



University for Peace



## ***Department of Environment and Development Outreach and Social Action***

**Created by Dr. Olivia Sylvester & Lic. Wendy Benavides  
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The purpose of our outreach and social action plan is to promote cultural integration and academic exchange in the local context of Costa Rica. Our outreach and social action programmes are linked to core themes in environment and development and are summarized below in two core programmes: A) Community Engagement and Sustainable Development Program (CESD Programme) and B) Alliance Strengthening Programme (ASP). These programs are conducted in partnership with diverse community and civil society organizations, as well as public and private institutions.

### ***A. Community Engagement and Sustainable Development Program (CESD)***

#### ***Project #1 Summer Practicum in collaboration with American University (AU) and Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) in Buenos Aires, Costa Rica (2019-2023)***

In 2019, the Department of Environment & Development at UPEACE, together with American University and the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, crafted a collaboration that culminates in a two-week practicum in the Buenos Aires county in Costa Rica; this project emerged due to department faculty Clara Ramin's long-term outreach programme in Buenos Aires. This practicum starts with collaborative meetings with community organizations online, where community members in the following communities (Longo Mai, Volcán, Térraba, & San Rafael) meet with students and professors to co-design a project where students can share skills and knowledge with communities. Students stay in host families in pairs and are divided into small groups working together with community leaders on environment and development topics flagged by community members as important. The work starts online before students arrive to the communities. Topics that have been addressed include: water conservation, water and land defense, agroecology, climate change, and more. Students are required to complete projects co-defined with community members and they present deliverables and outcomes in an interactive format to the entire community at the end of the practicum. Some of these projects have resulted in community-reviewed publications for advocacy and activism. In addition, to working with these communities, this practicum has provided donations to the scholarship program Longo Mai, which supports high-school students, university students, and students from other educational institutions.

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**[Pictures] Summer Practicum 2019**

**Project # 2. Outreach and Collaboration in Indigenous Territories**  
**2.1 Quitrrisí Community in Huetar Territory**

DED faculty Dr. Olivia Sylvester has created outreach programme with members of the Huetar Indigenous territory, Quitrrisí (starting in 2018); the programme resulted from a request from members of the territory for increased institutional support. This outreach programme has two goals, 1) to support the group Mujeres Huetares de Quitrrisí on projects related to ancestral farming practices, water conservation, and environmental care and 2) to support Ciudadanos de Oro Huetares de Quitrrisí in their revitalization of ancestral practices. Outcomes of this outreach programme include: 1) University for Peace authorization for free access to the UPEACE recreational park on ancestral territory, 2) annual meetings among faculty/students and Elders to support on-going cultural and territorial needs (from 2022-2024, one outcome of this is the creation of a Huetar authored book and cultural documentary, co-created among faculty, students and Elders), 3) workshops for Huetar women on agricultural and water protection. It's worth noting that the University for Peace is situated on Huetar indigenous territory.



**[Pictures] Students and Faculty in the Quitrrisí Huetar Territory**

### **Project #3 Volunteer work with the Costa Rican Food Bank**

DED faculty Dr. Sylvester has established a UPEACE volunteer programme with the Costa Rica Food Bank. This collaboration culminated in a visit from representatives of the Food Bank to UPEACE where they shared real-world challenges faced in food security efforts in Costa Rica and supported the establishment of a volunteer programme with DED students. The volunteer programme has the mission to ensure that students can support Costa Rican institutional and community needs. Currently students engage in a yearly visit to the Food Bank supporting this institution in sorting and packing food and other donations that are distributed to multiple organizations in the country.



**[Picture right] Students volunteering in the food bank in 2024**

**[Picture left] Visit of Food Bank to Upeace in 2023**

### **Project #4 Communities to UPEACE Campus**

This project is one of reciprocity with community members who have hosted UPEACE students and faculty in their communities and/or who have participated in UPEACE research. These community leaders are invited to visit UPEACE and to learn about ways they can access training at UPEACE or access spaces for their community needs; some invited guests also give a talk or a workshop for students and faculty during this visit. Below are a few examples of visits:

- In November 2022, a representative from the China Kichá territory visited UPEACE, gave a talk to students, and was invited to take courses on Human Rights and Environment from UPEACE Faculty.
- In 2024, two representatives from the Longo Maï community visited our campus and conducted a workshop on natural medicine and well as gave a talk about Circular Economy and Solidarity Economies in rural contexts.

## **Project #5 Implementation of engaging circularity on campus and its surroundings**

With the goal of increasing circular and sustainability practices and initiatives on campus and to practice reciprocity and giving-back to the broader UPEACE community and surrounds, in the frame of the yearly offered course on Circular Bioeconomy, department faculty Clara Ramin is implementing circular campus projects as one of the course assignments. Specifically, students are required to develop a comprehensive and engaging project proposal for implementing student-led circular initiatives on the UPEACE campus. The circular initiative can consist of a product, an event, a training, or others.

All projects shall benefit and be accessible to the overall UPEACE community including the student body, staff, and faculty. The developed projects and initiatives are presented to the whole UPEACE community by the end of the course through different formats, such as a presentation, a workshop, a poster etc.

### **Sample of implemented circular projects and initiatives:**

#### **5.1 Organization of a swap-party**

By the end of the course, students organized a swap-party activity open to the whole UPEACE community - a space that invited for reflection and awareness raising about the social and environmental impacts of overproduction and overconsumption, in order to avoid discarding of items in good condition, to increase products' life spans, and to promote community engagement and a practical circular economy experience. Additionally, students created guidelines to replicate the initiative if wanted and shared those with key stakeholders at UPEACE.

#### **5.2 Creation of a 'Circular at UPEACE Guide'**

Students created a handbook to stimulate conversations and increase awareness about existing initiatives and methods that promote circularity on campus and surrounds. This project aims to distribute valuable information, promote the importance of circularity and sustainability and to reduce personal through encouraging for sustainable decisions.

## **B. Alliance Strengthening Programme (ASP)**

### **Project #6 Alliances for sustainable agriculture in Costa Rica**

With the goal of supporting national alliances for sustainable agriculture in Costa Rica, DED under the leadership of Dr. Sylvester, created a Strategic Alliance with Rinconcito Orgánico Irazú, and Organics Global by Conviction-Costa Rica (Orgcon-CR). Via this alliance, we hosted a 2019 meeting to discuss the challenges in the organic agriculture sector; participants included organic farmers, civil society organization MAOCO (Movimiento de Agricultura Orgánica Costa Rica), and members of the Ministry of Environment (MAG) and PROCOMER (Costa Rican Foreign Trade Promoter). Following the impact of the pandemic, in 2022, we held a follow-up workshop where participants could learn from international experiences promoting organic farming in national policies. This event was a space to co-analyze the current situation of the organic sector, to identify challenges, to strengthen existing alliances, and to explore strategies to enhance support for organic agriculture in the country.



*[Picture left] Organic Farmers workshop 2019 [Picture right] Organic Farmers working groups in 2022*

### **Project #7 Alliances for Environmental Activism**

DED has created multiple alliances with Costa Rican civil society organizations working in environmental activism. In 2022, with funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and under the direction of DED faculty Dr. Sylvester, we have garnered support for alliance strengthening under the POLKA project: Policy Learning, Local Knowledge, and Advocacy (this project is led by IHE Delft Institute for Water Education and the University for Peace is one of 8 partners in the project). Within this project, in 2024 DED faculty and staff supported the gathering of FRENASAPP, Frente Nacional de Sectores Afectados por la Piña, and members of other national organizations (e.g., Ríos Vivos, SINTRAP, Frente Ecocipreses) to discuss the local and national agendas around social and environmental justice in the agricultural sector. In 2023, DED created an alliance with the foundation Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) to support workshops for land defenders in Latin America. The latter alliance resulted in a meeting at the UPEACE campus with representatives from land defense organizations from the following countries: Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panamá and Colombia.



*[Pictures] FRENASAPP meeting in 2024*

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