

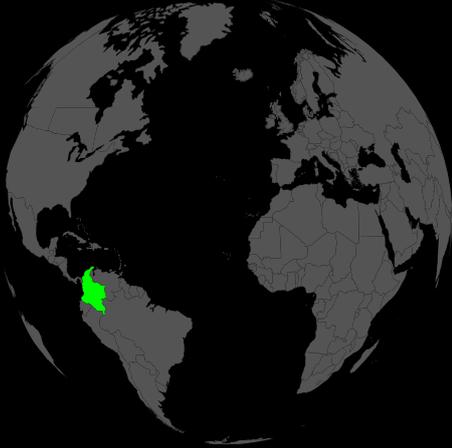


RFN, an investment case for Colombia

Upscaling innovative indigenous-led governance models, strengthening and uniting IPLCs for protection of the Colombian Amazon

Context

Colombia hosts the Amazon region's third-largest rainforest area. It is one of the world's most biologically diverse countries, with 52% of its land area covered by natural forests, 66% of which are rainforests in the Amazon region. Although much global attention has focused on Brazil's dismal record in safeguarding the rainforest, 140,000 hectares of the Colombian Amazon were destroyed in 2020 alone (Source: University of Maryland): this is equivalent to about 20 soccer pitches every hour and contributes to pushing the Amazon rainforest towards a "tipping point." That figure is more than triple the level in 2015—the year before the peace agreement was reached with FARC, the unintended outcome of which was an acceleration of deforestation, turning important parts of the Amazon into a mosaic of islands of jungle interspersed with vast cattle ranches. Because of the absence of state presence, Colombia has been experiencing a surge of illegal armed groups taking control of forest areas, also involving a significant raise in violations of human rights.



RFN IN COLOMBIA IN KEY FIGURES:

- ▶ Budget 2022: **USD 2,3 million**
- ▶ Number of trusted, long-term local partners: **5**
- ▶ Territories protected: **10.3 million hectares, storing 1.4 billion tons of carbon.**

Funding needs and opportunities

Indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities hold collective land rights to 53.4% of Colombia's forest areas. Their role in ensuring the protection and governance of the country's remaining native forest is crucial. The national authorities have signaled willingness to protect it, and several policy decisions point in the right direction. However, implementation is lagging and deforestation of tropical forest in Colombia is accelerating, with illegal actors engaging in massive land grabbing, as well as rapid and illegal conversion of land to agriculture and mining activities. On a more positive note, there is growing evidence that full legal recognition of IPLCs' collective rights over their forests results in sustained protection. The vision of RFN's Colombia Country Program is to halt deforestation in the Colombian Amazon while guaranteeing the human rights of IPLCs. To this end, RFN will step up our work with representative IPLC organizations and selected NGO partners working locally with IPLCs for the sustainable management of large contiguous rainforest areas in the Colombian Amazon, as well as upscaling our work towards targeted drivers of deforestation.

What will a US\$ 15 million investment achieve in Colombia over five years?

The “arch of deforestation” (Meta, Guaviare, Caqueta and parts of Putumayo departments in Central-Southern Colombia) is where Colombia is losing rainforests at the most alarming rate, due to land trafficking and conversion to agricultural land (for cattle ranching and palm oil production), threatening important protected areas. In Colombia’s Eastern Amazon, RFN and local partners Gaia and Etnollano have begun establishing and implementing the world’s first indigenous municipalities, fully integrated within the country’s public administration, national budget mechanisms, and governance structure. With this investment, RFN aims to catalyze the following outcomes by 2027:

- ▶ RFN and partners will implement a holistic approach to protecting Colombia’s remaining rainforest and biological corridors located in the “arch of deforestation” through monitoring, advocacy for effective implementation of existing legislation, strengthening of land rights for indigenous and peasant communities, combined with planning and governance.
- ▶ RFN will help partners create the conditions needed to finalize the indigenous municipal structures and mechanisms for achieving administrative decentralization and effective governance in the Eastern Colombian Amazon.
- ▶ RFN and partners will strengthen the recognition of indigenous land rights, governance, and the sustainable management of large rainforest areas, and will counter drivers of deforestation related to infrastructure development and oil extraction in Putumayo, a department with a high density of indigenous communities.

How we measure success

- ▶ Gradual reduction in deforestation rates in the Colombian Amazon through effective implementation of Colombian legislation protecting the remaining rainforest and the country’s international obligations under UNFCCC and CBD.
- ▶ Degree of reduction in deforestation in Guaviare and Caqueta departments, where some of the worst deforestation hotspots are found today.
- ▶ Continuous retention and increased storage of CO₂ in the Eastern Colombian Amazon, and a shift from CO₂ emissions to retention and carbon storage in the Western Colombian Amazon (areas of control: RFN project monitoring areas in defined rainforest corridors).
- ▶ Increased assignment of land rights to IPLCs in the Colombian Amazon by the responsible government office, in response to pending land claims.

Results to date

- ▶ Since 2019, RFN has supported the official establishment (still ongoing), effective governance, and stewardship of 15 Indigenous Municipalities in alliance with Gaia Foundation and Etnollano Foundation, covering an area of 10.3 million hectares of almost entirely intact rainforest, comprising 24% of Colombia’s Amazon rainforest area.
- ▶ Since 2018, our partner Foundation for Conservation and Sustainable Development (FCDS) has played a critical role in ensuring the passage of a new law against environmental crimes. This has led to the adoption of an ambitious law defining, for the first time, land trafficking as an environmental crime, and introducing jail sentences for deforestation.
- ▶ Since 2018, RFN has supported the strengthening of Colombian civil society so essential to the Peace Agreement, with several massive indigenous mobilizations (*mingas*) bringing together various sectors of civil society around the common struggle for recognition of Afro-descendants and indigenous rights, and better dialogue with Colombian authorities.
- ▶ RFN has built the capacity of indigenous leaders on territorial rights, business and human rights, and advocacy, supporting strategic local partners like Gaia Amazonas, and playing a central role in the mobilization of US\$ 3.4 million from Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative.



Why is RFN uniquely positioned to deliver

RFN's global role, our longstanding experience with advocacy, rainforest management, drivers of deforestation, and our role towards the Norwegian authorities—including advising on and monitoring the Joint Declaration of Intent on forests with Colombia—give us advantages put to the service of our partners and allies in Colombia. RFN has nurtured strategic relationships with the main indigenous peoples' and local community organizations, and helped these organizations grow and unite in the struggle to protect the Colombian Amazon.

RFN's network of partners in Colombia

RFN has been engaged in Colombia since 2016, focusing on the rainforest in the eastern Colombian Amazon and partnering with indigenous organizations as well as rights-based environmental NGOs.

• Asociación Ambiente y Sociedad (AAS) • Fundación para la Conservación y el Desarrollo Sostenible (FCDS) • Fundación Gaia Amazonas (Gaia Amazonas) • Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (ONIC) • Organización Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas de la Amazonía Colombiana (OPIAC) • Organización Zonal Indígena de Putumayo (OZIP).

COLOMBIAN RAINFOREST: KEY FIGURES

- ▶ World's fifth largest rainforest country (Amazon's third largest area of rainforest), with 53.3 million hectares of tropical rainforest, of which 63% were considered intact in 2016.
- ▶ Colombian intact rainforests store 4.75 billion tons of carbon in above the ground living biomass, equivalent to 17.3 billion tons of CO₂ emissions if these forest ecosystems were lost.

(Source: State of Rainforest Report 2021 based on 2016 forest cover data)

References

- ▶ Andreas Dahl-Jørgensen, NICFI
- ▶ Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, NORAD
- ▶ Kevin Currey, Ford Foundation
- ▶ David Kaimowitz, Tenure Facility

Contact us



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