

1. Name of the Group, Organization, or Individual being nominated

The Talamanca Initiative is a collaborative partnership, represented by Asociacion ANAI, Asociacion de Pequeños Productores de Talamanca (APPTA), and Corredor Biológico de Talamanca-Caribe (CBTC).

2. Nominee is best described as:

Asociacion ANAI is a Costa Rican non-profit, non-governmental organization.

APPTA is a farmer's cooperative and a regional level community-based organization, whose members are indigenous, campesino, and black Caribbean farmers.

CBTC is a consortium of indigenous and other community-based organizations, with the Costa Rican government's Ministry of the Environment as a non-voting member.

3. Initiative Description and Innovations: Provide a description of the initiative (i.e. its purpose, activities and output), with particular emphasis on the innovative aspects

The Talamanca Initiative is dedicated to supporting the integration of biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, sustainable socio-economic development, and community development in the Talamanca region of southeast Costa Rica. This initiative involves the collaboration and cooperation of over 20 grassroots, community-based organizations, many small-scale producers, and the Costa Rican Ministry of the Environment. ANAI, APPTA, and CBTC have provided strong leadership for this initiative in their over-20 years of existence. These three partner organizations, each with its own program and specific objectives, all share the common goal of improving quality of life in Talamanca through the preservation and environmentally-ethical use of its outstanding biodiversity and unique ecosystems. A common core belief is that the key to conservation and sustainable development is the successful management of these issues by the local people.

Talamanca is the region in the south of Costa Rica that stretches from the Caribbean to the continental divide in the central mountains, and borders on the southeast with Panama. It is the country's poorest region in socio-economic terms, but the richest in terms of biodiversity and tropical forest ecosystems, with almost 3 per cent of the world's known plant and animal species, including the country's greatest degree of endemism. Stretching from the highest point in the country to sea level, Talamanca's natural features include paramos, cloud forests, steep mountainsides, rich alluvial plains, mid altitude and lowland rainforests, large expanses of wetlands, and offshore, a variety of marine ecosystems including Costa Rica's only coral reef. The Amistad International Peace Park and its area of influence, where the Talamanca Initiative focuses its work, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Talamanca is home to more than half of Costa Rica's indigenous population, including peoples of the Bribri and Cabecar tribes, each with their own language and customs. The Hispanic/mestizo population is unusually diverse as well, due to historic and continuing immigration from various parts of Costa Rica and Central America. Along the coast the dominant group is English-speaking blacks of West Indian origin. Smaller numbers of immigrants from elsewhere have also established themselves there.

The Talamanca Initiative is based on five core beliefs:

- ⑩ No inherent contradiction exists between economic development and environmental conservation. If communities and nations are to thrive, development and conservation must take place together.
- ⑩ The best stewards of the tropical lowlands are the campesino and Indian farmers who have dedicated their lives to these lands.
- ⑩ All natural tropical areas that are not protected will be radically altered during our lifetime. We must work to protect these areas and preserve their biodiversity for future generations to enjoy.
- ⑩ The natural forest and other unique primary ecosystems are Talamanca's most economically valuable asset in the long term.
- ⑩ A successful strategy to address these issues must successfully integrate environmental, social, economic and organizational needs.

The Talamanca Initiative has put into practice a strategy that integrates biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development through activities that directly benefit the environment, the communities, the people, and the local economy. The three partner organizations highlighted in this nomination, ANAI, APPTA, and CBTC, have approached this challenge in complementary ways:

Asociación ANAI, founded in 1978, is a non-profit NGO focused on implementing integrated conservation and development programs; supporting community-based organizations in their establishment, sustainability, promotion, and stability; and sharing its experiences throughout Costa Rica and Central America for the benefit of local communities, regional socio-economic development, and preservation of biological diversity.

APPTA (Asociación de Pequeños Productores de Talamanca), founded in 1987, is a regional organic small farmer's cooperative that is making it possible for Talamancan small farmers to be successful in a competitive market, maximizing production and environmental benefits. APPTA actively promotes economically viable organic agro-ecosystems; processes and markets organic products from Talamanca's family farms (mostly cocoa and bananas, but the product range is expanding); and provides training to the Talamancan people in a way of life that is harmonious with indigenous culture, profitable, and environmentally ethical. APPTA is committed to consolidating agricultural systems as important elements of a regional strategy of biodiversity conservation.

The **CBTC** (Corredor Biológico Talamanca-Caribe), founded in 1992, is a consortium of community-based organizations (including ANAI and APPTA) that is working to consolidate and preserve a unique forested corridor that stretches from the continental divide in the Talamanca mountain range to the Caribbean sea, an area of major importance for many endangered species. CBTC works to protect this land (much of which is privately owned) through conservation measures, environmental education, and the promotion of biodiversity-friendly productive activities. CBTC is also a forum for local organizations to gain information, debate and analyze important local and regional issues, and make collaborative decisions on how to best address these issues.

Examples of our combined work in the areas of conservation, economic development, training and education, organizational development, and advocacy/sharing are outlined below.

CONSERVATION

The **Gandoca-Manzanillo National Wildlife Refuge**, stretching for 30 km along the Caribbean coast, was established in 1985, in partnership with the Costa Rican Ministry of the Environment. This refuge (now an officially recognized RAMSAR site) protects many species of endemic plants and animals, serves as Costa Rica's last remaining refuge for manatees and other endangered species, and contains a diversity of unique wetland ecosystems found nowhere else in the country. A co-management plan implemented in the refuge (the first of its kind in a Costa Rican protected area) has served as a model of communities, NGOs, and governments working together for the benefit of local people and the area's unique biological resources.

The Talamanca Marine Turtle Conservation Program, started in 1992 in the community of Gandoca, has saved thousands of leatherback, green, and hawksbill turtle eggs from predation and poaching, bringing stability back to the local populations of these endangered animals. Sea turtle conservation has become the economic motor for this community, generating 6 times more income than was previously generated from the harvesting and selling of turtle eggs, through the provision of services to the project volunteers and ecotourists. As one of the most successful projects of its kind in the world, Gandoca has become a center for the training of turtle conservationists throughout Central America and the Caribbean.

Scientific validation of the role that small farm agro-ecosystems can play in biodiversity conservation has been achieved through various research initiatives, the most notable having been published jointly with The Nature Conservancy, entitled "Cacao as Crop and Conservation

Tool in Latin America: Addressing the Needs of Farmers and Forest Biodiversity" (Parrish et al, 1999), which illustrates the importance of these agro-ecosystems as integral parts of an overall conservation strategy that simultaneously protects biodiversity and improves economic prospects. As habitat for a wide variety of plants and animals, these systems are an important complement to primary and secondary forest habitats, and create wildlife corridors linking conservation areas. The opportunities that this presents for marketing certain products as "environmentally friendly" and "bird friendly", with consequently higher revenue for small farmers, are being actively pursued.

Reforestation with native tree species has been carried out by more than 1,600 farm families.

115 small farmers are receiving **carbon offset payments** for conserving over 6,000 hectares of their forests.

Through a **participatory biomonitoring initiative** focused on fresh water streams, local communities are **gathering** valuable information for appropriate land-use planning and decision making.

Central America's only **permanent raptor migration monitoring program** has recorded more than 2.9 million raptors per season, becoming not only the second highest count in the world, but also a living laboratory for conservation education and a new opportunity for integrating conservation with eco-tourism initiatives.

Numerous **scientific, conservation and sustainable development oriented studies** have been carried out, including development of a Rapid Ecological Assessment, Site Conservation Planning, the identification of new species, the ecology of estuarine habitat use by tarpon, sustainable forest management planning, and biological inventories of different taxa and ecosystems.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Organic crop diversification for Talamanca's family farms was a main focus of work in the early to mid-1980's. Previously, small farmers had been dependent on cocoa as their only cash crop. After the arrival of a new fungal disease, monila, many local farmers, left without any other resources or options, were forced to sell their land or harvest their trees for lumber. Using community nurseries as a means of producing seedlings locally, as community training centers, and as focal points for community organization, local farms were diversified, creating new opportunities to allow small farmers to stay on their land and maintain their traditional way of life. Now, over 1,500 Talamancan **farmers have established organic agro-ecosystems, combining commercial crops with food security strategies**, in a multi-story planting system that mimics the structure and function of the rainforest.

Additionally, **farmers have been trained** in managing the new crops and agricultural systems, creating many **new jobs** on their productive, labor-intensive family farms while providing significant **environmental benefits** such as improved soil and water quality, biodiversity habitat, carbon dioxide fixation and improved community health.

APPTA has developed a local processing infrastructure for organic cacao and bananas, quality control checks, marketing strategies, and an organic certification program, becoming **the largest volume producer and exporter of organic products in Central America**. In addition to creating completely new markets for some products, the price premium farmers are receiving for their certified organic products ranges from 15- 60%.

8 community credit and loan associations have been formed.

Over 300 farmers have received clear **land titles** in the buffer zone of the Gandoca Manzanillo National Wildlife Refuge.

Disaster assistance (food, water, medicine, emergency shelter) and housing construction after the 1991 earthquake (7.4 on the Richter scale), with **over 300 new houses and 500 repaired houses**.

Projects throughout the region to improve basic needs including **community potable water systems** serving 10 communities, and other **community infrastructure** (schools, community centers, etc.)

COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM

For over 10 years, valuable **training** designed to help the local people learn the skills necessary to develop **community-based ecotourism initiatives** has been held in Talamanca, including training in financial management, small business operation, computer technology, ecology, biology, natural history, and tourism management.

As a result, **13 community eco-tourism ventures** have been established in Talamanca, and are a growing source of income for local people and their organizations. Five ecotourism lodges (CASACODE, Kekoldi, ACODEFO, ASODECC, and Yorkin) are all **owned and managed by community organizations** whose objectives include conservation, sustainable economic development, community development, and (in the case of the indigenous community groups) protection of cultural traditions. The Gandoca community ecotourism venture, managed by local families, provides homestays, hotels, and services for ecotourists and volunteers on the ANAI Sea Turtle Conservation. The Nature Guides association for the village of Manzanillo, managed by an executive committee of member guides, provides local guide services. Six other community-based ventures are beginning to provide services of different kinds. All of these groups are committed to the ideal of ecotourism as both a livelihood and a means for biodiversity and ecosystem conservation.

In 1998, 17 local organizations formed the **Talamancan Community Ecotourism Network**, a collaborative effort which facilitates close organizational relations, product development, information/idea sharing, training, collaborative planning, production of promotional media, and participation in ecotourism fairs.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

In 1991, a locally-run **Regional Training Center (Finca Educativa)** was established in the Talamanca Indigenous Reserve. This serves over 2,000 people per year, providing courses and workshops in agriculture, health, appropriate technology, conservation, and leadership for the local indigenous communities. Finca Educativa is managed by a local board of directors and executive committee, whose current focus is consolidating the center's financial and institutional sustainability.

Two separate **Leadership Training** programs have been carried out (one in the late 1980's, the second one currently), focusing on empowering local people to function as community leaders, which has served, among other things, to strengthen community based organizations.

Environmental Education in conjunction with local primary schools has been a constant since the early 1990's. Equally important in terms of environmental education results has been the active participation of women, men, and children in the TI's conservation and sustainable development programs. As a result, the Talamanca people have an exceptional awareness and interest in the environmental issues that challenge the region today.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The TI has brought about the creation and growth - at the regional and community levels - of more than 20 grassroots conservation and development organizations, dedicated to maintaining thriving human communities and a healthy, natural environment. Significant participation and leadership by women has been achieved in most organizations.

ADVOCACY / SHARING

Working together with respect and commitment is one of our guiding principles. We have promoted the creation of partnerships, and have conscientiously participated in partnerships sponsored by others. We are active members of the IUCN, the Latin American Network of Small and Medium Cocoa Producers Organizations, the Latin American Network of Small Banana Farmers and many Costa Rican forums. We have various collaborations with Costa Rican and other universities.

We **actively participate** in various forums, conferences, and workshops in promoting strategies, actions, policies and laws that further the integration of socio-economic development and biodiversity conservation throughout the Neo-tropics. Through **sharing and disseminating** the Talamanca model, the lessons learned, and the knowledge and experience gained through this process, the TI strives to inspire, encourage, and support other organizations and communities to develop similar processes.

The TI has provided **leadership at many levels beyond Talamanca**, including the main creative energy **for establishing and consolidating organizations** such as the Costa Rican Sea Turtle Conservation Network and the Central American Sea Turtle Conservation Network. Other organizations in which key members from the TI have provided leadership include JUNAFORCA (National Campesino Forestry Consortium), the GEF-SGP for Costa Rica, the Atlantic Regional Environmental Council, ACTUAR (the National Association of Community Ecotourism Initiatives), WIDECAS (Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network), and the Latin American Network for Alternative Development.

We sponsor **interns and students from around the world**; currently or recently on-site are interns from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina, Spain, Portugal, Holland, Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Japan, the United States, Israel and Kenya.

Tangible results of partnerships beyond Talamanca include organic certification and higher prices paid to more than 2,000 mostly indigenous farmers in Bocas del Toro, Panama, through work together with the Cooperativa de Cacao Bocatoreña (COCABO), and the establishment of community-based sea turtle conservation programs in 9 other sites throughout Central America. Work with carbon offset payments for conservation initiatives by small farmers has been extended to the entire Atlantic drainage area of La Amistad International Peace Park.

On a local level, our work has led to **environmental advocacy and citizen participation in environmental actions**. Conservation of biodiversity and eco-systems are now understandable, even commonplace, concepts in much of Talamanca. The most recent sustained action by the local population and their organizations forced the Costa Rican government to reject an environmental impact statement, effectively ending oil drilling off the Caribbean coast. Local people are committed to creating new approaches that will provide sustainable socio-economic development while protecting their natural environment and unique biological resources.

4. Poverty Reduction:

How has the initiative improved the socio-economic conditions and well-being of the community?

- ⑩ More than 1,500 farm families produce organic cocoa, bananas, fruits and root crops in agro-ecosystems and process them locally, providing environmental benefits along with substantially greater income and economic stability. These benefits reach even the most remote communities. Local processing creates new jobs, and the marketing of these products as organic and locally-grown results in significantly higher revenue for the farmers.
- ⑩ The integration of scientific research, conservation and ecotourism has become the main economic activity in the village of Gandoca, generating 6 times the income previously produced by poaching all of the turtle eggs.
- ⑩ Community Ecotourism Initiatives (lodges, guides, transportation and other services) are providing profitable and sustainable livelihoods for many Talamancan families.
- ⑩ Co-management of the Gandoca Manzanillo National Wildlife Refuge is empowering local communities and NGOs, new decision-makers in what was once the exclusive domain of the government.
- ⑩ Training of many kinds is helping people prepare for new jobs and better manage their family enterprises.
- ⑩ Training and strategic support has resulted in stronger organizations and better-managed community initiatives.
- ⑩ The creation and strengthening of regional and community organizations is providing jobs and a diversity of social benefits.
- ⑩ Communities have seen the tangible results of their earlier work, which has helped them develop a pro-active approach and empowered them to change their reality for the benefit of their, and their children's, future.

5. Biodiversity Impacts:

How has the initiative contributed to the conservation or sustainable use of biodiversity and/or to the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from genetic resources?

- ⑩ Organic agro-ecosystems are providing important habitat for local biodiversity and linking protected areas.
- ⑩ The economic benefits derived from diverse, organic ecosystems reach even the most isolated communities.
- ⑩ The Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge, created as a direct result of TI actions, preserves unique forest and wetland ecosystems and protects endangered species habitats, also providing nearby low-income communities with the benefit of using the refuge's rich biological resources as a focus for local ecotourism initiatives.
- ⑩ Talamanca is one of the few places in the world where leatherback sea turtle populations are growing.
- ⑩ The annual raptor migration (second largest in the world) is becoming a magnet for avitourists, and an incentive to maintain forest in a natural state.
- ⑩ The solidification of a Biological Corridor from the continental divide to the sea has preserved precious habitat for several endangered species.
- ⑩ Ecotourism benefits are beginning to flow to poor, marginalized communities.
- ⑩ The TI has helped more than 115 small farmers qualify for payment of carbon offset credits, achieving a more equitable distribution of this benefit.
- ⑩ The community nurseries shared agrobiodiversity among all the region's farm families, who represent the entire range of cultures and socio-economic situations.

6. Partnerships

Our collaborative approach requires strong networks of dedicated people and organizations. APPTA is an association of farmers working together to address common issues, the CBTC is a consortium of diverse community-based groups collaborating in the achievement of regional goals, and ANAI is a common link and partner for more than 20 of Talamanca's grassroots organizations.

The most important partnerships are those that have been developed and strengthened within and among the communities of Talamanca. These ties are the result of real life exchanges evolving from our work together. The TI fosters an environment where project staff, local people

of all cultures, grassroots organizations, local authorities, business-people, academics, and professionals work together "at the same table".

The key partnerships established beyond Talamanca (mentioned in #3) are also central to the structure and functions of the TI. Our working relationships extend to many more organizations, institutions and private enterprises than mentioned; however a listing does not seem appropriate. The importance exists in the richness of the exchange, the mutual benefits, the sharing of lessons learned, the creation of hope for a better future, and the support for practical initiatives that will yield tangible results.

7. Sustainability:

How long has this initiative been in operation? Since 1983.

What are the key social, institutional, financial, and ecological elements that make this initiative sustainable?

- ⑩ Almost all local organizations are based on an entrepreneurial activity, providing financial stability and sustainability, while supporting and subsidizing environmental and social aspects of the work.
- ⑩ The initiative has focused on integrating environmental, economic, social and organizational elements. Each activity, project, and program integrates all of these aspects while maintaining both a community and a regional perspective.
- ⑩ The process has focused on activities that provide tangible results and benefits.
- ⑩ A culture and practice of collaboration and cooperation has been fostered.
- ⑩ The key people have made a long-term commitment that is not limited by time nor external funding.
- ⑩ Local people have received theoretical and practical training, developing the capability to effectively design, manage and consolidate their own projects.
- ⑩ There is deep mutual respect for the cultural and social heritage of the various groups in Talamanca, and initiatives are tailored accordingly.
- ⑩ There is high participation of local women, men and young people.
- ⑩ The TI has had strong, consistent leadership and a dedicated staff.
- ⑩ The organizations have developed resiliency and the ability to adapt to changing conditions.
- ⑩ There are active partnerships with almost all local community organizations, relevant governmental institutions, private businesses and landowners.
- ⑩ The long-term commitment to Talamanca has slowly cultivated a sentiment of loyalty to the natural resources by many of its people, which is very real (not just based on financial gain). There are youth of 20 years that have grown up with the concept and practice of linking biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

8. Other Information:

Even more important than the many tangible results and impacts mentioned above is the ongoing process in Talamanca. Many people are actively creating a better present and future, with productive activities that are environmentally-friendly and able to compete in the world marketplace. They have taken responsibility for maintaining a healthy environment, strong local organizations, local economic stability, and respect for the different cultures that thrive in Talamanca.

The synergy created from the Talamancan people's love for their culture, families, and land, together with the long term commitment of capable professionals, has transformed this region into a model with much to share as the world faces the shared crisis of poverty and environmental degradation. People-to-people sharing of the TI experiences has already led to many tangible results beyond Talamanca, and this will grow as other regions of the world realize the power that dedicated grassroots organizations wield against biodiversity loss and tropical ecosystem degradation.

This process is alive, struggling with the issues of today and tomorrow. It continues to be a very participatory and creative process. A true integration of social, economic, cultural,

organizational and environmental needs requires a monumental and continual effort, whereas quick and easy approaches lead to short-lived solutions. The people of Talamanca have accepted this challenge, and are today working hard to establish and consolidate new approaches to living that produce immediate tangible results and also promise a better future. They can see that their efforts are already making a difference.

9.

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