It’s a tree that bears fruit, or a tree with monkeys, or a tree with people and without leaves. It means teamwork, a union that creates a growing force, and nature that gives life to human beings. More than one child said it was a tree of friendship because there are so many happy people together.

What is it? In January, ArtCorps Fellow Isabel Carrió met with a group of 42 students at a high school in Xolsacmalja, Guatemala, and showed them the EcoLogic logo. Without telling the young people what it was, Isabel asked them what it meant. After everyone shared their first impressions, Isabel then split the students into two groups. One group joined Josué Reyes, a Totonicapán artist and dancer, and they created body sculptures and movement pieces to interpret the “friendship tree.” The other group used paints and art supplies to create their own artworks based on the logo.

Afterwards, Isabel and Josué shared some brochures about EcoLogic and explained that the tree was our logo—and they spent a little time explaining what a logo is! As Isabel noted, “Consensus was that the logo sent a good message about people and nature needing each other. The kids really liked learning about EcoLogic in this way, and it provided a good opportunity for them to think about how we care for the natural world and vice versa.” Please visit www.ecologic.org/logo-art if you would like to see more photos of the children and the artwork they created.

Since 2009, ArtCorps fellows have served at select EcoLogic project sites, using art and personal expression activities to engage people of all ages in environmental and social justice initiatives.
In 2012 EcoLogic was contacted by a team of graduate students with a proposal: the five students from the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers university had experience with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping that they wanted to apply in an international context. Might EcoLogic be interested in a collaboration that would help the students while producing maps for one of EcoLogic’s project sites?

Soon David Kramer, EcoLogic’s senior program officer, was in conversations with the students and their faculty advisor, Anton C. Nelessen, to identify the project site that would most benefit from such analysis. “Maps can be an easily accessible way to help people see how their behavior impacts their natural environment,” explains Kramer. “We have helped communities create topographic models—simple but accurate structures using wood, papier maché, and paint—that really change how people visualize their environment and make changes to protect it. We in the US have to remember that even simple maps are sometimes difficult to come by in remote parts of the world.”

Many of us in the developed world use GIS-based maps every day such as when we use Google Earth or Mapquest. Planners, conservationists and others use GIS to show the relationship between human population growth and forest loss in a particular area, for example, or how average temperature has risen while the amount or frequency of rainfall has changed. Such mapping can be particularly powerful as a tool to predict future outcomes and provide ways to assess interventions.

EcoLogic’s Healthy Fisheries project that straddles Belize and Guatemala along the Sarstun River, seemed a particularly appropriate place for mapping. The project brings together communities along a disputed international border where many are competing for the same resources. This has created a situation where jungle is disappearing, fish stocks are crashing, and clean drinking water is in increasingly short supply.

One of the greatest impediments to the creation of these maps for the developing world is obtaining accurate data, and this was a challenge for the Rutgers team. In addition to information EcoLogic and its local partners provided, the team spent significant time “sleuthing” and uncovered useful data-sets generated by organizations such as USAID, CATHALAC, NASA, and SERVIR.
really pleased to be working with EcoLogic. The organization has a unique niche—collaboration, learning exchanges, and information sharing are central to its mission. They really do what they say, and we could see it during our visit. We hope to do more work like this with them in the future.

During this project, the Rutgers students formalized their partnership beyond the directed study, as Strategies for Equitable Development, LLC (SED).

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) Workshops for Mayans in Chiapas, Mexico

EcoLogic currently supports three Mayan communities developing a community-led REDD+ project in Chiapas, Mexico, to promote the long-term conservation of a 35,000 hectare communal reserve in the Lacandón Rainforest. REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation plus) is a mechanism under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and provides scientific structure and verification mechanisms for third party certification of carbon projects, allowing for carbon credits to be sold on the world market. The “plus” adds steps to enhance the “non-carbon benefits” of REDD forest protection including biodiversity and ecosystem conservation.

Some REDD projects have faced criticism because not all take into account the interests and livelihood needs of the local communities who depend on the forests. This runs very much counter to EcoLogic’s vision of supporting local and indigenous peoples as the primary actors managing and benefiting from the conservation of their local ecosystems. EcoLogic believes it vital that local people understand the implications of any project and have their rights respected when they enter into contractual agreements. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is one tool we use to promote a fair and transparent process. Originating from the UN Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, FPIC is founded on the principle that local people have the right to give or refuse consent to projects that will impact them and their lands. EcoLogic considers FPIC an essential process to promote fair and collaborative participation and build community project ownership.
Free, Prior and Informed Consent
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In March 2013, EcoLogic’s CarbonPlus Director Bryan Foster, and Associate Andrea Savage, traveled to Chiapas to join with our community coordinator, Abelino Flores, and representatives from our local partner Na’Bolom to conduct FPIC workshops with each of the three Mayan communities—the Choles, Lacandones, and Tzeltales. At EcoLogic’s invitation, Dr. Tuyeni Mwampamba, Ph.D., a community engagement expert for REDD projects, joined the first workshop to provide insights and strategies on how to ensure the communities understand how REDD+ could impact their lives.

More than 340 people attended the two-day workshops. These workshops included smaller working group discussions on specific local factors that contribute to the destruction of the forest and identified potential activities that would need to happen in order to successfully develop the REDD+ project and sell carbon credits. Feedback provided at the end of the sessions indicated that the communities felt good progress was made, and appreciated the inclusiveness of the process.

At the end of April, the Choles, Lacandones, and Tzeltales will convene in a general assembly to decide on whether or not to take the next steps for REDD+. This would include a workshop for the communities on how to use Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to clarify community boundaries within the project site—an ongoing source of contention—and the identification of baseline indicators for human quality of life and biodiversity measurements.

We created CarbonPlus to implement projects that promote the health of forests and their ability to absorb carbon from the atmosphere to reduce climate change effects. The program provides community-based partners with the technical expertise needed to successfully implement carbon projects, and by collaborating with communities we help them grow to independently manage these projects for the long term. By helping these communities access the carbon credit market, our CarbonPlus program also makes conserving forests more financially viable for the rural poor.

VIDEO ABOUT COMMUNITIES ORGANIZING FOR WATERSHEDS PROJECT

We made a new video about EcoLogic’s Communities Organizing for Watersheds project in northern Honduras! Thanks to support from the Swiss Re ReSource Award for sustainable watershed management, and Intercultural Productions, a socially motivated video and multimedia production company, we created this five minute documentary about the history of our work in northern Honduras, and our collaboration with local partner, the Association of Water Committees of the Southern Sector of Pico Bonito National Park (AJAASSPIB). To watch the documentary, point your web browser to www.ecologic.org/cowp-video, and find out more about what makes our collaboration with AJAASSPIB such a success!

EcoLogic was founded in 1993 to help rural and indigenous peoples restore and protect tropical ecosystems.

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