

Innovative project gives South American communities a voice in protecting their own environments

August 9 2013

Today, as the world marks the United Nations' International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, a project at Royal Holloway University is highlighting the crucial contribution local people in South America can make in helping to protect the natural environment.

Project COBRA is enabling people in Guyana to track and document the effect that global environmental policies have on their own [communities](#) and lives, through video and photographs. Led by Jay Mistry from the Department of Geography at Royal Holloway, the project also allows local people to identify and capture the most effective methods they have for managing natural resources, such as selecting the right land for agriculture, and enables them to share their findings with other communities.

The results are then analysed together with the team at Royal Holloway, as well as with colleagues in Europe, in order to develop clear models based on the communities' own methods for sustaining their environment.

"Our project provides [clear evidence](#) of the invaluable role indigenous people can play in protecting [natural environments](#). Indeed, national governments and policy makers should take this point on board when considering the dramatic changes they want to make to local peoples' land rights," said Céline Tschirhart, post-doctorate researcher for the

project. "The use of visual methods introduced through Project COBRA has enabled local communities to become advocates for their own way of life and get their voice heard. For example, in March, COBRA team members from Guyana submitted a video to the United Nations on the importance of forests to [indigenous people](#)."

The next phase of the project, due to start in September, will see the communities involved with COBRA, presenting and disseminating their best practices with other [indigenous communities](#) in the Guiana Shield region of South America. Sydney Allicock, representative for the communities of the North Rupununi, Guyana said: "This [project](#) is crucial in giving our people the skills, capacity and confidence needed to engage with national and international governments and ensure we have a say on our own future."

More information: www.projectcobra.org/

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

Citation: Innovative project gives South American communities a voice in protecting their own environments (2013, August 9) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-08-south-american-voice-environments.html>

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