for the future.

## Implementation of the Global Support Initiative to ICCAs

The ICCA-GSI COVID-19 Response Initiative<sup>8</sup> was launched in 45 countries, receiving USD 250,000 to support initiatives and actions for a green recovery from the pandemic in indigenous territories.

- To implement the ICCA-GSI in Panama, a public call was launched exclusively for indigenous NGOs and CBOs at the national level with proven experience in community work so that they could apply for amounts between USD 30,000 and USD 40,000 providing a counterpart of at least 50% of what was requested to implement local solutions from the field. One of the selection criteria was to prioritize organizations that were exclusively indigenous or had alliances with the leadership or in indigenous territory. A Technical Committee was formed by the SGP to review project ideas before they were submitted for evaluation and approval by the National Steering Committee.

Eight projects within indigenous regions and territories were selected: Guna, Emberá, Ngäbe Buglé and Wounaan, which included immediate response components to COVID-19, such as the translation into indigenous languages of health messages for prevention and care, and the addressing of primary concerns aroused by the pandemic such as food sovereignty and the loss of

biodiversity due to human activities.

The rescue of traditional indigenous knowledge became more relevant than ever as a comprehensive approach to the crises generated by the pandemic in economic, social, environmental and health terms, including mental health.

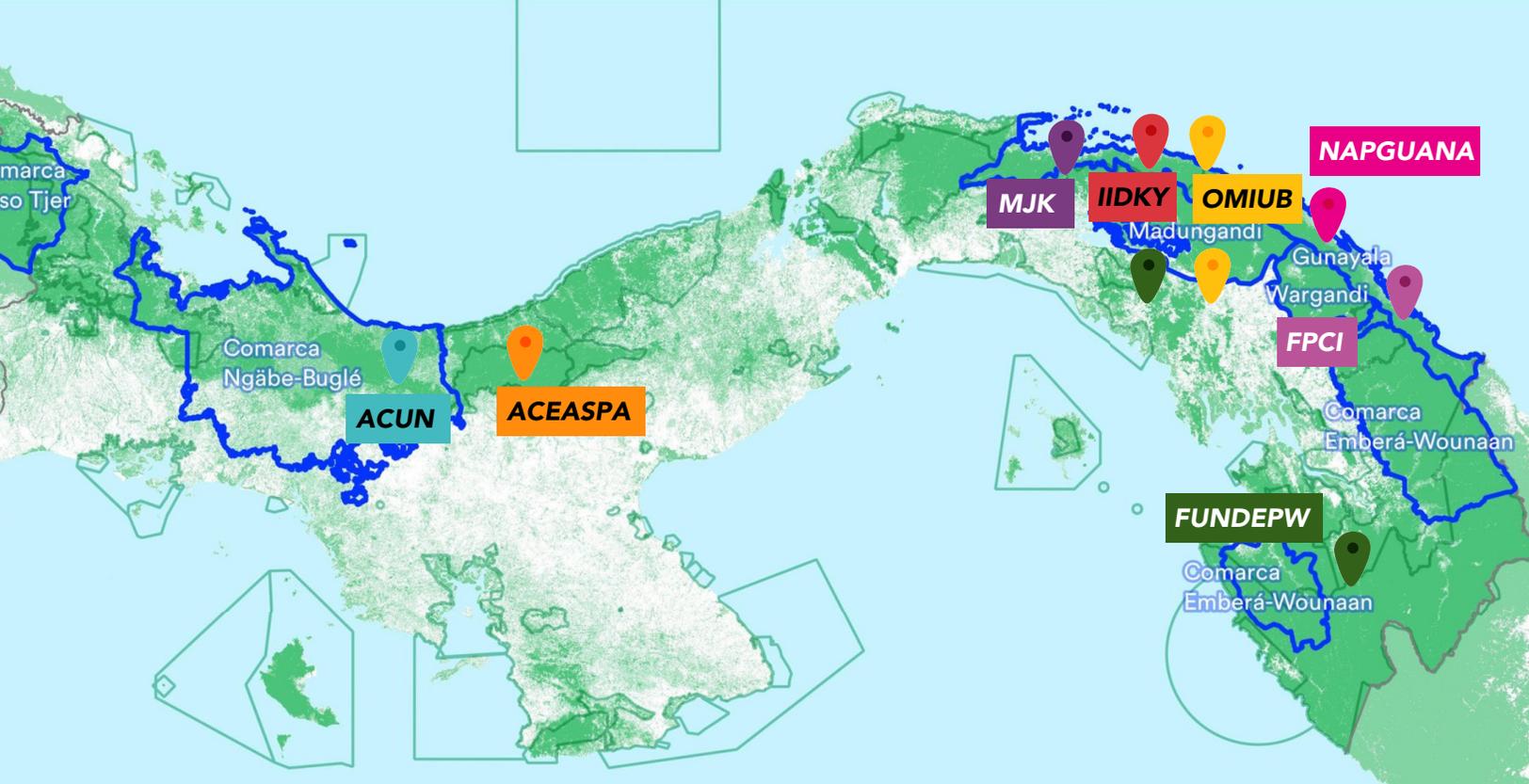
The projects were implemented between 2021 and 2023 with local solutions for food sovereignty, wildlife conservation, access to new technologies, traditional medicine, ecological protection against fires and deforestation and the use of indigenous language and adapted media to deliver key messages to the indigenous population about prevention and care.

In the implementation of the ICCA-GSI, the SGP of Panama worked together with coordinators of the ICCA network of Colombia, the SGP country programmes in Colombia and Paraguay (who participate in the ICCA-GSI) and with specialists from the ICCA Consortium with a view to strengthening regional networks and future possibilities of joint work to sustain and replicate the results achieved.



<sup>8</sup> SGP, ICCA-GSI COVID-19 Response Initiative, S.f.





## What are ICCAs?

ICCA refers to demarcated territories whose natural resources are conserved and managed by local governance of indigenous peoples or local communities of migrant or Afro-descendant peasants. ICCA is an abbreviation for "territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities" or also called "territories of life".<sup>9</sup> According to the ICCA Consortium, these territories are recognized as essential for the conservation of the natural environment, the vindication of collective rights and responsibilities and sustainable livelihoods.

## What is the ICCA Consortium?

The ICCA Consortium emerged as a movement of people promoting equity in conservation and was formalized as an international association under the Swiss Civil Code. It is located in 22 countries and works to identify and document ICCA cases to support countries in achieving international biodiversity conservation targets.<sup>10</sup>

## What is the Global Support Initiative to ICCAs (GSI)?

The Global Support Initiative for Indigenous Peoples and Community-Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCA-GSI) is funded by the Government of Germany, through its Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer

Protection (BMUV), implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and executed by the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP).

Key partners include the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the ICCA Consortium, the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Global Programme on Protected Areas (IUCN GPAP) and the United Nations Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP WCMC).

It was funded for a period of five years as a contribution to the achievement of the CBD's Aichi 2020 targets and operates in at least 26 countries around the world. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the German government decided to create an additional fund where more countries were included in this Initiative, including Panama.

The Initiative acts as an umbrella for multi-partner projects and is designed to enhance the recognition, support and effectiveness of ICCAs in support of the diversity, quality and vitality of governance globally. The ICCA Consortium provides ICCA-related assistance to all ICCA partners.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> ICCA Consortium, Global Support Initiative, N. d.

<sup>9</sup> ICCA Consortium, Territories and conserved areas indigenous and local communities, N. d.

<sup>10</sup> ICCA Consortium, Latin America, N. d.



# PPD Panama's projects in ICCA territories in the face of COVID-19



# Panamanian Center for Studies and Social Action Association (ACEASPA)



**Title: Strengthening community organizations in the face of COVID-19 in the Caribbean region from the northeastern end of the Ngäbe-Buglé Region (Bledeshia district) and the north of Veraguas.**



**Location: Ngäbe-Buglé region and north of Veraguas, Santa Fe. Atlantic Coast: Caribbean Sea.**

This project introduced innovative low-cost technologies in the Buglé communities of the Ngäbe-Buglé Region and the north of the province of Veraguas, adjacent to the protected areas of the National System of Protected Areas of Panama (SINAP), Santa Fe National Park and Omar Torrijos Herrera National Park, to disseminate messages related to the COVID-19 pandemic and to work on issues related to territorial governance and the control of new health-related threats, among others. To this end, a network of community communicators was created made up of sixteen people, including 7 women and 9 men, to sustain a communication system that would work continuously among the communities of the region.

One of the innovative technologies introduced by this project was the "internet box": it is a small plastic box that is installed in a community, emitting a WiFi signal and has a memory that stores information that can be downloaded by any cell phone or other nearby device that connects to the box at a distance of no more

than 50 meters from it. 10 boxes were installed in different communities and it was used to load material that serves for school research and current affairs in the region that were then downloaded by different members of the nearby communities who had access, generating a virtual network for the exchange of information.

At the same time, 41x27-inch solar panels were used on the roofs of the houses or schools in the 10 communities<sup>12</sup> where the boxes were installed to supply them with electricity. ACEASPA received the induction from the staff who sold the solar panel, since for cost reasons they could not travel to the communities. ACEASPA and the team of communicators were in charge of doing the installation and maintenance. This whole process was recorded in a manual prepared by the project.

Based on the needs detected by the communities in a self-diagnosis at the beginning of the project, the people of the Network were trained in filming videos and audios with cell phones, conducting interviews and editing the recorded material to be uploaded and shared in the internet box. Horizontal peer-to-peer learning was important for this project by conducting an exchange to a community in the Ngäbe-Buglé region where they learned about community radio and the creation of radio programs.

Having worked on the links between communities and the internal communication between them, the next step will be to communicate outwards using radio and social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram and expand the uses of the internet box.

**This project represents the appropriation of low-cost Information Technology (ICT) to create our own ways of facing global challenges at the local level.**

<sup>12</sup> They settled in the communities of Valle de Guacamaya, Alto Cuay, Cahuita, in the district of Bledeshia, and La Palizada, Pedregoso, Río Luis, Caloveborita, Llanita, El Macho, Alto del Carmen in the district of Quibian Urracá. They consisted of three parts: the panel, a solar controller, and a battery. The cost for 10 solar panel systems was \$3,600.

# Cultural Action Ngäbe (ACUN)



**Title: Sustainable community ecotourism to generate sources of income, with food production actions from agroecology, agroforestry, and forest restoration as a strategy in response to the crisis generated by COVID-19.**



**Location: Ngäbe-Buglé region. Communities of Cerro Flores, Cerro Congo and Llano Sebles.**

Through the promotion of good agricultural practices and traditional medicine, this project becomes an example of how the SGP in Panama supports community initiatives that have been developed for years in the communities, in this case in the communities of Cerro Flores, Cerro Congo, and Llano Sebles in the Ngäbe-Buglé Region. They set out to confront COVID-19 through the Ngäbe link with the forests and the land, rescuing the management of pandemics that this people keeps in the memory of their ancestors.

**“The translation we do is not only of the language, it is a cultural translation that is guided by healers. There are cultural actions that the Ngäbe already carry out that were enhanced with the official indications of COVID prevention, for example, quarantine and not waving at each other.”**

**Blas Quintero, executive director of Acción Cultural Ngäbe (ACUN)**



One of the pillars of this project was the work together with the traditional "medicine donors" translating the preventive messages of the Ministry of Health and sharing them on social networks such as Facebook and WhatsApp, generating 4 posters and 2 informative brochures. A group of seven women with sewing experience was organized to make cloth masks. These documents were incorporated into the process of training new healers guided by the men and women who gave ancestral medicine, both in spiritual health (women called *sukia*) and medicine givers (called *krägä biaga*).

Another of the main pillars of this project was the support of agroecological systems through the installation of five family gardens to supply 30 people from 5 families, the documentation and systematization of ancestral techniques for the cultivation of native beans without burning or tilling, and the use of laboratory analysis of the<sup>13</sup> wild Ngöga plant to seek alternative sources to animal protein and to sustain and defend traditional Ngäbe foods. Five gravity irrigation and hydraulic ram management systems were also built for the orchards, a source of innovation that makes simple technology available to sustain traditional agroforestry production systems.

<sup>13</sup> With a cost of approximately USD 1,600, carried out by a private laboratory called LAISA (Laboratorio de Análisis Industriales S. A.).



The third pillar of this project was the consolidation of eco-tourism as a source of income for the communities. To this end, an exchange of food and cultural goods was carried out between the three communities of the project, 10-hour courses and trainings for local indigenous tour guides, cooking and basic accounting courses were given, and a cabin was built to receive visitors and hold meetings and trainings with more than 80 women involved. Work meetings were also established to improve the safety of tourist trails, an exchange with the community of Mata Oscura on community tourism and workshops to form an ecological tourism program, from which they conceived a management committee, receive visitors and have rehabilitated a trail to reach a waterfall as an attraction.

***“Food security and sovereignty encompasses, above all, Ngäbe's own systems that are working and have worked very well.”***

***Blas Quintero, director ejecutivo de Acción Cultural Ngäbe (ACUN)***

***In their seeds, in their forests and in their "donors of medicine" the Ngäbe indigenous communities keep their power of resilience.***

In this project, the defense of food sovereignty predominates through the valorization of traditional cultivation systems, the conservation of native seeds, supported by scientific tools of analysis and research.

# Foundation for the Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge (FPCI)



**Title: Strengthening Indigenous Sustainable Food Production Systems as Resilient Measures to the Impact of COVID-19 and Biodiversity Conservation Based on Indigenous Knowledge.**



**Location: Community of Dadnaggwe Dubbir, of Usdub, naibe Galu area (Ustupu), Dad Nagwe Dubbir Shire Guna Yala. Atlantic Sea: Caribbean Sea.**

This project highlighted the importance of strengthening the governance system of this Guna community to face the challenges of changing and risky contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a governance that shows the resilience of this people and their capacity to respond.

A central axis of this organization is the recovery of knowledge transmitted ancestrally through orality to be systematized and ensure its durability over time through the generations. For this reason, the collection of Guna knowledge in relation to

biodiversity and climate change was carried out, especially by women. This resulted in the development of a systematization document and two workshops on the recovery and conservation of native seeds and the cultural importance and resilience of food. Four trainings on leadership and good governance were also organized, and an Agricultural Biodiversity Management and Governance Plan was developed focused on the management of seeds of food and cultural importance.

Territory mapping and zoning was also part of this project through the identification of cultivation areas in the Ustupu and Dad naggue dubbir area, geophysical land analysis, and participatory mapping of areas of ecological importance, ecosystem connectivity, and restoration. To this end, camera trap technology, drone and software were used to read the information obtained, as part of evidencing the riches of indigenous territories. A document was generated by a map

expert focused on sustainable development, management plan, zoning and mapping for the forested area of Ustupu-Ogobsucun and Dad Naggue Dubbir. This project emphasizes a conception of landscape that integrates ancestry, the history of the people in those lands, the biodiversity that surrounds them, the native medicine and traditions.

**“One of the things that satisfies us is trying to monitor what kind of wildlife we have in the region through the use of camera traps. This shows the richness of our region.”**



**Onel Masardule, Executive Director FPCI**

**Putting at the centre efforts to ensure that ancestral knowledge, customs, and traditions endure in such a challenging world is the strength of indigenous peoples, their own institutions and governance systems. To put this knowledge in relation to territoriality, where the notion of landscape must include not only the physical and ecological aspect but also the historical and cultural aspect.**

# Foundation for the Development of the Wounaan People (FUNDEPW)



**Title: The ecological protection of Wounaan peoples against COVID-19.**



**Location: Pacific Coast. Communities of Río Platanares, Río Hondo and Majé, Panama Este, Serranía Majé and neighborhoods to three protected areas: the Panama Bay Wetland Wildlife Refuge, the Bayano Hydrological Reserve and the Chucantí Private Reserve.**

**Puerto Lara, Darién, neighboring the Filo de Tallo Canglón Hydrological Reserve.**

**Aruza, high on the Tuira River, neighboring the Darién National Park.**

**Chulel and Cémaco, Chepigana Darién, Serranía Bagre biological corridor and the Chepigana Forest Reserve.**

**Biroquerá, Darién, neighboring Darién National Park.**

This project sought to address one of the consequences of the pandemic: confinement, the inability to mobilize, and the illness of community leaders led to the appearance of illegal slash-and-burn activities in indigenous territories and protected areas due to the impossibility of monitoring by communities.

This project was implemented in eight Wounaan communities neighboring protected areas or areas of ecological importance to preserve the biological corridor of Darién and Panama Este, to combat deforestation and forest fires.

This project is in addition to the activities that the organization has already been developing for years in its territories, evidencing the work of these peoples on the protection of the biodiversity of the territory, especially in the face of the threat of zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19.

This was carried out through the field demarcation of the three most vulnerable territories (Río Hondo, Platanares and Majé) with nine milestones built by themselves, boundaries that are georeferenced on maps and in the process of being requested for adjudication as collective lands. A territorial alert map was also deployed to remotely detect forest loss and active fires, using public data from Global Forest Watch, the alert system at the University of Maryland, USA, and NASA's Fire Information Resource Management System. Technology with which they have been able to detect the loss of 122 hectares of forest during the pandemic, which were legally denounced.

The three communities were equipped with monitoring technology (drone, a desktop computer, a tablet for the use of the Locus Map application, a printer and computer software), and were trained in their use, resulting in 10 forest monitoring technicians and 5 local authorities from the communities.

***"We are focused on early warning as one of the main tools of our organization because deforestation has been overwhelming, especially during COVID."***

***Amador Mercasa, FUNDEW project coordinator in 2022***

Forests were also monitored every 15 days during the dry season and legal complaints of timber logging and deforestation established through the National Congress of Wounaan People were followed up. More than 10 complaints were filed, most of them

for ecological damage in areas of natural forests and others for illegal logging of forests, filed with the Ministry of Environment and the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Superior Environmental Prosecutor's Office. Finally, a workshop on forest fire prevention and fire management was held in each of the project's communities with the participation of 20 people.

***Protecting these Wounaan indigenous territories meant protecting the integrity of biodiversity and preventing the ecological fragmentation of the territory, putting communities at the service of the health and preservation of ecosystems.***



# Kuna Yala Research and Development Institute (IIDKY)



***Title: Supporting initiatives for the sustainable and regulated use of wildlife and promoting the breeding of small animals on sustainable farms with mitigation measures with women's organizations in Guna Yala.***



***Location: villages of Nargana and Dwbuwala, Guna Yala region. Atlantic Coast: Caribbean Sea.***

Based on the concern about the hunting of wild animals for consumption, such as wild pigs, saïno and painted rabbits, this project set out to address this issue through traditional knowledge about rules and taboos related to the consumption of wild meat, developing didactic booklets on threatened fauna and vulnerable species. Indiscriminate hunting and the destruction of their habitat has led several wild animals in the area to be on the list of threatened species, putting the spotlight on this issue at the community level.

This project understands that the conservation of vulnerable wild species goes hand in hand with the understanding of hunting as a cultural element, given that their meat has been a source of food since ancient times and an element of rituals such as the passage to puberty. It was therefore necessary to address this issue at the community level together with young people, wise men, women, and hunters.

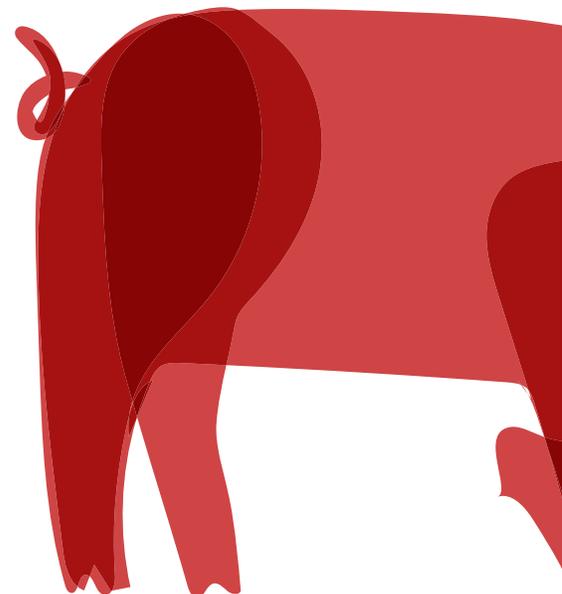
For this reason, recommendations to regulation based on these principles were made through a community regulation workshop, an environmental education workshop on vulnerable species protected by the Panamanian National Law aligned with multilateral environmental agreements ratified by Panama, and a hunters' workshop with young people to share experiences on the behavior of biodiversity. This component benefited the communities of

Gangandi, Mandi Ubgigandub and Aggwadub and involved around 111 people with 40% women participating.

Complementary to the work on wildlife hunting and given the high costs of farming on land for the archipelago of islands, the project established nine pilot projects for the breeding of small domestic animals led by more than 70% of women and youth, with the advice of the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MIDA). The five groups of women beneficiaries belonged to five neighboring communities of the Protected Wildlife Area of the Township of Narganá and four of the Township of Dubwala.

Four trainings were held on small animal husbandry and good environmental practices and eight pig farms and one poultry farm were established with mitigation measures to avoid surface water contamination, with three pigs per pig pilot project and 20 chickens on the poultry farm. The sustainability challenge of the farms is the constant monitoring for the maintenance of the animals, one of the lessons learned from this project.

The breeding and sale of domestic animals makes it possible to approach the hunting of wild animals for family consumption and not for sale, respecting the role of hunting in the Guna tradition where the elders of the community determine limits to the consumption of wild meat in their territory.



**Knowledge and territoriality come together in the need to understand wildlife hunting as a cultural element, where regulations and norms come hand in hand with traditional knowledge and ancestry. It shows the importance of biodiversity-related regulations being built from the indigenous community bases.**



# Kuna Youth Movement (MJK)



**Title: *Strengthening Indigenous Family Farming in the Guna Yala Region.***



**Location: *communities of Nalunega, Ailitupu, Acuatupu, Río Azúcar, Niadup, Ustupu, Maguebgandi, Digir, San Ignacio de Tupile and Playón Chico, Guna Yala Region. Atlantic Coast: Caribbean Sea.***

***“It was very satisfying to see how women are also doing field work, that they have crops at home. These are things that we didn't expect because we have the idea that women are meant for the house. That idea has been going on for a long time because women work.”***

***Ehny Martinez, general coordinator of the Kuna Youth Movement***

This project represents the leadership of the Guna youth in the face of the challenges imposed by COVID-19, taking the initiative and raising their voices to express needs on the issues they consider important, such as food sovereignty, and traditional medicine, and contribute to the solutions implemented at the community level. One of the great achievements was to face the challenges involved in the implementation of an international cooperation project, which represents the first steps in handing over the execution of projects to the new generations.

In view of the efforts of the Guna leadership to encourage young people to return to the countryside, artisanal fishing, and collective work, this group proposed to contribute to this issue through 7 conversations and 8 exchanges between peers on family farming with more than 70 women and 30 young people involved, exchanges of native seeds and spreading the importance of local markets and the breeding of domestic animals; together with the Ministry of Agricultural Development and led by women.



A seed bank was also set up and an exchange of native seeds was carried out. The formation of a Youth Network for Food Sovereignty was initiated, which, although a way must be found to give it continuity, represents the need to generate networks to face the challenge of cultivating the land.

As an immediate response to COVID-19, four youth workshops were held to inform health norms, work on identity and leadership, and disease prevention. 10 short videos were created in Spanish and Guna, in both languages, informing about hygiene rules and the use of masks, and the development of traditional medicines and artisanal alternatives to industrial hygiene products, by traditional doctors from the Guna communities.

These communication platforms between young people and led by women were also used to raise awareness about other diseases such as HIV-AIDS, showing that COVID-19 opened the discussion on disease management at the community level.

**Rescuing medical and agricultural knowledge so that it lasts from generation to generation, it is a youth that seeks to be part of the future of its community.**

# Kunas United for Nabguana Association



**Title: Strengthening capacities against COVID-19 through traditional knowledge and promotion of prevention mechanisms in the Guna Yala Guna communities.**



**Location: Guna Yala Region and Guna de Madungandí Region**

This project tackled the COVID-19 pandemic using accessible and effective dissemination channels in indigenous communities, making a cultural adaptation of health measures to the reality of the 22 communities with which they worked with the participation of 62 people, including 8 women and 3 young people.

The community radio station "Radio Voces Originarias" and the creation of its website served as a communication platform to send the COVID-19 protocols in 22 audio capsules in the 7 indigenous languages of Panama. Having its headquarters in COONAPIP, which brings together the 12 indigenous congresses of Panama, this radio served as a platform for exchange not only for COVID-19 but also for other social struggles such as the defense of territory and ecosystems, giving a national character to the impact of this project.

**"We have to join the two hands, traditional medicine and guna. For example, handwashing in the Guna village dates back to before the pandemic. The lack of cultural relevance means that the examples of the Guna people have not been used."**

**Jaime Rodríguez, president of the Kunas United for Nabguana Association**

Complementary to the radio communication work, this project addressed issues related to COVID-19 such as biosafety protocols with an intercultural approach, training the *inadulegan* (traditional Guna doctors, made up of more than 70 men and 2 women doctors involved in the project) in the 22 Guna communities of the West sector during 70 hours of training and adapting the contents to the Guanadule indigenous reality.

Not only were ancestral knowledge taken together with the participation of health personnel from the Regional Directorate of MINSA, but the organizational structure of *inadulegan* (which brings together traditional doctors) and the *Onmaggad Dad Argwaned Siggid* (Congress of the Guna Culture of the Western Sector of Guna Yala) was strengthened, and an exchange of experiences and visions was achieved from the construction of trust and the use of participatory mechanisms.

The measures taken to deal with COVID-19 have also allowed the updating of protocols for other diseases relevant to the Guna communities, such as malaria, leishmaniasis and

Chagas disease. Intercultural relevance was central in the development of these protocols, highlighting the construction of sanitary measures from the local level.

**With an integrative approach, through the translation of COVID-19 protocols into all indigenous languages and the use of community radio to exchange with other indigenous communities in the country, this project addresses the importance of exchange, learning and maintaining ties between indigenous territories as a unit.**

**“One of the great successes of the project is the support of the sailas and the inadulegan. They are now aware that today there are diseases that did not exist before, such as diabetes and hypertension, of which we have records since 2009.**

**Because before, the diet was healthier and our people had stronger defenses.**

**Nowadays, with the new canned and bottled foods, the defenses are low and any disease attacks the guna.”**

**Jaime Rodríguez, president of the Kunas United for Nabguana Association**

# Organization of Indigenous Women United for Biodiversity of Panama (OMIUBP)



**Title:** Facing the COVID-19 pandemic through biocultural strategies.



**Location:** Guna Yala and Ipetí Emberá regions (Alto Bayano collective lands) and Curtí.

Led by women, the organization OMIUBP, which brings together women from the Guna and Emberá people and is a member of the Regional Network of Indigenous Women on Biodiversity in Latin America (RMIB-LAC), set out to carry out health campaigns through the creation of 24 audio messages in the indigenous language of Guna and Emberá to be disseminated through community radios and social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. Work was also carried out on other contagious diseases such as tuberculosis.

Another of the main axes of this project was the realization of four inventories of seeds in danger of extinction and the support with inputs to six family gardens on 16 hectares, recovering traditional seeds. Family farming was strengthened to improve the quality of life of these communities and generate a local economy for 20 families by producing bananas, sugar cane, cassava and mango trees, and new products such as pumpkin, cassava, peppers, corn, using traditional Kuna methods such as in *nainu* where no agrochemicals are used. From them arose the need to exchange seeds between the communities to conserve their native knowledge and the care of the land, resulting in four exchanges.

Emphasizing the importance of the process of reflection once the threat has passed, this

organization carried out a systematization of the synergies between traditional medicine and Western medicine to face COVID-19.

**Hand in hand with women, the importance of sustaining the family economy through production led by them and the processes of reflection, systematization, and lessons learned is highlighted. Executing the project in the midst of the pandemic has forced innovation in coordination and activity planning strategies to achieve the objectives.**



A close-up photograph of a person's hand reaching out to touch a green vine with heart-shaped leaves. The vine is climbing a brown wooden branch. The background is filled with more green foliage and brown branches, suggesting a forest or natural habitat. The lighting is natural, highlighting the vibrant green of the leaves.

# ICCA Fund Projects by the Numbers

Below are the main indicators for the eight projects of the SGP Panama.



**1,580**

**Women  
beneficiaries of  
the projects**

**1,546**

**Men  
beneficiaries of  
the projects**



**570**

**Young people  
involved in the  
projects (between 14  
and 25 years old)**



**403**

**Trained  
people**





**44**

**Indigenous leaders involved in the projects**

**44**

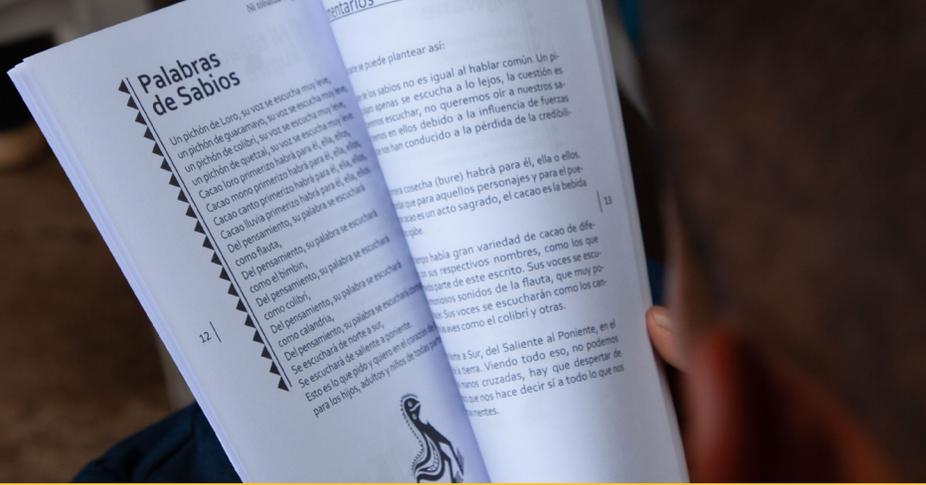
**Generated audio and video capsules**



**23**

**Species of flora and fauna involved in the projects**





**11**  
**Publications**  
**generated**

**10**  
**Peer-to-peer**  
**exchanges**  
**carried out**



**4**  
**New partnerships or**  
**strengthened networks**

**1**  
**Web Page**  
**created**



# Lessons learned from project implementers



Months after the projects finished their execution, and in line with the networking and participatory work with which this fund has been executed, a reflection and learning meeting was held to jointly define several conclusions. From this process, we share in this publication the main learnings of these leaders.

**Regarding the work of women in the execution of projects**, the importance of supporting their work was highlighted not only from the technical aspect linked to production and inputs but also from moral and human support, encouraging processes and workshops that promote unity and brotherhood. The importance of delegating functions to avoid overloading activities (care systems) and promoting

the sustainability of projects is also highlighted. It was proposed to assign a male leader and a female leader to each of the aspects of a project so that each one could contribute from their vision.

**In relation to the technical skills that mobilize the projects**, the need to improve soft skills, such as teamwork and leadership, is highlighted. At the same time, the exchange between indigenous professionals is relevant when it comes to valuing their work careers, their studies and project leadership skills, putting their professional preparation at the service of their community and highlighting the importance of working in a network to leave installed capacities. The presence of traditional authorities also proves to be a source of



motivation for community participation in projects, including addressing issues of relevance to the success of projects when working on indigenous lands.

**The transmission of knowledge and the appropriate spaces for its dissemination** is of utmost importance, especially in the exchange with traditional scholars and doctors, where the spaces for exchange usually have a different format from that of workshops and trainings. At the same time, when disseminating equipment acquired by the projects is used, it is important to establish rules of management with the users to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings in its use.

**The value of the agroecological approach to the cultivation of the land is recovered**, enhancing what the communities already cultivate and fostering their decision-making capacity on what they want and what is appropriate to cultivate due to the characteristics of the land. Cultural relevance in the cultivation of the land implies unlearning universal rules and adapting to what is valid for indigenous peoples. Field schools with male and female participants and with the presence of nutritionists is a methodology that has been successful, and highlights the need to give constant and continuous monitoring of crops and breeding animals to give sustainability to orchards and farms.

**The projects showed the synergies** between Western practices and the indigenous worldview and ancestral traditions, representing values of complementarity and the generation of connections, integration and cohesion, with strengthening of governance in decision-making processes when they involve local or national non-indigenous authorities.



# Conclusions and reflections on the implementation of this fund

Based on the path traveled in the implementation of this fund and a process of reflection on the work of the SGP with indigenous peoples in Panama, we present some conclusions that we believe are worth sharing.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and confinement as a health response measure, **food sovereignty** was one of the major issues that indigenous communities considered necessary and relevant to address. The ability to secure food became a priority of life, so the rescue of native seeds, the regulation of wild hunting and the **reevaluation of indigenous cultivation practices** were cross-cutting themes in the construction of most of the projects.

In practice, this represented great challenges when it came to implementing practices that have worked in other territories of the country but that do not necessarily correspond to the daily habits of some communities. The need to be in constant contact

with crops necessitates a regular presence on the land where crops are grown, which can result in high costs for some communities whose farmland is separated from their daily residence.

At the same time, we highlight **the involvement of women** on farms in the face of the need to promote cultivation, becoming the great precursors of family gardens and the care of seeds. Although the discipline of care makes women key links in the link between the family and the land for the generation of food, it is necessary to open the discussion on how to carry out the cultivation of food without representing an extra burden on women's work in the home but looking for ways to support this work **from the unity and sisterhood of women and with the support of men for a robust care system.**

Another of the transversal axes of the implementation of this fund was the application of traditional medicine to face COVID-19, turning to the "medicine givers" of their cultures to work on



of the most relevant conclusions is the need to carry out translations that are cultural, that is, **a translation that involves not only letters and words** but also the work of understanding the cultural gaps between those who produce the messages and those to whom they are directed. It is in this act of cultural translation that the knowledge that indigenous cultures already store in their ancestral memory about the treatment of diseases in community can be valued.

**Cultural relevance** becomes one of the main conclusions of the implementation of this fund, where working with indigenous peoples implies considering the difference in governance systems, political conceptions, and systems of social and community organization when implementing international cooperation projects. The implementation of a project presupposes work logics to arrive at specific objectives that must be integrated into the vision of the authorities and their communities. For this reason, it is necessary to have a permanent, up-to-date and open dialogue with traditional organizations and authorities throughout the implementation of international funds.

One of the fundamental aspects of this fund was the **continuous networking**, from its birth from the "Collective of Indigenous Allies", to the constant sharing of progress and results. This was evidenced in the implementation of participatory **monitoring of the projects** where all organizations were part of the monitoring of the fund, while lessons learned and possibilities for replication were exchanged.

Finally, it should be noted that this fund granted financing to indigenous organizations or organizations that work with close ties in legally recognized indigenous territories, which represents the strengthening of indigenous organizations in the management of projects **to leave installed**

the indications of the Ministry of Health of Panama. Through these projects, the **great resilience of indigenous peoples** was evidenced by putting into practice what their communities already know about the impact of diseases on the body, the need for community solidarity and the implementation of internal governance systems to face diseases at the community level in complementarity to what were the recommendations of the MINSA.

It is important to highlight that losses during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic are not only material, but also roots, identity, bonds, and traditional knowledge are lost and degraded. That is why these projects are relevant when it comes to systematizing indigenous knowledge, since their valorization contributes to **the strengthening of their governance and the durability of their ancestry**.

Based on the translation into indigenous languages of COVID-19 protocols and hygiene measures, one

related to COVID-19 in indigenous languages on the SG

# Publications

## generated by

## the projects

capacities and equal opportunities in the implementation of projects led by them directly.

We share with you the knowledge management publications produced by the projects, the audio messages generated for COVID-19 prevention, and

other links to social networks and web pages generated through the implementation.



From the **ACEASPA** project, we share a Facebook post from the organization's account where you can find the photos of the Communicators Network, the equipment used and the trainings carried out.



From the same project, we share with you the Instagram of the **community radio of Siliko Creek**, through which the live broadcasts have been made



and where you can find publications and photos of the work of the community communicators.



From the project of the **Kunas United for Nabguana Association**, we share the website of the radio "Original Voices of Panama", where you can listen to the live radio, learn more about the organizations and radios that are part of this project and the news relevant to the reality of Panama and its indigenous peoples.



You can find the publications made by the projects and the audio messages



Organization	Dates	Amount awarded by the SG	Counterpart provided by the organization and the communities	Contact Person	Telephone	Email
<b>ACEASPA</b>	June 2021- April 2023	30,000.00	15,000.00 in kind	Daniel Holness Carrasco	6006-1443	bioalfabetizacionpty@gmail.com
<b>ACUN</b>	May 2021- April 2023	30,000.00	21,396.50 in kind	Blas Quintero	6982-67593	blaquinter61@gmail.com
<b>FPCI</b>	July 2021- July 2022	30,000.00	15,000.00 in kind	Onel Masardule	6122-2021	masardule@icloud.com
<b>FUNDEPW</b>	July 2021- March 2023	30,000.00	78,987.04 (66,199.00 in cash, 12,787 in kind)	Novel Carpio / Chenier Carpio	383-3078	novel_carpio@hotmail.com / cheniercarpio@hotmail.com
<b>IIDKY</b>	July 2021- August 2023	40,000.00	25,000.00 in kind	Heraclio Herrera	6007-5933	heraclio.herrera@gmail.com
<b>MJK</b>	May 2021- February 2022	30,000.00	30,000.00 in kind	Enildalia Martinez	6570-1863	movjuventudkuna@gmail.com / ehnyzahir0722@gmail.com
<b>Kunas United for Nabguana Association</b>	May 2021- May 2023	30,000.00	15,555.00 in kind	Jaime Rodríguez Smith	6639-0035	jaimekuna@gmail.com
<b>OMIUBP</b>	May 2021- February 2023	30,000.00	15,000.00 in kind	Deidamia Lopez	6004-0793	iguaidgilil@hotmail.com / omiubio@gmail.com

The counterpart of SGP projects is what communities, partner organizations and institutions contribute to make the project possible. The counterpart can be in cash (the money invested in the activities) or in kind (field work, participation in workshops and training, use of the organization's tools and equipment, contributions of materials or food).

The image is a vertical composition. The left half is dominated by a large, vibrant green leaf with prominent veins, filling the space. The right half shows a narrow river flowing through a dense, lush forest. The river is surrounded by large, moss-covered rocks, and the water appears to be moving over them, creating small rapids. The overall scene is a representation of a natural, indigenous environment.

**The Response  
to COVID-19  
in Panama's  
Indigenous  
Territories  
with the Small  
Grants Programme**