



SACRED SIERRA

PROTECTING
THE HEARTH
OF THE WORLD

The livelihoods of coffee communities are increasingly at risk. How do they cope with coffee price volatility, poor labour conditions and the impact of climate change all at once? In Colombia, ANEI initiated the Sacred Sierra coffeelands programme, to demonstrate their model for sustainable production and trade. It is based on local ownership, indigenous values, rural job creation and regenerative agricultural practices. This document shares the importance of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta landscape and is an invitation to join a movement to protect the Heart of the World.

Heart of the world

The Sierra Nevada de Santa Maria is home to more than 50.000 inhabitants among four indigenous communities, direct descendants of the ancient Tayrona culture. This landscapes is a place of worship - no less worthy of veneration than a temple, church, or mosque. As guardians of the earth, they believe it is their duty to protect natural resources and show an ecological alternative to industrialized societies. To the indigenous communities of this Sierra, this landscape is the literal, beating heart of the world.

ANEI

ANEI was established in 1995 and is the organization of native agro-ecological farmers in the coffeelands of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. It is led by Aurora Izquierdo, the first Arhuaca native woman to earn a degree in agronomy. Currently, ANEI sources from over 500 farming families and this Fairtrade cooperative is Colombia's largest exporter of organic coffee.

UNESCO Biosphere reserve

The Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta is the highest coastal mountain range in the world. Shaped like a pyramid the mountain climbs through multiple ecological zones. From the wetlands and mangroves along the coast, through tropical rain forests, deserts and alpine tundra, until finally reaching the snow-capped peaks. Because of the

exceptional set of bio-cultural characteristics, UNESCO declared the region a Biosphere Reserve of Man and Humanity in 1979. The region is a recognized biodiversity hotspot and one of the world's most irreplaceable protected areas for conservation of threatened species.

Sierra Nevada under attack

Despite its protected status and the success of ANEI, the coffeelands are under constant pressure, experiencing high rates of deforestation and environmental degradation due to cattle grazing, mining, mass tourism and the construction of mega dams. The increasing impact of climate change is further jeopardizing the livelihoods of the communities and biodiversity of the land.

Elder & Younger brothers

The communities in the region refer to themselves as elder brothers and express concern that non-indigenous outsiders, the younger brothers, are plundering and destroying Mother Earth. They believe the exploitation of nature causes rapid ecological damage that will harm the world, which they see confirmed in the form of droughts and disappearing glaciers in their mountains. It is their conviction that all communities and cultures on our planet should live in harmony, peace and balance with nature in order to achieve general well-being.

The plan

Sacred Sierra is an initiative of ANEI, in collaboration with Ethos Agriculture and the 1000 Landscapes Initiative. This unique combination of organizations brings together the commercial, development and research activities that are required to create a sustainable coffeelands model. We do this by:

Supporting local ownership: Implementation of this initiative is owned and directed by ANEI and associated communities, based on their beliefs, values and needs. An important pillar of this initiative will be community stewardship to establish and monitor biological corridors, restoration of deforested and degraded lands, and protection of rivers and streams.

Promoting regenerative agriculture: ANEI builds on 26 years of experience in Organic certified coffee with the aim to create the highest standard for sustainability: the world's first Regenerative Coffee-Cocoa Landscape. This initiative will go beyond individually certified farms blending agriculture, conservation and culture at the regional level. With organically grown coffee and cocoa as its foundation, this model combines traditional knowledge and new insights in sustainable agriculture practices, to facilitate landscape management and investments.

Facilitating rural development: ANEI and its domestic and international partners are designing a rural development plan to promote the creation of decent jobs in the region.



These jobs relate to the production, processing and trade of sustainable coffee and cocoa, the manufacturing of bio-fertilizers, monetizing ecosystem services, promotion of sustainable tourism, and involving youth in research or reforestation projects.

Data and technology: A suite of Open Source tools are being developed to support ANEI in managing this initiative. This includes mobile applications for data collection of farm level activities, GIS mapping tools to monitor landscapes, dash boards to support coordination with partners and social media to directly engage with consumers. These tools will facilitate research partners to explore the valuation of eco-system services and monitor climate change.

Education and engagement. To ANEI, coffee and cocoa are vehicles to share values and wisdom. Their story is about traditions, beliefs, landscape and unity. It is a story demonstrating an alternative to an extractive model of commodity trading. More than anything, it is a story consumers can participate in.

Sustainability puzzle pieces

Simply targeting coffee production as a variable that can be isolated, has led to scaling partial solutions as proxies for sustainability. Certifications, Public Private Partnerships, Finance Schemes, Tech solutions all have pieces to the sustainability puzzle, yet they are not quite fitting together.

We believe traditional ecological knowledge within indigenous communities is the missing piece of the puzzle. If we want to move away from a Northern driven framing and interpretation of sustainability towards a more equal approach, we will need more agency by stakeholders in origin. Demonstrating the value and potential of such a model is what the Sacred Sierra initiative is all about.

More information

The initiative is driven and directed by ANEI (anei.org.co), supported by Ethos Agriculture (ethosagriculture.com), and is part of the 1000 Landscapes Initiative (landscapes.global). A coalition driven to reimagine coffee sustainability and provide a viable alternative to destructive production and trade models. To learn more about the initiative please contact: info@ethosagriculture.com