

# ■ BRIDGE Colombia

**A partnership to build long lasting research collaborations between UK and Colombian institutions to achieve biodiversity conservation and sustainable growth.**

BRIDGE Colombia is a multidisciplinary network of research, industry, and governmental organisations, mainly from Colombia and the UK, working to understand, promote, and preserve Colombia's biodiversity with the ultimate goal of stimulating economic and social growth in Colombia and the region.

BRIDGE Colombia works to build research capacity and human capital development in Colombia and the UK, stimulate partnerships between organisations in Colombia and with international partners, and promote exchange of knowledge.

The network integrates world-leading expertise from biologists, ecologists, agricultural researchers, economists, social scientists, and environmental humanities, which exists across public and private academic institutions, and research centres in both UK and Colombia; it also includes the participation and guidance of key governmental agencies non- governmental organisations (NGOs) and conservation initiatives.

The BRIDGE Colombia network was founded in 2017 by Professor Federica Di Palma, Director of Science at the Earlham Institute in the UK. It grew from a shared vision to build a prosperous society around thriving biodiversity at a formative time in Colombia's post-conflict development. The network has brought together a wide group of around 50 organisations from the UK and Colombia united in partnership to achieve biodiversity conservation and sustainable economic growth in Colombia.

Known by its acronym, BRIDGE, (Biodiversity, Responsibility, Innovation, Development, Growth and Education) the multidisciplinary network provides formal and informal collaboration opportunities for researchers working on a range of issues including:

- Conservation of Colombia's natural capital
- Sustainable development of Colombia's bio-economy and agriculture industry
- Social stability and equity in green growth
- Progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Colombia

BRIDGE Colombia facilitates academic exchanges for Colombian and UK-based academics and student researchers, and wider networking opportunities for private sector and civil society organisations.

## ■ BRIDGE Objectives

1. To promote the sustainable use of biological resources and the sustainable development of the bioeconomy in Colombia through responsible innovation and evidence based policy.
2. To conserve existing biodiversity through integrated management systems with an emphasis on regional context and engagement of communities in these systems.
3. To strengthen Colombian institutions at a national level through building research capacity, supporting the next generation of researchers and building partnerships across diverse scientific fields.
4. To support reconciliation efforts between all stakeholders to improve economic growth post-conflict.
5. To establish frameworks for the use of biodiversity for the economic development of regional communities.

## ■ Impact and activities Achieved So Far

- Over the past two years the BRIDGE network has attracted a growing membership of approximately 50 organisations in the UK and Colombia.
- In 2017 the BRIDGE network enabled Professor Federica Di Palma to bid successfully for £6.5 million of the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund. The resulting GROW Colombia project extends many of BRIDGE Colombia's aims with a four-year programme of capacity building objectives to strengthen research capability in biological sciences, computational biology, and socio-economic research. This project, now in its second year, is already achieving significant policy impact and demonstrating the importance of targeted science diplomacy. Recently Prof. Di Palma was honoured by the Government of Colombia with her appointment to the Misión de Sabios (International Mission of Experts). Federica is tasked with advising the Government on policy proposals in education, science, technology and innovation.
- In June 2018 the BRIDGE network helped to bring together nearly 40 researchers to participate in an international cyberinfrastructure workshop in Bogota. They agree to form the Consorcio Colombiano de Ciberinfraestructura para la Biodiversidad (C3Biodiversidad) and produced a White Paper to inform future government policy. A scientific journal paper was submitted to Public Library of Science Computational Biology in April 2019 and follow up workshops and training events are planned for the next two years, funded by the UK's Royal Academy of Engineering.
- In June 2018 the British Embassy in Bogota invited Prof. Di Palma to profile the BRIDGE network at the FIMA international environment trade fair. BRIDGE members facilitated workshops, gave presentations and joined speaking panels on a range of issues associated with biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.
- In October 2018 the BRIDGE network was commissioned by the UK Natural Environment Research Council and the Newton-Caldas Fund to facilitate a workshop to integrate Colombian and UK institutions selected to implement Newton-Caldas and GCRF funded programmes. One of the outcomes of the workshop was to use the BRIDGE network to help unite efforts to develop capacity building and research activities such as a three-day science and media engagement workshop in May 2019 in Bogota.
- To continue becoming a global impact network BRIDGE held its second annual meeting in Bogota in October 2018. Over 90 persons attended presentations and a discussion panel held by Prof Di Palma, the British Embassy, Colciencias, Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Humboldt Institute, Unilever, WWF, Universidad Javeriana, Instituto Sinchi, and Foro de Presidents. Participants also worked to identify key priorities for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, and to understand how to address and reach these priorities in an ongoing and rapidly changing Colombian territorial context.
- In November 2018 Prof Di Palma represented BRIDGE Colombia at a two day workshop in Panama City funded jointly by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and USAID. The workshop brought together leading experts, researchers, funders and policy makers from around the world to share best practice and understanding on the impact of research and innovation programmes that tackle global challenges like biodiversity loss and climate change.
- In December 2018 BRIDGE hosted at Earlham Institute a senior delegation from the following four national science organisations in Colombia to integrate collaborative efforts between Colombia and UK on biodiversity conservation and explore areas for future research collaborations:
  - AGROSAVIA (Colombian Corporation of Investigation on Agriculture)
  - Humboldt Institute
  - IIAP (Environmental Research Institute of the Pacific)
  - INVEMAR (Marine and Coastal Research Institute - "José Benito Vives de Andrés")
  - SINCHI (Amazon Scientific Research Institute).

