

# Indigenous leaders: Traditional knowledge can save the planet

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**Editor's note:** *Could observing the stars or planting bushes help the world adapt to climate change impacts? Conservation International's [2016 indigenous fellows](#) think so. Martha Ntoipo hails from a Maasai village in northern Tanzania; Jamer López is a Shipibo-Conibo man from the Peruvian Amazon. Below, they discuss their research on traditional knowledge in their own communities and its implications for conservation and the future. (Note: the thoughts and opinions expressed on Human Nature are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of CI.)*

**Question: What first inspired you to get involved in this kind of work?**

**Ntoipo:** My father is a polygamist with seven wives; the youngest is a little older than my daughter. I grew up seeing the situation with my mother and stepmothers, and I clashed with my dad. He wanted me to marry a person he chose — actually, he chose six men, and I refused all of them. I felt that something needs to change, and that I should be part of that change.

After high school I went back to my community and started training and creating awareness among women of their rights, and trying to make men understand that women are the holders of much of the traditional knowledge that dictates how we relate to the natural world. It wasn't easy; at first men

were reluctant, and women were scared. But the good thing is if you are one of them, they tend to listen.

**López:** I could see that my community and others in Amazonia are losing traditional knowledge. Currently there are lots of people studying traditional knowledge within these communities, but generally they come from the outside. I was drawn to this work because I felt it was my responsibility as a young man who is part of this culture.