



22 Biodiversity Heroes

There are biodiversity heroes around the world, working to protect the diversity of life at large and small scales. In honour of Biodiversity Day on 22 May, this short list introduces some biodiversity heroes who have been recognized by major awards, including the [Equator Prize](#) administered by the [United Nations Development Programme](#) and the [Champions of the Earth Awards](#) presented by the [United Nations Environment Programme](#).

1. **Sir David Attenborough – United Kingdom**

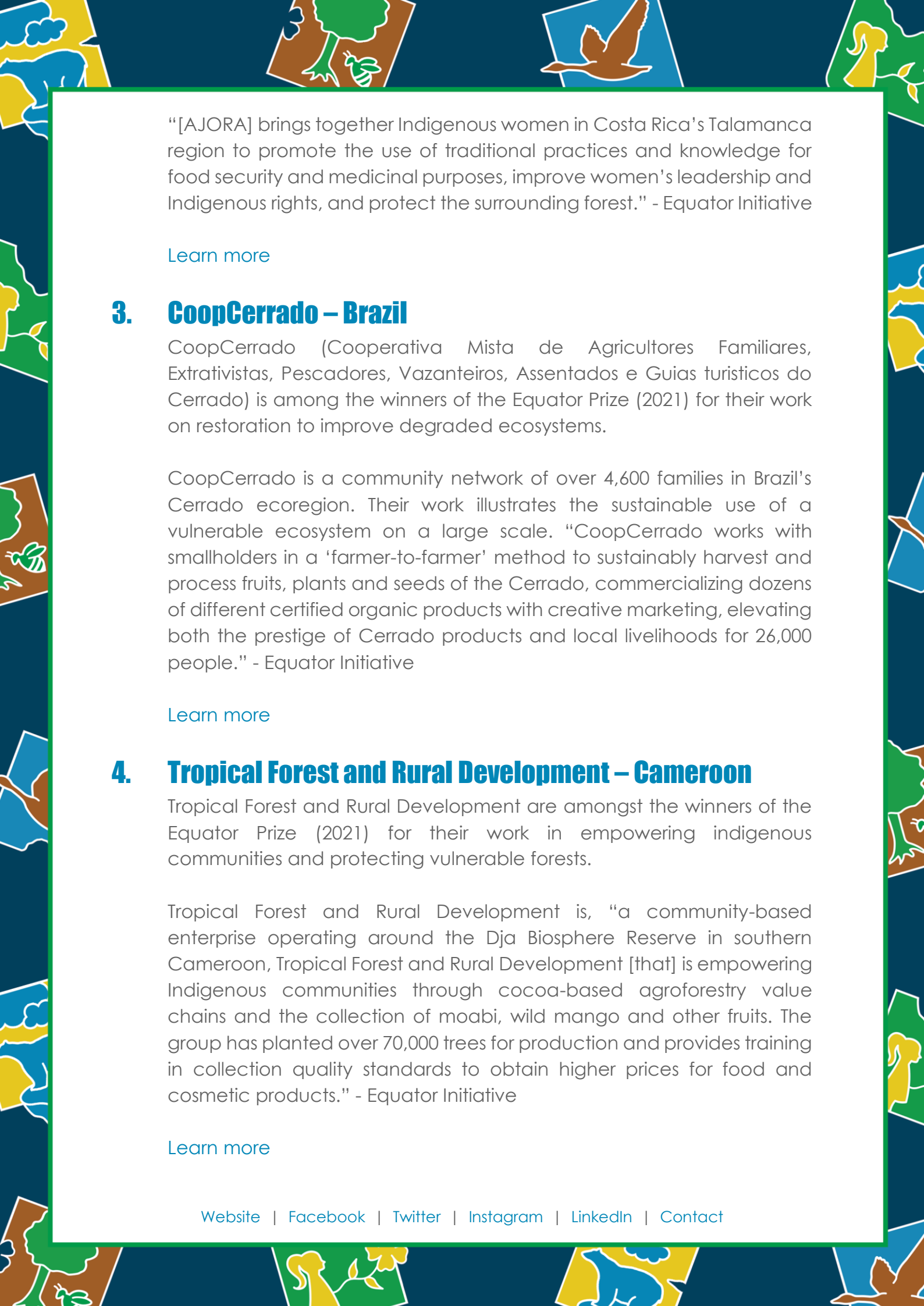
Sir David Attenborough, the broadcaster, natural historian and environmental advocate, has received the prestigious [Champions of the Earth Lifetime Achievement Award](#), administered by the United Nations Environment Programme.

“Sir David Attenborough is the recipient of the Champions of the Earth Lifetime Achievement Award for his dedication to research, documentation, and advocacy for the protection of nature and its restoration.” - UNEP

[Learn more](#)

2. **Asociación de Jóvenes Reforestadores en Acción (AJORA) – Bolivia**

Asociación de Jóvenes Reforestadores (AJORA) is among the winners of the [Equator Prize](#) (2021) for their work in sustainable agroforestry models and environmental restoration efforts.



“[AJORA] brings together Indigenous women in Costa Rica's Talamanca region to promote the use of traditional practices and knowledge for food security and medicinal purposes, improve women's leadership and Indigenous rights, and protect the surrounding forest.” - Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

3. CoopCerrado – Brazil

CoopCerrado (Cooperativa Mista de Agricultores Familiares, Extrativistas, Pescadores, Vazanteiros, Assentados e Guias turísticos do Cerrado) is among the winners of the Equator Prize (2021) for their work on restoration to improve degraded ecosystems.

CoopCerrado is a community network of over 4,600 families in Brazil's Cerrado ecoregion. Their work illustrates the sustainable use of a vulnerable ecosystem on a large scale. “CoopCerrado works with smallholders in a ‘farmer-to-farmer’ method to sustainably harvest and process fruits, plants and seeds of the Cerrado, commercializing dozens of different certified organic products with creative marketing, elevating both the prestige of Cerrado products and local livelihoods for 26,000 people.” - Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

4. Tropical Forest and Rural Development – Cameroon

Tropical Forest and Rural Development are amongst the winners of the Equator Prize (2021) for their work in empowering indigenous communities and protecting vulnerable forests.

Tropical Forest and Rural Development is, “a community-based enterprise operating around the Dja Biosphere Reserve in southern Cameroon, Tropical Forest and Rural Development [that] is empowering Indigenous communities through cocoa-based agroforestry value chains and the collection of moabi, wild mango and other fruits. The group has planted over 70,000 trees for production and provides training in collection quality standards to obtain higher prices for food and cosmetic products.” - Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

5. **Asociación de Mujeres Indígenas del Territorio Cabécar Kábata Kónana – Costa Rica**

Asociación de Mujeres Indígenas del Territorio Cabécar Kábata Kónana are amongst the winners of the Equator Prize (2021) for their work in combining traditional knowledge with social media to ensure food security.

“The Asociación de Mujeres Indígenas del Territorio Cabécar Kábata Kónana brings together Indigenous women in Costa Rica’s Talamanca Kónana region to promote the use of traditional practices and knowledge for food security and medicinal purposes, improve women’s leadership and Indigenous rights, and protect the surrounding forest. In the face of the coronavirus pandemic, the group quickly established a virtual market on social media to trade and share food during the closure of regular markets. The association also trains women in rotational and regenerative agroforestry, and promotes the use of local native seed varieties and traditional medicinal plants, improving community resilience in the face of climate warming.” - Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

6. **Pueblo Originario Kichwa de Sarayaku – Ecuador**

Pueblo Originario Kichwa de Sarayaku are amongst the winners of the Equator Prize (2021) for their work on the protection of their 133,000-hectare territory in the Amazon rainforest.

“Deep in Ecuador’s Amazon rainforest, the Kichwa people of Sarayaku are leading Indigenous rights advocacy, protecting their ancestral territory and forest, and pursuing a sustainable lifestyle that sees nature not merely as resource but is in line with Indigenous wisdom.” -Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

7. Aadhimalai Pazhangudiyinar Producer Company Limited – India

Aadhimalai Pazhangudiyinar Producer Company Limited are amongst the winners of the Equator Prize (2021) for their work on improving the livelihoods of villagers by supporting sustainable collection and cultivation of a wide range of forest produce and crops.

Aadhimalai Pazhangudiyinar Producer Company Limited is a “1,700-member cooperative, managed and run entirely by Indigenous people from the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve in Southern India [that] has improved livelihoods across 147 villages by processing and marketing a diverse range of forest products and crops.” - Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

8. Snehakunja Trust – India

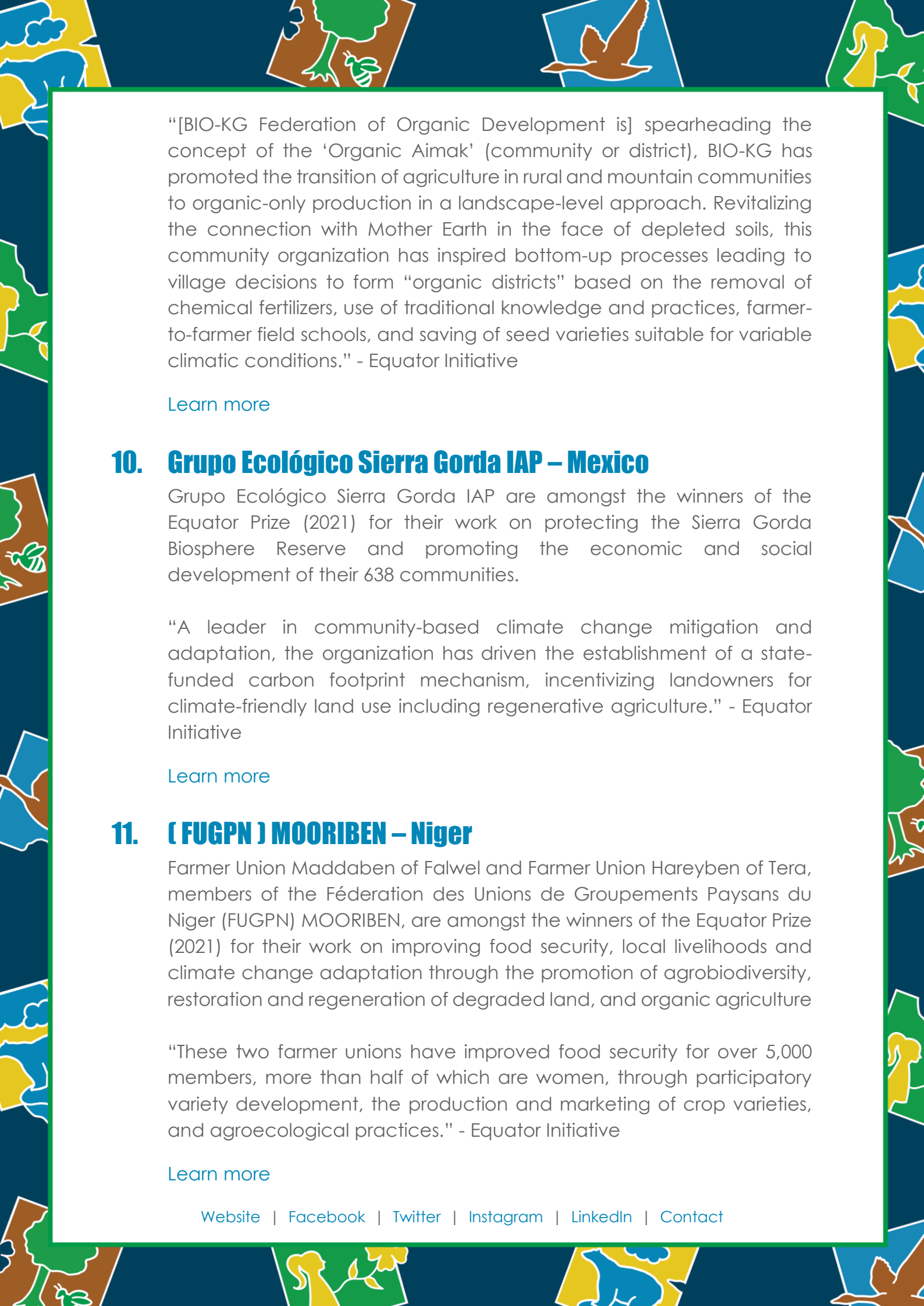
Snehakunja Trust are amongst the winners of the Equator Prize (2021) for their work on the protection and restoration of freshwater swamps, evergreen forests and mangrove ecosystems while empowering local communities to pursue sustainable livelihoods.

“[Snehakunja Trust] has protected sensitive wetland and coastal ecosystems in the Western Ghats and the Karnataka coast for 45 years. With a focus on community-based restoration and conservation, this organization provides essential solutions to the climate crisis. It has supported hundreds of self-help groups and village forest committees to sustainably manage resources based on traditional knowledge, implement natural farming techniques, use clean energy, promote entrepreneurship, and provide community health services.” - Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

9. BIO-KG Federation of Organic Development – Kyrgyzstan

BIO-KG Federation of Organic Development are amongst the winners of the Equator Prize (2021) for their work on reversing land degradation in rural and mountain communities in Kyrgyzstan.



“[BIO-KG Federation of Organic Development is] spearheading the concept of the ‘Organic Aimak’ (community or district), BIO-KG has promoted the transition of agriculture in rural and mountain communities to organic-only production in a landscape-level approach. Revitalizing the connection with Mother Earth in the face of depleted soils, this community organization has inspired bottom-up processes leading to village decisions to form “organic districts” based on the removal of chemical fertilizers, use of traditional knowledge and practices, farmer-to-farmer field schools, and saving of seed varieties suitable for variable climatic conditions.” - Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

10. **Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda IAP – Mexico**

Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda IAP are amongst the winners of the Equator Prize (2021) for their work on protecting the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve and promoting the economic and social development of their 638 communities.

“A leader in community-based climate change mitigation and adaptation, the organization has driven the establishment of a state-funded carbon footprint mechanism, incentivizing landowners for climate-friendly land use including regenerative agriculture.” - Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

11. **(FUGPN) MOORIBEN – Niger**

Farmer Union Maddaben of Falwel and Farmer Union Hareyben of Tera, members of the Fédération des Unions de Groupements Paysans du Niger (FUGPN) MOORIBEN, are amongst the winners of the Equator Prize (2021) for their work on improving food security, local livelihoods and climate change adaptation through the promotion of agrobiodiversity, restoration and regeneration of degraded land, and organic agriculture

“These two farmer unions have improved food security for over 5,000 members, more than half of which are women, through participatory variety development, the production and marketing of crop varieties, and agroecological practices.” - Equator Initiative

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12. **Sea Women of Melanesia – Melanesia**

Sea Women of Melanesia are among the winners of the Champions of the Earth Award for Inspiration and Action (2021) for their work teaching local women scuba diving and biology skills in order to allow them to monitor the health of coral reefs, as well as to create and restore marine protected areas.

“The SeaWomen work in what’s known as the Coral Triangle, which covers some 5.7 million square kilometers between the Great Barrier Reef and the island archipelagos of Melanesia and South East Asia. Brimming with marine life, it is one of the world’s premier destinations for underwater tourism and home to a major fisheries industry. It is also exceptionally threatened by surging human populations and waste levels.” - UNEP

[Learn more](#)

13. **Maria Kolesnikova – Kyrgyzstan**

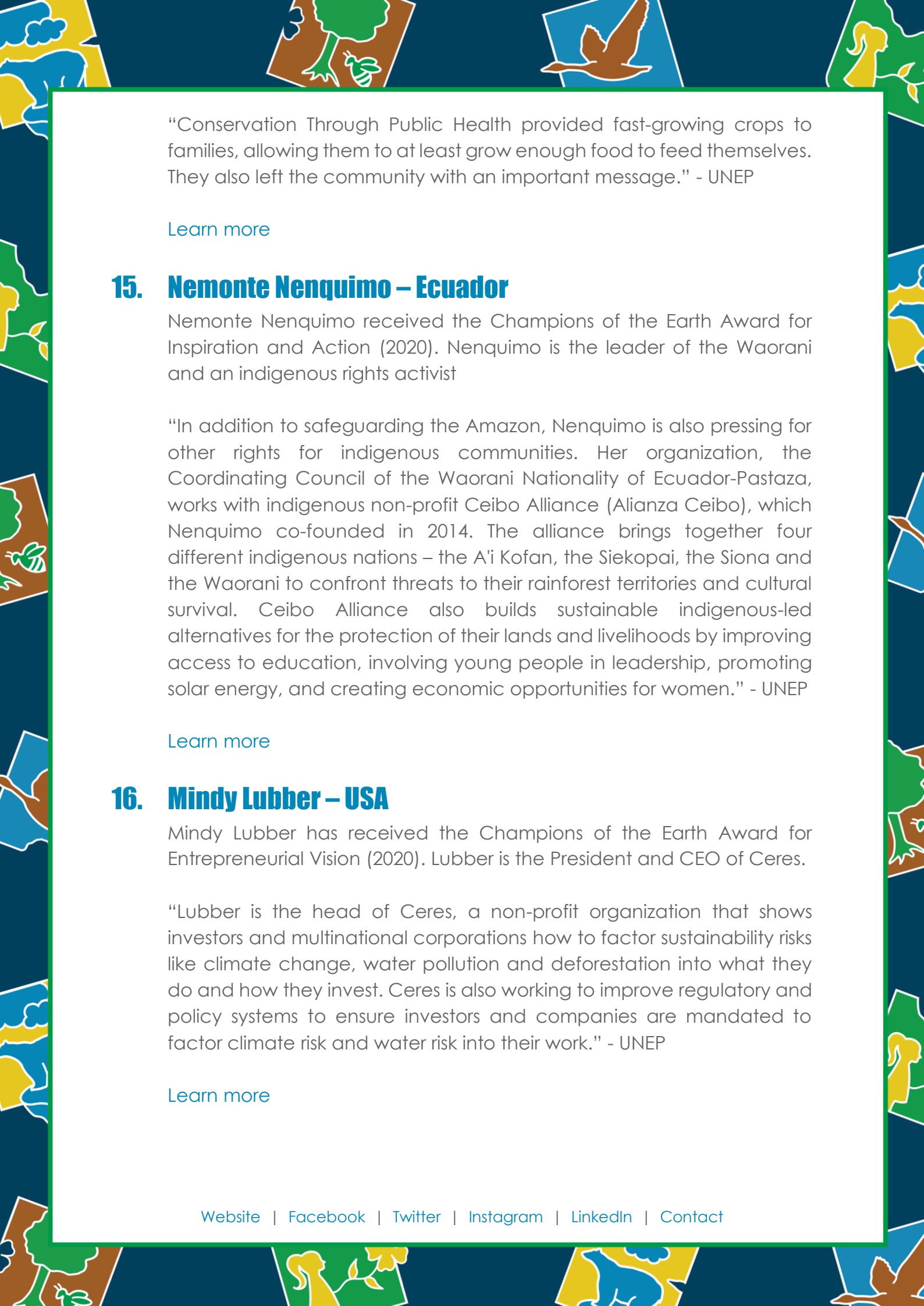
Maria Kolesnikova received the Champions of the Earth Award for Entrepreneurial Vision (2021) for creating an app that collects real time actionable data about air quality.

“Kolesnikova’s work reflects how individuals and citizens can drive environmental change by leveraging the power of science and data. So often, people wonder if there’s anything they can do to combat pollution, climate change and the other threats to the planet. Maria Kolesnikova proves that there is. Her dedication is remarkable and shows that we can all play a role in putting the planet on the path to a better future.” - Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP

[Learn more](#)

14. **Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka – Uganda**

Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka received the Champions of the Earth Award for Science and Innovation (2021). Dr. Kalema-Zikusoka is the Founder and CEO of Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH).



“Conservation Through Public Health provided fast-growing crops to families, allowing them to at least grow enough food to feed themselves. They also left the community with an important message.” - UNEP

[Learn more](#)

15. **Nemonte Nenquimo – Ecuador**

Nemonte Nenquimo received the Champions of the Earth Award for Inspiration and Action (2020). Nenquimo is the leader of the Waorani and an indigenous rights activist

“In addition to safeguarding the Amazon, Nenquimo is also pressing for other rights for indigenous communities. Her organization, the Coordinating Council of the Waorani Nationality of Ecuador-Pastaza, works with indigenous non-profit Ceibo Alliance (Alianza Ceibo), which Nenquimo co-founded in 2014. The alliance brings together four different indigenous nations – the A’i Kofan, the Siekopai, the Siona and the Waorani to confront threats to their rainforest territories and cultural survival. Ceibo Alliance also builds sustainable indigenous-led alternatives for the protection of their lands and livelihoods by improving access to education, involving young people in leadership, promoting solar energy, and creating economic opportunities for women.” - UNEP

[Learn more](#)

16. **Mindy Lubber – USA**

Mindy Lubber has received the Champions of the Earth Award for Entrepreneurial Vision (2020). Lubber is the President and CEO of Ceres.

“Lubber is the head of Ceres, a non-profit organization that shows investors and multinational corporations how to factor sustainability risks like climate change, water pollution and deforestation into what they do and how they invest. Ceres is also working to improve regulatory and policy systems to ensure investors and companies are mandated to factor climate risk and water risk into their work.” - UNEP

[Learn more](#)

17. **Yacouba Sawadogo – Burkina Faso**

Yacouba Sawadogo received the Champions of the Earth Award for Inspiration and Action (2020). Sawdogo is a Sahel Restoration Farmer and Zai Specialist.

“Sawadogo, known locally as “the man who stopped the desert”, modified a traditional cultivation practice called Zai, which allows crops to grow in pits that trap rainfall, even in regions beset by water shortages. His technique, now nearly four decades old, is used by farmers across a 6,000-kilometre stretch of Africa.” - UNEP

[Learn more](#)

18. **Dr. Fabian Leendertz – Germany**

Dr. Fabian Leendertz received the Champions of the Earth Award for Science and Innovation (2020). Dr. Leendertz is a veterinarian who has helped trace the origin of some of the world's deadliest disease outbreaks.

“Leendertz has led ground-breaking investigations into pathogens like Anthrax and Ebola, exploring how the contagions jump between animals and humans. He led a group of researchers who tracked a 2014 outbreak of Ebola back to a single, bat-filled tree in Guinea.” - UNEP

[Learn more](#)

19. **Salween Peace Park – Myanmar**

The Salween Peace Park, located in an area of South-Eastern Myanmar that has been marked by decades of conflict, was established in 2014. The Salween Peace Park is an expression of Karen indigenous identity and is the result of a grassroots movement for conservation and stability of a 5,400 square kilometer continuous ecosystem of forests and mountains.

“Based on an indigenous vision of sustainable use of natural resources, coupled with traditional practices and taboos, local communities lead a life that respects wildlife and local ecosystems.” - Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

20. Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Kayan Mentarang National Park – Indonesia

Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Kayan Mentarang National Park are among the winners of the Equator Prize (2020) for their work in bringing together 11 indigenous groups (Forum Musyawarah Masyarakat Adat Taman Nasional Kayan Mentarang (FoMMA)). FoMMA advocates for the rights of communities who live on 20,000 square kilometers of customary land in Northern Kalimantan.

“Government and indigenous authorities, represented by FoMMA, decide jointly on resource management as well as traditional access and use rights, promoting local stewardship over the park. FoMMA has supported communities to document and map over 20,000 square kilometers of indigenous territories. In 2019, they secured legal recognition for a first block of 2,500 square kilometers of customary lands under national law. FoMMA’s communities pursue traditional forest-based local economies, and protect large swaths of rainforest in an effort to mitigate climate change and retain traditional ways of life.” - Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

21. Vie Sauvage – Congo

Vie Sauvage are among the winners of the Equator Prize (2020) for their work on the protection of endangered species.

“Vie Sauvage has pioneered a holistic model for community development, conservation, and peace-building, helping create and manage a 4,875 square kilometer reserve for the bonobo (a great ape), and other endangered species. Deeply-rooted indigenous traditions see the bonobo as close relative to humans and forbid its hunting or eating. Local economic, social and health needs drive the planning of conservation activities, and support community ownership and mobilization.” - UNEP

[Learn more](#)

22. Nashulai Maasai Conservancy – Kenya

Nashulai Maasai Conservancy are among the winners of the Equator Prize (2020) for their conservation work. They are among the first conservancies owned and managed by indigenous peoples in East Africa and use a mixed conservation model.

“This 2,400 hectare protected area forms an important ecological corridor in the Maasai Mara and has attracted elephants, zebras, giraffes, lions and numerous other species. Combining indigenous ecological knowledge with cutting-edge science, local Maasai communities are also engaged in economic development and cultural programming, so humans, livestock, and wildlife all prosper in harmony.”
- Equator Initiative

[Learn more](#)

[Propose your own list of 22 biodiversity-related items \(guidelines\) >](#)

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Disclaimer

We acknowledge that there are thousands of individuals and organizations around the world undertaking extraordinary work for biodiversity each and every day.

The information provided within each list of 22 biodiversity-related items is meant to create engagement and participation in the [Biodiversity Day](#) campaign and is by no means exhaustive or fully representative of all the initiatives taking place around the globe or all the individuals, organizations, and entities that promote biodiversity. We apologize for any inconvenience or misunderstanding this could cause and we look forward to your feedback. Please [contact us](#) for any comments and suggestions to rectify any inconsistencies. More importantly, we also invite you to create your own lists of 22 biodiversity-related items, which will be more representative of your work and adapted to your topic of interest.

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