



“To lose our rainforest would mean the loss of our identity as a culture and as a people.”

Above: An open-air market in Otavalo, Ecuador.

TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS, AND BACK AGAIN.

When local indigenous leaders like Randy Borman attend international policy forums—like the U.N. conference on biodiversity conservation in Bonn, Germany—policy-makers take note. It’s a circular process: while decisions made at international conferences eventually affect on-the-ground conservation, the decision-makers can only formulate authentic policy by hearing from the ground which policies would be effective.



Left: Randy Borman.



Randy Borman is a charter member of the Centro Cofán Zabalo community and the executive director of the Fundación para la Sobrevivencia del Pueblo Cofán in Ecuador.

“The Cofán Nation reaches back to pre-Inca times. We have maintained a deep relationship with our rainforest environment.

Half of the Cofán language describes our environment and our relationship with it. To lose our rainforest would mean the loss of our identity as a culture and as a people.

The international forum ensures that the world begins to take on the responsibility of conservation. This in turn creates policies that trickle down to local communities and indigenous groups. In the long run, international policies do affect what happens at the ground level.

Local communities should not be expected to carry the load of protecting these forests on their own. This global problem should involve global-level solutions, including mechanisms that will allow indigenous communities to take on the frontline task of local management of the forests.

Government policy in Ecuador is increasingly recognizing this reality. While indigenous leaders cannot be credited with making this happen by ourselves, I think we have had an influence in making this come about.”