

# STATEMENT OF THE SPA YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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The Amazon Basin is critical for global climate stability, biodiversity protection, sustainable development, and human well-being. While a living Amazon supports the health of our entire planet, a deteriorating Amazon can trigger widespread negative consequences both locally and globally.<sup>1</sup> Deforestation, forest fires, and environmental degradation, frequently tied to illegal activities, threaten both the environment and health of the communities who depend on it.<sup>2</sup> Temperatures are increasing, the dry season is expanding, and extreme weather events are intensifying.<sup>3</sup> The expansion of unsustainable extractive industries—often labeled as “progress” and occurring without prior consent of Indigenous peoples and local communities—is disrupting local economic and social systems jeopardizing sustainable livelihoods.<sup>4</sup> Corruption, changing political cycles, and the lack of public policies tailored to the Amazon further exacerbate these compounding issues, threatening the resilience of the region.<sup>5,6</sup> As deforestation in the Amazon approaches a point of no return, the world at large and Amazonian populations and biodiversity are at serious risk.<sup>7</sup>

It’s hard to see the possibilities of a truly sustainable future through the smoke of Amazon forest fires. But, we know this is not the Amazon We Want. We need to act now, with collective efforts from all generations to advance solutions that align with local contexts and the needs of diverse stakeholders across the region.

However, many barriers prevent Amazonian youth from engaging in science and decision-making to advance the innovative solutions and conservation needed in the region. Young people in the Amazon are often forced to migrate to big cities to access academic and decision-making spaces and opportunities, or are left with little to no resources, such as equipment, laboratories, and research centers.<sup>8</sup> Across the region, weak educational infrastructure, combined with a lack of teachers trained in sustainability and intercultural programs that reflect local contexts, limit youth’s access to the knowledge needed to address environmental challenges.<sup>8</sup> Due to insufficient funding, many young people are also forced to support their families rather than continuing their studies.<sup>9</sup> Because standard scientific methods often overlook Indigenous and Local Knowledge, youth from Indigenous and local communities are often further disincentivized from pursuing scientific careers or even returning to their communities after they do so, thus putting the preservation of ancestral knowledge, traditions, and cultural heritage at risk.<sup>9,10</sup>

Despite these barriers, the youth of today are committed to furthering the work of previous generations who succeeded in understanding the challenges the Amazon faces, but were not able to resolve them. As the generation that will continue to face the consequences of current decisions, youth feel an especially deep sense of urgency to

advance solutions that promote equity, respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, and the conservation of biodiversity. As the next generation of leaders, young peoples' active participation now guarantees the preparation of the Amazon's future defenders and decision-makers, as well as the long-term continuity of conservation and sustainable development efforts in the region and beyond.<sup>11</sup>

**Youth not only offer fresh perspectives—and, usually, more diverse and inclusive ones—but also must bring a new energy to science by combining academic knowledge with Indigenous and Local Knowledge, innovation, and adaptability,**<sup>12</sup> all of which are translated into actionable steps toward promoting conservation and socio-environmental justice in the Amazon. Young people must transfer both technical and practical knowledge, helping to disseminate replicable technologies and creative solutions that expand conservation, restoration, a socio-bioeconomy, and sustainable development.<sup>13,14,15</sup>

As the Youth Advisory Committee of the Science Panel for the Amazon, we are committed to supporting a paradigm shift in development in the Amazon. Over the next two years, we will seek, in every form, to support the Panel's efforts and mobilize the next generation of scientists and leaders in the region. The time to act is now, and **we are ready to lead the way toward a resilient, sustainable, and vibrant future for #TheAmazonWeWant.**

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