

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

A look at the person behind the Campaign, and *what* motivates Dr Corredor to do what she does.

By Michelle Adams © 2016

Every morning at 5am, her mother would open their front door to distribute buckets of clean drinking water to the destitute. On the weekends, a young Lilliana Corredor would accompany her mother into the *tugurios** and teach some of Colombia's poorest citizens to read and write.

It was here that Lilliana learnt about the impact of pollution on communities and how a lack of clean water affected people's well-being.

It was here that Lilliana learned that working at the community level empowered people to help themselves.

And it was here that Lilliana decided that it would be her responsibility to protect our water systems, even if it meant risking her life for it.

"It's the most dangerous job in the world," says Dr Lilliana Corredor, *"but also the most important"*.

Supporting figures released in a 2014 report by Global Witness show that an average of two environmental activists are being killed weekly trying to protect our natural resources.

Dr Corredor has had her life threatened several times. She has taken on corporate giants and environmental agencies and exposed their corruption. In return, they have threatened to globally discredit her and destroy her security. She has unravelled mentally and physically on occasion and is often heavily in debt after her campaigns. You can't help but wonder why she keeps going when the personal price seems so high.

Dr Corredor closes her eyes and takes a deep breath before answering. She reaches into a place of peace to speak calmly about her experiences without awakening the rage that simmers beneath her surface.

"I am very concerned about water. Without water, there is no life. Humanity simply cannot survive."

She is fierce. Tenacious.

"I am a mother—somebody that has to care about the survival of the species. I have the knowledge and so it is my responsibility to do this work."

Dr Corredor has studied internationally in Marine Biology, Oceanography and Behavioural Sciences. She is an expert in water ecosystems and freshwater organisms.

"For me, science was the pursuit of truth, or so I thought," she says. *"But I have discovered very strong discrepancies between science and the truth."*

Disillusioned by the scientific league, she instead turned her expertise to environmental activism to challenge governments and corporations.

There is a constant struggle for balance between the highs and lows in her work.

"I have had some very dark moments where I feel like I've lost everything and I think ... for what? But then I am welcomed into communities and I speak to the people."

"I have learnt the word for water in every language. It's easy to get people to resonate with water and I've seen great change created by communities."

A history of proactivity amongst the women of Dr Corredor's family has deeply influenced her commitment. Just as Lilliana went out on social work missions with her mother from a very young age, her mother also went out and worked extensively in "leper" communities with her mother. And Lilliana's daughter Shanti, 25, has travelled the world with her mother on environmental campaigns since she was a toddler. They have just returned from a trip through SE Asia educating communities along the Mekong River about the devastating impact of the proposed hydropower dams on their food and water supply.

"I swore I'd never do this again," Dr Corredor says, "but somebody must do this work." There are 60 million people in danger if the Mekong Hydropower dams go ahead. "I go to the people and I talk to them about what they can do. My philosophy is that a lot of empowered individuals makes an empowered collective. And that collective is the one that makes the difference."

**tugurios* (Spanish) - a settlement of shacks in urban areas, a slum. Equivalent to "Favelas".