

Kifah Sasa Marín, Costa Rica, 31 years old



Creativity and self-sacrifice of a young social entrepreneur in the development front

After finishing his studies in Development and Natural Resource Conflict Management, Kifah Sasa Marín, driven by his natural leadership founded the Arruko Foundation, at the age of only 23. His foundation, a non governmental organization leads participatory development processes in buffer zones of important protected areas of Costa Rica, such as the Osa and Tempisque Conservation Areas.

His ever-lasting commitment to conservation areas and altruistic style of leadership is a remarkable aspect of his work. Created at a time when Costa Rica social development indicators began to generate a drastic reduction of foreign aid for projects, the organization had to learn quickly how to be financially self sufficient. Hence, Kifah worked on a volunteer basis as CEO of the Foundation for several years. Thus allowing the organization to grow to the point where it could partner with entities like GTZ, UNDP or OTS.

Presently working for a GEF/UNDP and French Environment Fund Project on Cocos Island Marine Protected Area (MPA), he demonstrated creativity in solving a growing conflict between Costa Rica fishermen who reject an increase of MPAs, and conservation organizations pressurizing the government for more MPAs. Kifah conducted video-taped meetings with both protagonists, and projected to each side the other's video-arguments to avoid direct confrontations. Soon both sides had identified common grounds, and the idea of a new MPA that allows local fishermen to fish sustainable tuna through a system of privileged access and certification may become a reality for Costa Ricans in 2008.

Kifah is an outstanding young person who stands as an example to many of tomorrow's conservationists. While Kifah was working at Arruko Foundation, he stated: "*Money is meaningless if there is no clean water to drink, or tropical trees to give you cover*". An ecological ethic that every single individual should grasp.

For more information on Arruko Foundation: www.arruko.net