



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

INTERAMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE

Letter from the Directors



Astrid Puentes
Co-Executive Director



Anna Cederstav
Co-Executive Director

This year's unprecedented events have forced us all to slow down and think deeply about our lives, families, and futures; about the people and places we hold most dear.

The pandemic, climate crisis, and global economic decline have and will hit some of us far harder than others, laying bare systemic inequalities built into the very fabric of our societies. It's clear that we can't go back.

Yet governments and industry across Latin America are pushing an economic recovery based on business as usual, entrenched in resource extraction and megaprojects that destroy our natural environment and harm the communities that best protect it.

As global citizens, we must ask ourselves: What's next?

At AIDA, we believe there's another way. We have the opportunity to build a better world, collectively, and we know AIDA's team of attorneys and scientists can help get us there.

That's why we're working to bring climate cases before the courts, advocating for a just transition away from fossil fuels while holding governments and financial institutions accountable, and strengthening land rights by working together with our planet's greatest stewards—the indigenous and traditional communities who know it best.

Through decades of work, we've learned that there can be no justice until the most vulnerable among us are included as part of the solution.

Creating a just future will require innovation and tenacity, and it needs all of us to show up. We invite you to join us for what lies ahead.

Sincerely,

Astrid Puentes *Anna Cederstav*



Safeguarding the Natural Places of the Americas

Like the Mesoamerican reef, which extends for more than 600 miles along four countries, interconnected Latin American ecosystems form the backbone of the region's biodiversity.

From rugged coastlines or sandy beaches, through wetlands or tropical forests, to the high peaks of the Andes Mountains—precious natural places and the species they shelter connect us to our land, regulate the climate, and provide drinking water and nourishment.

To preserve these places, as we learn from traditional and indigenous communities, is to protect life on this planet.

The cases AIDA takes help conserve natural environments throughout the Americas, support the communities that defend them, and promote a healthier and more just and resilient region.

AIDA by the Numbers, FY19-20

10,000+

allies engaged in webinars,
workshops and exchanges

7,500,000+

views of our reports, blog,
social media and websites

\$1,684,519

total revenue



Toward Responsible Financing

“We consider it essential that banks, monetary funds, and other financial institutions account for the likely impacts of the projects they finance,” AIDA attorney Marcella Ribeiro says with conviction.

One real example of these impacts is the construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon, which led to the forced displacement of nearly 20,000 people, including traditional populations whose homes were submerged.

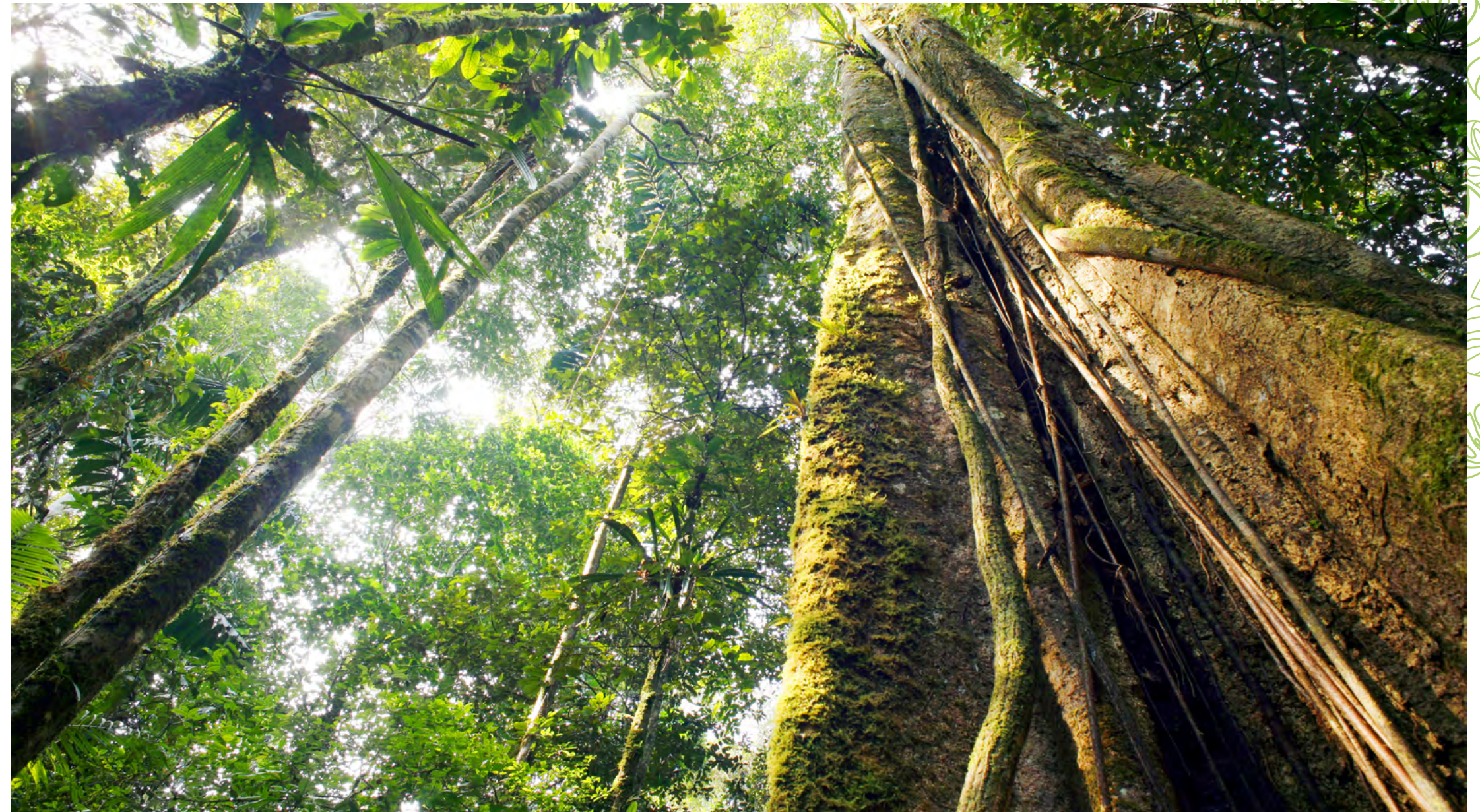
The dam also caused the disintegration of indigenous peoples’ social structures and deterioration of their livelihoods.

These consequences are unacceptable to Norway’s Government Pension Fund, one of the largest investment funds in the world.

That’s why, last May, the fund excluded Eletrobras—which owns almost half of the hydroelectric plant and controls the consortium that financed the project—from its investment portfolio.

This considerable 74 million dollar divestment sets an important example for other investors and sends a clear message to Eletrobras regarding the need to improve its performance.

The Norwegian Fund operates under ethical guidelines and eliminates companies that do not respect them from its portfolio. The fund followed the recommendations of its Ethics Council, which



found that Eletrobras incurred an “unacceptable risk” of contributing to serious and systematic human rights violations through its involvement in Belo Monte.

Marcella, on behalf of AIDA and as part of a joint effort by civil society organizations, had informed the Council about the situation of the indigenous and riverine populations affected by Belo Monte—whose struggle we have supported for years—and the national and international legal actions brought against the project.

We did this because it is clear that every financial institution must respect human rights and prevent their investments from generating human rights abuses.

The Norwegian Fund’s decision is an important precedent against funding unsustainable and misnamed “development” projects like Belo Monte.

“Accountability is key to preventing investments that damage human rights and the environment,” Marcella says, “and to show that responsible and ethical financing is possible.”



“We consider it essential that banks, monetary funds, and other financial institutions account for the likely impacts of the projects they finance.”

Hand in Hand with Communities

AIDA's strength comes from the people we support and learn from every day. To mutual benefit, our lawyers, scientists, and communicators work closely with indigenous and traditional communities, women, and activists defending their lands, culture, and ways of life.

They share with us the ancestral wisdom behind their connection to the Earth, demonstrate the courage it takes to uphold that wisdom in the face of great risk, and embody a commitment to solving urgent social and environmental problems with respect for gender equity and human rights.



“Our safety lies in our networks, our understanding of different experiences and our ability to weave bridges of knowledge and expertise.”



Learning to Protect Our Partners and Ourselves

Marcelina is an indigenous woman with character and conviction. She lives in a village hidden in the mountains of western Mexico. She is a leader and voice of the movement to defend her local river and sacred sites from the damages of government-promoted energy projects.

Last October, she traveled to Bogotá, Colombia, to meet with more than 70 environmental defenders from 11 Latin American countries at an event convened by AIDA. There, she connected her struggle with that of other people—indigenous, rural, and Afro-descendant—who, like her, protect nature, territories, and their fundamental rights.

In the region consistently ranked as the most dangerous globally for environmental defenders, AIDA successfully took on the challenge of bringing together a diverse group of guardians to collectively build a safer future.

It was a fruitful exchange of experiences regarding situations of risk and best practices for enhancing security.

“Our safety lies in our networks, our understanding of different experiences and our ability to weave bridges of knowledge and expertise,” expressed one of the defenders.

Liliana Ávila, senior attorney at AIDA, was satisfied with the active participation in the meeting and the valuable conclusions that were reached—among them, the importance of considering the gender approach, and the need to strengthen self-care and community protection.

“There was a richness in the exchange that came together naturally,” she said. “We wanted everyone to learn from their own stories, but also to get away from them and be able to see that there are different ways to protect each other, including strategies to demand that states provide immediate protection and stop the violence.”

A Women's Circle of Indigenous Attorneys

“Opportunities for women in Guatemala, like many parts of the world, have been hard fought for, and for indigenous women doubly so,” explained Jovita Tzul.

Jovita is a Mayan attorney who works to defend the rights and territory of indigenous communities throughout Guatemala.

Together with AIDA attorneys Liliana Ávila and Rosa Peña, she hosted indigenous attorneys from across her country in a workshop last August.

From the Western Highlands to the jungles of Petén, they traveled to the capital to connect with colleagues in a growing community of attorneys from districts that have been historically absent from the halls of power, in spite of representing nearly half of the country.

The event culminated in the first women's circle of indigenous attorneys in Guatemala—women who are leading the fight to defend ancestral territories and cultures while also confronting social challenges.

For her part, Jovita, along with AIDA and others, has legally accompanied the peaceful resistance of the microregion of Ixquis against the large dams threatening their land and water. In doing so, she's also helped position and strengthen the local women's resistance in defense of their territory.

The circle, designed for sharing and mutual enrichment, revealed that the fight for climate and environmental justice is also a fight against racism and sexism.



Structural racism and ingrained sexism, Jovita explained, have in the past relegated indigenous women to subservient roles in a patriarchal society. But these women, her generation, are reclaiming the power that is found in their identity.

In the circle, the women found connection in their shared stories of determination, of perseverance, and of the struggle for the rights of their people.

“One can't seek strength from where it was taken, one has to look for it where it originated,”

she said. “We obtained our strength from our ancestors—I cannot deny who they are, so I don't deny myself.”

Even their choice of clothing—many dress in the traditional Mayan traje when they go before judges or litigate a case—is a political stance in a world created by and for men, Jovita explained.

“It's a way of putting our mothers, our grandmothers, in the place they deserve, and of bringing them with us before the high courts of this nation.”



“Opportunities for women in Guatemala, like many parts of the world, have been hard fought for, and for indigenous women doubly so.”

Protecting the “Heart of the World”



The heart of the world is not alone—four indigenous guardians, the “black line,” Decree 1500/18, and thousands of Colombians protect it.

The Wiwa, Arhuaco, Kankuamo and Kogui peoples tell us that life and everything we know originated in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. That’s why they refer to this sacred mountain range as the “heart of the world.” Without its heartbeat, there would be no air or fire, animals, people or food. The people of the Sierra are its ancestral guardians.

The borders of the heart are delimited by the “black line,” which is drawn via the union of 348 georeferenced sacred sites, and in which history,

culture and biodiversity converge. Colombia’s National Decree 1500/18 recognizes the importance of this place, protects it from intervention, and is the result of twenty years of work by indigenous communities.

Nevertheless, the region is threatened by violence along with hundreds of mining projects and other extractive activities. When we learned that the nullification of Decree 1500 was requested before the Council of State, we mobilized—guided, as always, by its guardians.

In July, thousands of hearts around the world beat together with the heart of the Sierra Nevada.

Indigenous leaders joined forces with the Friends of the Sierra, an alliance that includes AIDA, to defend the decree. We called on citizens to share #1500Latidos (heart beats) for the “heart of the world.” The response was inspiring!

Environmentalists, advocates, local organizations, university groups, celebrities like Carlos Vives, Marcela Carvajal, Dr. Krápula, the Rolling Ruanas, and thousands of other Colombians joined the call to protect the Sierra Nevada.

On the social network Twitter, the campaign was the most discussed topic of the day in Colombia. In response, local, national and international media including the BBC and DW provided in-depth coverage of the threats facing the Sierra Nevada and its communities.

Together we showed the Colombian government that the “heart of the world” never beats alone.

In November, we received two pieces of good news: the Council of State agreed to officially include the four indigenous communities in the legal process so that they can argue against nullification of the decree, and decided to deny the request for a provisional suspension of the Decree while the case is heard.

Now, the protection of the “heart of the world” is in the hands of the Colombian Council of State.



The Wiwa, Arhuaco, Kankuamo and Kogui peoples tell us that life and everything we know originated in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. That’s why they refer to this sacred mountain range as the “heart of the world.”



Litigating for Our Future

Rarely do we have an opportunity to shape the future. Today, we know our planet is ailing, and we understand what's required for the cure. What's missing is the implementation. In the face of this crisis—we need action!

That's what climate litigation is all about: demanding in the courts that those who caused the climate crisis take responsibility and adopt measures to address the threat.

In the United States alone, there are more than 800 lawsuits for the climate, with an additional 250 globally. Dozens are becoming benchmarks and setting precedents that force urgently needed changes.

"In Latin America, to apply effective climate litigation strategies, we need more trained attorneys who understand the national contexts and have the resources needed to handle key cases, with all the technical and social complexity involved," says Javier Davalos, senior attorney for AIDA's Climate Change program.

With this in mind, AIDA has been building a climate litigation community of practice, launched in 2018. It's a space for mutual support and training that brings together advocates demanding fair climate actions in representation of rural and urban communities, women, youth, Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples, among others.

Some climate lawsuits call on governments to take climate action, others sue corporations for their



responsibility in the crisis, and still others seek redress for serious human rights violations. There are many paths, but the objective is the same: climate justice, and the guarantee of a dignified future for all.

At AIDA, we help develop and strengthen arguments related to climate change, as well as legal strategies that address problems like the use of coal, fracking, air pollution, and legal barriers preventing the advancement of renewable energy.

Building knowledge is essential to tackling these issues. Interdisciplinary teams develop the arguments to bring to court, applying both law and science.

"The climate litigation that is emerging in Latin America uses the law and scientific knowledge to make climate action that respects human rights an obligation, not just an act of good faith," says Javier. "Only from there can we build the future we want for the region and the planet."



"We need more trained attorneys who understand the national contexts and have the support to handle key cases, with all the technical and social complexity involved."

Our Vision

In seeking a more just world, two elements stand out for AIDA: the environment and our climate. That's why we work in defense of the rights of communities affected by environmental degradation, especially the most vulnerable. And it's what motivates us to stop activities that aggravate the climate crisis, while promoting sustainable alternatives that take human rights into account.

Under this broad scheme, and drawing on our strengths working with the law, science, and public participation, AIDA makes diverse and strategic contributions.



Defending traditional and indigenous communities



Safeguarding natural systems that reduce and mitigate the impacts of climate change



Protecting environmental defenders



Bringing clean energy to Latin America



Advocating for healthy air

Our Team

All of our attorneys were born in Latin America and work in the region, as do most of the other members of our team. Our team members work virtually from eight countries in South, Central, and North America.

We provide fellowships and internships to mentor the next generation of leaders. This year, AIDA trained 24 interns in the defense of the environment and human rights.

 **6**
MEN

 **25**
WOMEN



SCIENTISTS



3

ATTORNEYS



17

ADMINISTRATORS



5

COMMUNICATORS



4

FUNDRAISERS



2

Financials

How does AIDA spend donations?

ADMINISTRATION



FUNDRAISING



PROGRAMS



STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES AND CHANGE IN NET ASSETS

	FY 19	FY 20
REVENUES		
Grants	1,387,163	1,198,586
Donations	142,416	145,121
Investment Income	711	691
Program Service Revenue	88,081	65,056
Donated Services and Facilities ¹	130,384	275,066
TOTAL REVENUES	1,748,755	1,684,519
EXPENSES		
Program	1,026,494	1,132,268
Fundraising	78,593	24,660
Administrative Expenses	77,953	105,070
Donated Services and Facilities ¹	130,384	275,066
TOTAL EXPENSES	1,313,424	1,537,064
NET ORDINARY REVENUES	435,331	147,455
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS²	435,331	147,455

¹ AIDA receives significant in-kind donations of professional time as well as office costs, materials, and equipment from AIDA participating organizations, particularly Earthjustice. Numerous professional volunteers and interns also contribute time and resources to AIDA. These contributions are valued at fair market value and shown in the Financial Statements as "Donated Services and Facilities."

² Because AIDA receives multi-year grants, a positive change in net assets results from receipt of funds that are designated for use in future years.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	31-jul-19	31-jul-20
ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,548,189	1,711,197
Accounts receivable	415,590	389,643
Prepaid Expenses	12,247	526
Fixed Assets	1,097	1,284
TOTAL ASSETS	1,977,123	2,102,650
LIABILITIES		
Accounts payable	93,178	221,779
Other Payables	130,271	
Credit cards payable	27,985	7,420
TOTAL LIABILITIES	251,434	229,199
NET ASSETS		
Unrestricted Net assets	762,875	858,577
Temporarily restricted	962,814	1,014,874
TOTAL NET ASSETS	1,725,689	1,873,451
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	1,977,123	2,102,650

