



World Justice
Project

A VOICE FOR THE AMAZON

How environmental reporting is changing minds—and government policy—in Peru.

Photography by Deborah Espinosa

Excerpted from "A Voice for the Amazon," available in full at: www.worldjusticeproject.org

Deep in Peru's Amazon rainforest, an indigenous community of the Kukama Kukamilla tribe has created a fortress of green protected from illegal loggers, gold miners, and ranchers. With help from the Peruvian Environmental Law Society (whose initials in Spanish are SPDA), the native community of Puerto Prado was able to safeguard their land as a conservation area—a major feat for a spot on the planet where the environmental destruction can be seen from space.

Emma Tapullima is the community leader of Puerto Prado. Her community's livelihoods—primarily fishing, hunting, and agriculture—depend on a healthy environment. "This forest is our legacy for our children. We do not have much money, but we feel rich living here."



Above: Jimmy Carrillo (left), Communications Director, and Pedro Solano (right), Executive Director, stand in the headquarters of SPDA's office in Lima, Peru. Through its reporting on the growing conflicts surrounding extractive industries and indigenous communities, SPDA's website *Actualidad Ambiental* was the first successful environmental news site of its kind in Peru.

Tapullima sought the help of SPDA, an environmental law organization that has been working to protect the environment and strengthen natural resource governance in Peru for three decades. SPDA was able to help Puerto Prado become the first native community to get their land protected as a private conservation area.

SPDA featured Puerto Prado's story on their environmental news website, *Actualidad Ambiental*. The story caught the attention of other indigenous communities trying to protect their land and livelihoods, too, as investment in Peru's mining sector continues to rise; last year it reached

a record \$25 billion. Failure to protect indigenous communities from illegal mining and logging has led to bloody protests, as native tribes fought with their lives to protect their land.

Peru has struggled with regulatory enforcement around its natural resources, a large source of revenue for the country. Last year, Peru was forced to declare a state of emergency in the Amazon rainforest from excessive pollution.

Now, native communities have begun contacting Tapullima for help protecting their land, helping her become a recognized leader in the region and now Lieutenant Governor. The success of Puerto Prado has much to do with being featured on *Actualidad Ambiental*—the first successful environmental news source of its kind, revolutionizing how Peruvians learn about environmental issues. The website was a turning point for SPDA.



Left: SPDA's environmental news website, *Actualidad Ambiental*, launched at a pivotal moment in Peru—just as a surge in environmental conflicts intersected with the explosive growth of social media.

Right: The leader of Puerto Prado, Emma Tapullima, wanted future generations to be able to benefit from the native medicinal plants and animals in the rain forest that she grew up with. "This is our legacy for our children," she said.



In 2008, SPDA was invited to attend the World Justice Forum, a biennial event hosted by the World Justice Project (WJP) to bring together leaders from around the world to advance the rule of law. At the event, the WJP encourages participants from different sectors, countries, and professions to develop solutions to issues holding back their communities from equality and opportunity. SPDA realized they needed more than lawyers to affect environmental change—they also needed talented communicators.

Above, left: The community's livelihoods—primarily fishing, hunting, and agriculture—depend on a healthy environment. Last year, Peru declared an environmental state of emergency in the Amazon rain forest, home to one of the country's biggest oil fields, from excessive petroleum-related pollution.

With a seed grant from the WJP, SPDA hired a local journalist whose reporting they admired to lead the project. *Actualidad Ambiental* took off and put SPDA on the map in a big way, earning the SPDA a good reputation with journalists, researchers and policymakers alike.

Above, right: Although Peruvian law recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to their land, it still foresees the possibility of granting concessions over these lands if they are deemed to be of national interest.

"This has changed the way we think...We found that when we created a multi-disciplinary team, our work became more effective," said Pedro Solano, executive director. *"Now the way we make things happen is collaborative—with journalists, NGOs, and the government."*

At the World Justice Forum, SPDA realized they needed more than lawyers to affect environmental change—they also needed talented communicators.

More than 60% of the Peru's territory is covered by the Amazon rain forest, home to 300,000 indigenous people who depend on it for their livelihoods.





About This Photo Essay

This essay is part of an ongoing series documenting pilot programs incubated at World Justice Project (WJP) convenings and/or launched with WJP seed funding. Since its founding, WJP has provided network connections and over \$1,000,000 in funding to 80+ pilot programs on five continents. These practical, community-led solutions to discrimination, corruption, violence, and more represent a broad cross-section of disciplines and approaches to strengthening the rule of law worldwide. Pilot programs are catalogued on the WJP website, where they can be searched by geography and issue area.

About The World Justice Project

The World Justice Project (WJP) is an independent, multidisciplinary organization working to advance the rule of law around the globe. Establishing the rule of law is fundamental to achieving communities of opportunity and equity—communities that offer sustainable economic development, accountable government, and respect for fundamental rights.

Our work engages citizens and leaders worldwide and from all work disciplines to advance the rule of law. Through our mutually reinforcing programs of Research and Scholarship, the WJP Rule of Law Index®, and Engagement, WJP seeks to increase public awareness about the foundational importance of the rule of law, stimulate government reforms, and develop practical programs at the community level. Learn more: www.worldjusticeproject.org