



Carlos Manuel Rodríguez

IE SPEGA School and RAIA 2024 Summer Research Programme

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Introduction

'I define myself as a lawyer by training, politician by choice and conservationist at heart,' said Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, who helped transform his country into a pioneer of environmental policy in Latin America.

Born in Costa Rica on April 16th, 1960, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez grew up surrounded by nature, and throughout his career, he often derived his passion for the environment from his childhood years. This connection with nature, fostered by his grandfather's coffee farm business which was right next to a national park and forest, instilled in him a deep appreciation for the environment. Rodríguez's formative years were significantly influenced by Costa Rica's social reforms of the mid-20th century. The civil rights reforms in the 1940s, the establishment of a higher education system, and the redirection of military funds towards education and healthcare were crucial in setting the stage for the progressive environmental policies that the country later adopted in the 1990s. These reforms created a supportive environment for Rodríguez and his generation to innovate in environmental conservation.¹

Yet during the period Carlos Manuel Rodríguez was a teenager, his country's economic model depended on deforestation and fossil fuel extraction to work; in fact, deforestation in Costa Rica peaked in 1972 which Carlos Manuel Rodríguez somebody remembers. Between the 1940s and 1980s, the country lost approximately 50,000 hectares of forest per year, reducing forested territory from 75% in 1940 to 29% by 1990.² However, as the Cold War ended, a shift occurred. New members joined the environmental groups, bringing in broader environmental and social issues. This shift led to essential policy implementations, such as the 1996 Forestry Law to regulate logging and later ban it in all government-owned forests.³

Inspired by his passion for the climate, Rodríguez knew he wanted to dedicate his career to serving the environment, but he still did not know how; it was thanks to his father's advice, who was a renowned lawyer that Rodríguez pursued studies in environmental law and policy, becoming the first environmental lawyer in Costa Rica.

He then began his career as a public servant by serving as the Director of the National Park Service and Head of Protected Areas in 1995 - 1998, then he served as Minister of the Environment and Energy three times, between 1998 - 2000, 2002 - 2006 and finally between 2018 - 2020; between his second and third term he was the Vice President of Conservation International for 12 years. Currently, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez has stepped down as Minister and is the CEO and Chairperson of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), a role for which he got re-elected in last month (June 2024).

¹R. A. Butler, 'The post-COVID opportunity for the environment: An interview with the GEF's Carlos Manuel Rodríguez' *Mongabay*, 12 October 2020.

²Anja Nygren, 'Deforestation in Costa Rica: An Examination of Social and Historical Factors,' *Forest & Conservation History*, Volume 39, Issue 1, January 1995, Pages 27-35.

³M. Pebet, 'Costa Rica: A Remarkable Tale of Environmental Redemption'.

His work led to significant advancements, such as the payment for ecological services model and a decarbonisation strategy for Costa Rica, positioning the country as a global leader in sustainability and conservation efforts. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Costa Rica reduced from 26.4 tonnes per capita in 1972 to 3.0 tonnes in 2022.⁴ The land use and forestry sectors previously contributed to 2.43 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions over a 100-year time scale in the 1990s. By 2020, this sector will produce a carbon sink of -7.32 million tonnes of CO₂.⁵

What factors shaped Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's journey from a nature-loving child to a pioneering environmental lawyer, and how did his contributions influence Costa Rica's environmental policies and global conservation efforts? This profile of Rodríguez's background, career milestones, and policy impacts highlight his significant role in transforming Costa Rica and determine whether he is a climate leader.

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's Stake

To better understand Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's impact on his country, it is important to understand what continuously motivated him and pressured him to lead an innovative climate policy throughout his career by giving more context of Costa Rica. Due to its geographical position, reliance on natural resources for agriculture and food production, as well as being an eco-tourism hub, Costa Rica is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Vulnerability to oceanic climate events

Costa Rica is one of the few countries (out of 22) that have coasts to two different oceans (the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean), making it especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In an interview ahead of COP27, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez pointed out that the country is 'subject to strange water events such as hurricanes and droughts'⁶. In fact, the Climate Change Knowledge Portal (CCKP) writes that the country has the 8th highest economic risk exposure to three or more hazards⁷ and that almost 80% of the country's population resides in an area at high risk for floods, cyclones, storms, rising sea levels and landslides.

Given the vulnerabilities of the population, there is high support for stringent environmental policies. According to a survey by the European Investment Bank on Costa Rican environmental policy, 89% of respondents agreed that the environment and sustainable growth should be prioritised over economic growth at any cost; further, 90% of respondents believe that climate policies should be stricter.⁸ However these statistics can also be explained with the fact that Costa Rica thrives on eco tourism, which

⁴Hannah Ritchie, Max Roser and Pablo Rosado (2020) - 'CO₂ and Greenhouse Gas Emissions'. Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Hannah Ritchie, Max Roser and Pablo Rosado (2020) - 'CO₂ and Greenhouse Gas Emissions'. Published online at OurWorldInData.org.

⁵Hannah Ritchie, Max Roser and Pablo Rosado (2020) - 'CO₂ and Greenhouse Gas Emissions'. Published online at OurWorldInData.org.

⁶C.M. Rodríguez, 'You don't need to be a biologist to save the planet', *Fletcher*, 10 November 2022. News.

⁷Climate Change Knowledge Portal, 'Costa Rica, historical hazards' *Climate Change Knowledge Portal*. 2021. Country Profiles.

⁸European Investment Bank, '9 Costa Ricans in 10 demand stricter climate policies, EIB survey reveals' *European Investment Bank*, 4 September 2023.

represents 5.5% of the GDP, but this figure was larger pre-covid, where ecotourism represented above 20% of the GDP in 2019; for this industry to keep existing,

It is necessary to maintain sustainable growth and strict climate laws that protect their natural resources. Moreover, the country's culture of valuing and protecting natural resources over economic growth has given the government the opportunity to take advantage of natural resources and further profit from ecotourism.

In his third term as Environmental Minister, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez stated that ecotourism and the concern for the environment were elements that set the basis for the relationship between the government of Costa Rica and civil society, demonstrating the priority that environmentalism is given by both himself and the government.⁹ With this we can explain why Carlos Manuel Rodríguez has been successful at implementing revolutionary climate policies: because the political culture encourages him to do so, giving that the environment is a priority.

Water pollution

Another one of the issues that Costa Rica still faces is pollution of water, woods, and oceans. The country's water system is managed by the Costa Rican Institute of Aqueducts and Sewage (AyA, for its initials in Spanish), and as recently as January of this year there was still a water pollution crisis in the country which has affected more than 100,000 people across 5 cantons¹⁰. Additionally, local newspapers reported that the AyA initially denied any contamination of the water when citizens started reporting issues. In other provinces of the country, there have been more serious water emergencies where more than 65,000 residents were found to be consuming water that contained a cancer-causing pesticide at amounts exceeding 200 times the legal limit, according to an investigation done in June 2023, the date which the first tanker of clean water was reported to be delivered to the citizens. Carlos Manuel Rodríguez has commented on this issue, calling it 'el gran tema ambiental pendiente'¹¹ — the big pending environmental issue — claiming also that this issue has to be solved within the next decade in order to prevent further damage not only to Costa Ricans but to the environment.

Deforestation

The third climate issue is deforestation, which historically was caused because during the 1950s to the 1990s, Costa Rica's economic model depended largely on the plantation of crops and cattle ranching, which needed more land area.¹² Rodríguez highlighted in an interview that this had placed the country in a bad situation since this industry was destroying the country's biodiversity at staggering rates. Here he also stated that at that time, deforestation in Costa Rica was such a huge industry it 'formed the basis of the country's development model'¹³. Deforestation in Costa Rica reached its peak in the 1970

⁹R. A. Butler, 'The post-COVID opportunity for the environment: An interview with the GEF's Carlos Manuel Rodríguez' *Mongabay*, 12 October 2020.

¹⁰Tico Times, 'Costa Rica Acts Over Toxic Drinking Water Emergency' *Tico Times*, 26 January 2024.

¹¹Paula Umaña, 'Ministro de Ambiente: 'El gran tema ambiental pendiente en Costa Rica es la contaminación de agua dulce', *El Observador*, 3 June 2020.

¹²R. A. Butler, 'The post-COVID opportunity for the environment'.

¹³T. Villalobos, 'al MINAE le falta presión', *Delfino*, 3 May 2019.

when it became one of the countries in Latin America with the highest rates of deforestation¹⁴, 1987 more than 50% of Costa Rica's forests had been destroyed¹⁵.

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez reminisced about the effects of deforestation in Costa Rica when he was a child, 'when I was growing up, there are 2 things I remember from deforestation [...] which was the number of trucks with timber and the number of trucks with cattle,'¹⁶ He further talked about this topic in an interview for the newspaper *Delfino*, where he said 'when I was 16, 17 years old, I realised we were destroying the country'.¹⁷ In the end, seeing the effects of deforestation first hand had motivated him to change the country's economic and political landscape through legislation. At the start of his career in politics, he even considered starting a Green Party with some friends in the 1990s, but this option was vetted and they decided instead to try to work within traditional political parties¹⁸ to try to pass legislation.

In another interview, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez explained that in the 90s the Costa Rican politicians changed from a 'conservationist' approach, which he claimed had been the trend between the 60s and 80s¹⁹ to an 'environmentalist' approach; while he did not clarify what each of these terms meant in the context of his country, we can assume that Rodríguez meant that the politicians of this conservationist period had a limited focus, with limited results given that deforestation was at its peak during this time period. He then proceeded to explain that this drastic change was an effect of the Cold War ending, 'new members came into our groups, which were not very much interested in preserving nature rather than bringing other environmental and social issues into the cause.'²⁰

Therefore in the 1990s we saw a new type of legislation being introduced: the fossil fuel extraction laws part of the new forest code. Fossil fuel extraction, which at the time was one of the most profitable industries and had little regulation, started to be taxed according to the new legislation. This is very significant since it meant that politicians favoured protecting the environment over making profits, thus marking the start to an end of deforestation in the country. Now, Costa Rica has put in place a plan to permanently ban fossil fuel extraction and decarbonize by 2050.²¹ While the reason for such a strong climate policy might also stem from the prospect of economic gains since the country's eco tourism brings the country almost 2 billion US dollars a year²².

With this it is clear how Carlos Manuel Rodríguez was able to build his policies based on the precedent of 1990s legislation where politics shifted to a more environmental focus and it helps explain why he did not face a lot of limitations when trying to implement new ideas as Minister of Environment and Energy.

¹⁴C. Konyn, 'How Costa Rica Reversed Deforestation and Became an Environmental Model', *Earth.Org*, October 2021.

¹⁵C. Konyn, 'How Costa Rica Reversed Deforestation and Became an Environmental Model'

¹⁶Global Environment Facility. 'An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez' *Global Environment Facility (GEF)*. 26 October 2023.

¹⁷T. Villalobos, 'al MINAE le falta presión', *Delfino*, 3 May 2019.

¹⁸R. A. Butler, 'The post-COVID opportunity for the environment.'

¹⁹R. A. Butler, 'The post-COVID opportunity for the environment.'

²⁰R. A. Butler, 'The post-COVID opportunity for the environment.'

²¹2050 Pathways Platform, 'Costa Rica launches Decarbonization Plan' *2050 Pathways Platform*, 12 December 2024.

²²Enchanting Costa Rica 'Costa Rica tops the world in eco-tourism' *Enchanting Costa Rica*, 12 September 2023.

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's Defining Moment

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez was born into a middle-class family in San José, Costa Rica, which was deeply connected to nature and the environment. He grew up surrounded by nature since he fondly remembered in an interview how he used to go every summer to his grandfather's coffee farm in Orosi, Costa Rica, which happened to be right next to the Tapanti National Park and the Gran Talamanca forests, he added that 'spending so much time in nature had a great influence.'²³ Besides this, Rodríguez adds that his mom had a great affliction for plants and his grandfather was a plant and bird collectionist and in the house where he grew up they had 11 fish tanks and 8 parrots; all of this gave him '*that sensibility*'²⁴, which as he explains cultivated his love for the environment. He spent his teen years reading about the efforts of Costa Rican conservationists to preserve and save the forest, which heavily influenced his commitment to taking care of the environment.²⁵

He first began to develop an awareness of deforestation when he was 12 years old in 1972, the height of deforestation when he started 'to pay more attention to the change of landscapes and geography.'²⁶ At this time, he realised that 'forest conservation was an unproductive activity'²⁷ because all the economic, agricultural, land-use policies and laws were stimulating deforestation. He then highlights that 'I remember deforestation, I remember the dry season, the forest fires everywhere in Costa Rica.'²⁸

He recalled being very interested in biology and natural history throughout high school. When choosing a career, he needed to decide about studying law or biology. At that age, he already knew he wanted to change the climate policy of his country, but he was not sure how; therefore, he went to his father, a renowned lawyer, for advice. His father emphasised that understanding the rules of the game laws will enable Rodríguez to tackle problems within the country's legal framework more efficiently. This conversation marked a turning point for Rodríguez, directing him toward a law career.²⁹

Motivated by his father's insights, Rodríguez obtained his law degree from the University of Costa Rica in 1986. During his university days, he referred to himself as an 'unconventional student'³⁰ because he spent much of his time with biology students and was eventually closer to them than his law peers. During most weekends and vacations, he immersed himself in national parks to continue connecting with the Costa Rica Forest where he grew up. Therefore, his graduation thesis was 'Graduation thesis "A New Wildlife Law for Costa Rica.'³¹ After obtaining his degree, he worked as an associate at Lara, Lopez, Matamoros, Rodríguez, and Tinoco Law Firm from 1982 to 1998, specialising in Environmental Law.³² During this time, he also served as a legal assistant at the

²³T. Villalobos, 'al MINAE le falta presion.'

²⁴T. Villalobos, 'al MINAE le falta presion.'

²⁵T. Villalobos, 'al MINAE le falta presion.'

²⁶Global Environment Facility. 'An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez.'

²⁷Global Environment Facility. 'An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez.'

²⁸Global Environment Facility. 'An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez.'

²⁹Global Environment Facility. 'An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez.'

³⁰Global Environment Facility. 'An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez.'

³¹Proceedings of the IUCN World Conservation Congress," IUCN, pages 181-184.

³²Proceedings of the IUCN World Conservation Congress," IUCN, pages 181-184.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Dallas, Texas, and provided legal advice to several conservation organisations.³³

Rodríguez's early career also saw him and his friends forming a watchdog organisation to combat logging companies, eventually leading to their political involvement. They initially considered creating a Green party but chose instead to work within Costa Rica's traditional political parties. This strategic choice allowed them to influence environmental policies within the existing political structure.³⁴ They believed working from the inside out is more effective in bringing change.

After finishing his undergraduate studies, he pursued a master's in Environmental Law at Southern Methodist University in Texas in 1988,³⁵ and his graduation thesis was "Forest Conservation and Economic Growth."³⁶ He said it changed his life because, upon his return to Costa Rica at the end of the 1980s, he was the only environmental lawyer there, which allowed him to collaborate with biologists, conservationists, and various environmental organisations, including the Ministry of Environment and the National Institute of Biodiversity.³⁷ From 1987 to 1988, he worked as a legal assistant in the Legal Department of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Dallas, Texas.³⁸

After that, he focused on politics and worked with Congress to pass laws to protect biodiversity; his legal background gave him the tools to advocate for new policies, such as the payment for environmental services model. This model incentivised landowners to maintain and restore forest cover, demonstrating Rodríguez's ability to leverage legal mechanisms to promote ecological sustainability.³⁹

He started his career with his first job in 1995 as director of the National Park Service and head of protected areas, a role which lasted until 1998; he recalls that the moments working here were the happiest of his career⁴⁰ since he helped create a myriad of institutions, policies, NGOs, a system for protected areas and biological corridors. It was in this period that he reflected, 'I was part of the movement that did major changes that today makes Costa Rica quite different, a period where the number of forests doubled'⁴¹ During this time, he was also the head of Costa Rica's delegation to the Biodiversity Convention and the Conference of Climate Change.⁴²

Rodríguez started his governmental career in 1995 as the Vice Minister and later Minister of Environment and Energy (MINAE) until 1998,⁴³ under the administration of José María

³³Proceedings of the IUCN World Conservation Congress," IUCN, pages 181-184.

³⁴R. A. Butler. The post-COVID opportunity for the environment: An interview with the GEF's Carlos Manuel Rodríguez. 12-10-2020. Minute 7:38.

³⁵Global Environment Facility. 'An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez'

³⁶Proceedings of the IUCN World Conservation Congress," IUCN, pages 181-184.

³⁷Global Environment Facility. 'An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez'

³⁸Proceedings of the IUCN World Conservation Congress," IUCN, pages 181-184.

³⁹Global Environment Facility. 'An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez' .

⁴⁰Global Environment Facility. 'An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez'

⁴¹Global Environment Facility. 'An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez'

⁴²Proceedings of the IUCN World Conservation Congress," IUCN, pages 181-184.

⁴³R. A. Butler. The post-COVID opportunity for the environment: An interview with the GEF's Carlos Manuel Rodríguez. 12-10-2020. Minute 8:36.

Figueres Olsen of the Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN).⁴⁴ His tenure ended due to the political transition when Miguel Ángel Rodríguez of the Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (PUSC) took office. He then worked with the Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza as Subdirector from 2000 to 2002.

Rodríguez returned to government service from 2002 to 2006 as Minister of Environment and Energy under President Abel Pacheco (PUSC).⁴⁵ During this period, he continued to advocate for environmental policies and worked on strengthening the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC). After Pacheco's term, Rodríguez left the government again due to another political transition. In 2005, he founded the Coalition of Rainforest Nations to Avoid Deforestation, a significant initiative that contributed to the development of the REDD (Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) concept.⁴⁶

Between 2006 and 2018, Rodríguez served as Vice President at Conservation International, where he played a pivotal role in promoting global conservation initiatives and environmental sustainability. His extensive work with this NGO allowed him to influence international environmental policies and collaborate with various countries on conservation projects.⁴⁷

Rodríguez returned to government from 2018 to 2020, serving as Minister of Environment and Energy under President Carlos Alvarado Quesada of the Partido Acción Ciudadana (PAC). During this tenure, he was instrumental in advancing Costa Rica's decarbonisation strategy and reinforcing the country's commitment to environmental sustainability.⁴⁸

Reflecting on Costa Rica's progress, Rodríguez emphasised the leap forward in human development between his grandfather's and father's generations. He noted how Costa Rica committed significant resources to education and healthcare, rooted in solid principles of liberty, democracy, and human rights.⁴⁹ This transformation was marked by the civil rights reforms in the 1940s, the establishment of the higher education system, and the creation of a robust social care and health system.⁵⁰ Notably, Costa Rica abolished its army in 1949, reallocating those resources to education and healthcare, which led to substantial improvements in human development. This cultural and political context enabled his generation to build on the pioneering work of early conservationists. Rodríguez also acknowledged that Costa Rican culture, characterised by a preference for consensus and avoidance of conflict, has facilitated adequate progress in various sectors, including education, health, and environmental policy. This culture of seeking common ground and avoiding confrontation has been crucial in implementing and advancing conservation efforts in the country.⁵¹

⁴⁴Trilce Villalobos, "Carlos Manuel Rodríguez: Al MINAE le falta pasión," Delfino.cr, May 2019.

⁴⁵Trilce Villalobos, "Carlos Manuel Rodríguez: Al MINAE le falta pasión," Delfino.cr, May 2019.

⁴⁶Proceedings of the IUCN World Conservation Congress," IUCN, pages 181-184.

⁴⁷Proceedings of the IUCN World Conservation Congress," IUCN, pages 181-184.

⁴⁸Proceedings of the IUCN World Conservation Congress," IUCN, pages 181-184.

⁴⁹Rhett A. Butler, The post-COVID opportunity for the environment: An interview with the GEF's Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, Mongabay.org. 22-10-2020.

⁵⁰Margaret E. Crahan, Costa Rica: National Identity and the Promotion of Human Rights, 2019, pp. 1-9.

⁵¹Rhett A. Butler, The post-COVID opportunity for the environment: An interview with the GEF's Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, Mongabay.org. 22-10-2020.

This defining moment, catalysed by his father's advice, shaped Rodríguez's career and profoundly impacted Costa Rica's environmental policies. His work helped transform the country into a global leader in conservation, with lasting effects on national and international environmental efforts. Rodríguez's strategic career choices and the profound influence of mentorship in achieving significant long-term changes. To further emphasise the impact that his father's career advice had on Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, in an interview with the Global Environment Facility (which he is now the CEO and chairperson of), he stated that the most important thing he had learned was that 'you don't need to be a biologist to save the nature and to save the planet'⁵². This is important because it means he did not regret his career choice since studying law enabled him to be a pioneer of environment conservation without explicitly knowing the biological technicalities.

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's Solutions

Payment for Environmental Services (PES) / Pago por Servicios Ambientales (PSA)

The first policy by Carlos Manuel Rodríguez to be analysed is the renowned Payment for Environmental Services (PES) passed into Costa Rican legislation in 1996 through the Forest Code Law, 'Ley Forestal' N°7575. Carlos Manuel Rodríguez was critical in developing the idea for this program⁵³ and in helping it pass in parliament; a famous Costa Rican newspaper referred to him as 'the father of PES'⁵⁴

The program consists of giving money via the National Fund of Forest Financiation, 'Fondo Nacional de Financiamiento Forestal' (Fonafifo), to the owners of land that establish forest plantations, agroforestry systems and/or carry out natural regeneration, protection and management projects of forests⁵⁵. Law N°7575 recognises 'Environmental Services' as:⁵⁶

- Mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions (fixation, reduction, sequestration, storage and absorption);
- protection of biodiversity for its conservation and sustainable use, scientific and pharmaceutical, research and genetic improvement, as well as for the protection of ecosystems and forms of life;
- protection of water for urban, rural or hydroelectric use and
- natural scenic beauty for tourism and scientific purposes.

This new law was accomplished thanks to legislation from the country's Forest Code, such as Law N°4465 from 1969, which created the possibility of offering incentives for reforestation; law N°7032 from 1986 hat created a new modality for incentives in which landowners can be given money in advance to finance reforestation that they can not

⁵²GEF. An unconventional career path: Carlos Manuel Rodríguez. 26-10-2023

⁵³GEF, 'Carlos Manuel Rodríguez', GEF. *Translated by authors from Spanish.*

⁵⁴E. Vega, 'Papá del Pago por Servicios Ambientales: 'Algunos finqueros juraban que era un plan para robarles las tierras', *La Teja*, 21 October 2021. *Translated by authors from Spanish.*

⁵⁵Oficina Nacional Forestal, 'Pago por Servicios Ambientales' *Oficina Nacional Forestal. Translated by authors from Spanish.*

⁵⁶Fonafifo, 'Pago por Servicios Ambientales', *Fonafifo. Translated by authors from Spanish.*

afford otherwise, and Law N°7174, which removed limitations to the previous law.⁵⁷ Yet PES was still revolutionary since it was one of the only laws that 'changed the traditional concept of a 'subsidiary' or 'investive' of previous legislation for the concept of 'economic recognition' for environmental Services.'⁵⁸

Passing a new law was not an easy task since Carlos Manuel Rodríguez had a hard time convincing both the Parliament to implement the policy through the Forest Code and the owners of the land because people believed deforestation wasn't too big of an issue and that the land owners did not need money.⁵⁹ In an interview, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez claimed that without his program, deforestation and reforestation in the country eventually will be possible to happen due to 'other policies that were about to be implemented',⁶⁰ but at a much slower rate than they did with the PES. Troubles continued when Parliament approved the new law since Rodríguez claimed the landowners refused to register for the PES program and accept paychecks since they thought it was a scam; however, with time, this became less of an issue as confidence in the program increased.

This policy helps Carlos Manuel Rodríguez to achieve his and his country's goals of ending deforestation and re-forestate Costa Rica as well as achieving the country's national plan of decarbonisation, 'Plan Nacional de Descarbonización', which aims to be not only carbon-neutral but also carbon-negative by 2050⁶¹. This is because it helps owners of forests maintain their forests by receiving government money in case they lack sufficient funds. Thus, by helping with reforestation efforts and planting more trees, they help reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and lessen the load of carbon emissions.

This policy can be tied to Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's stake because of the strong connection to his country, given that he grew up in Costa Rica working at his grandfather's coffee farm and mentioning on several occasions how deforestation, which he saw all the time, affected him as a child⁶² and during his youth, he even formed a watchdog organisation with his friends to fight dams and logging companies,⁶³ We can see his motivations stemming from his childhood's experiences, plus his experience as a lawyer and working in the area for several years, culminating in him developing such a revolutionary climate policy.

Marine and Coastal Project for the Ministry of Environment and Energy

The second policy in which Carlos Manuel Rodríguez played a leading role was creating the first-ever Marine and Coastal Program within the Ministry of Environment and Energy. During this time, Rodríguez served his second term as Minister of Environment and

⁵⁷Oscar Sánchez Chavesa, Gilmar Navarrete Chacón, 'La experiencia de Costa Rica en el pago por servicios ambientales: 20 años de lecciones aprendidas' *Revista de Ciencias Ambientales*. *Translated by authors from Spanish*.

⁵⁸Fonafifo, 'Pago por Servicios Ambientales', *Fonafifo*. *Translated by authors from Spanish*.

⁵⁹E. Vega, 'Papá del Pago por Servicios Ambientales'. *Translated by authors from Spanish*.

⁶⁰E. Vega, 'Papá del Pago por Servicios Ambientales', *translated by authors from Spanish*.

⁶¹R. A. Butler, 'The post-COVID opportunity for the environment.

⁶²C.M Rodríguez, 'TEDxPura Vida.

⁶³R. A. Butler, 'The post-COVID opportunity for the environment.

Energy (MINAE) (2002-2006). This program began as a project that aimed to establish a zone dedicated to the protection of biodiversity within Costa Rica's maritime territories through the establishment of an Interdisciplinary Commission of a special economic zone, 'Comisión Interdisciplinaria Marino Costera de la Zona Económica Exclusiva'.⁶⁴ The goal was to determine the viability of dedicating 25% of the area of Costa Rica's exclusive economic zone in the ocean exclusively to 'conservation, restoration, management and sustainable use of existing species and ecosystems, giving particular emphasis, among others, to sites of aggregation, reproduction, feeding and migration'.⁶⁵

A policy like this is crucial given that Costa Rica's ocean territory is 11 times bigger than its land area, and its marine biodiversity represents around 4% of total global biodiversity.⁶⁶ It is also significant because it was the first policy in Costa Rica that specifically targeted the conservation-restoration of the country's marine biodiversity; all previous conservation efforts had neglected marine and coastal zones. A decade of overfishing has significantly impacted marine biodiversity, making it a priority for the government.⁶⁷

This policy helps achieve Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's goal of protecting the biodiversity of his country because it is one of the country's first steps in trying to conserve and restore damaged and deforested land. After this first instance, there will be an increased amount of regulation in this area; in fact, in 2012, the Ministry of the Environment and Energy (MINAE) annulled the decree that established this commission and replaced it with a National Maritime Commission.⁶⁸ To this extent, we can see this policy being successful in different aspects. First, it led to the protection of 12.5 million hectares as part of the country's exclusive economic zone,⁶⁹ and it also catalysed further legislation in this area. The success of this Commission did not go unnoticed since it led Carlos Manuel Rodríguez to win the Global Ocean Conservation Prize in 2005.

By creating this policy to protect the Marine Coastal zone, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez tackled Costa Rica's challenge with coastal degradation, which is one of his principles as an environmental leader.

Global plan to protect tropical forests that were used for the UN's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation program (REDD & REDD+)

The third policy that will be analysed is the United Nations Plan for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries program (REDD) and REDD+ , the '+' stands for other forest activities that protect the climate. This program was

⁶⁴La Gaceta de Costa Rica, 'Decreto Número 31832 MINAE' *La Gaceta de Costa Rica*, 9 July 2004, *Translated by authors from Spanish*.

⁶⁵La Gaceta de Costa Rica, 'Decreto Numero 31832 MINAE.

⁶⁶J. S. Villarreal, F.D. Mora-Rodríguez, A.M Rodríguez, 'Gestión integrada Marina y Costera en Costa Rica', *Revista Costas*, December 2019, *Translated by authors from Spanish*.

⁶⁷La Gaceta de Costa Rica, 'Decreto Numero 31832 MINAE.

⁶⁸La Gaceta de Costa Rica, 'Decreto Número 31832 MINAE' *La Gaceta de Costa Rica*, 17 July 2012, *Translated by authors from Spanish*.

⁶⁹E. Vega, 'Papá del Pago por Servicios Ambientales: 'Algunos finqueros juraban que era un plan para robarles las tierras', *La Teja*, 21 October 2021.

based on the PES program,⁷⁰ and Fonafifo, the Costa Rican National Fund of Forest Financiation Agency, was the operating unit after their excellent execution of the PES program.⁷¹

This initiative aims at 'helping mitigate climate change incentivising countries to reduce carbon emissions due to deforestation and forest degradation'⁷². REDD+ in Costa Rica claims to benefit indigenous communities and owners of forests specifically. It primarily aids these communities through programs and projects that are financed mainly by the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) and the National Fund of Forest Financing (FONAFIFO) via a national investment program set up in 2017 that was going to give around 1 billion US dollars to the REDD+ initiative in the country⁷³. Most of the budget will be allocated to strengthening programs that prevent and control land usage and forest fires.⁷⁴

For Costa Rica, the REDD+ program has established 6 policy strategies that it wants to implement in the country:⁷⁵

1. Promotion of low-carbon production systems carbon emissions;
2. strengthen prevention and control programs for land use change and fires;
3. incentives for forest conservation and management sustainable;
4. incentives for forest conservation and management sustainable;
5. restoration of landscapes and forest ecosystems;
6. participation of Indigenous peoples;
7. enabling conditions: actions aimed at facilitating and monitoring REDD+ actions that are developed in the country and that allow it to attend to the technical-methodological provisions and safeguards applicable to REDD+ as well as supporting the participation of key actors;

For each of these 6 policies (referred to under the acronym PAM, which stands for Policies, Actions and Measures for the REDD+ strategy in Costa Rica), there will be a continuous analysis of their execution in Costa Rica, as well as a revision of their goals and indicators to evaluate whether further money investment is needed.

The REDD+ strategy helps implement activities and projects that will reduce the amount of greenhouse emissions and gas and stop dangerous human activities that have a negative effect on the country's biodiversity. Also, the REDD+ strategy aims to boost involvement in the carbon market climate finance within the forest sector, and we are actively starting the process of implementing soil carbon accounting.⁷⁶ By tackling this

⁷⁰Oscar Sánchez Chavesa, Gilmar Navarrete Chacón, 'La experiencia de Costa Rica en el pago por servicios ambientales: 20 años de lecciones aprendidas' *Revista de Ciencias Ambientales*.
Translated by authors from Spanish.

⁷¹Oscar Sánchez Chavesa, Gilmar Navarrete Chacón, 'La experiencia de Costa Rica en el pago por servicios ambientales: 20 años de lecciones aprendidas.

⁷²REDD Costa Rica, 'REDD+ en Costa Rica', REDD Costa Rica, *Translated by authors from Spanish.*

⁷³J.M.R Zúñiga, 'Estrategia Nacional REDD+ Costa Rica', REDD+ Costa Rica, *Translated by authors from Spanish.*

⁷⁴J.M.R Zúñiga, 'Estrategia Nacional REDD+ Costa Rica.

⁷⁵J.M.R Zúñiga, 'Estrategia Nacional REDD+ Costa Rica.

⁷⁶UN-REDD Programme, 'Costa Rica: Achievements and scope of REDD+ Results-based payments' UN-REDD Programme, 25 March 2024.

issue through climate finance, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's goals of not only protecting biodiversity but growing it can be achieved at a systemic level.

This policy demonstrates commitment to global environmental goals, reinforcing Costa Rica's image as a pioneer in green policies while boosting the economy and addressing environmental challenges. Due to the high budget of this plan and its goals of using 'climate finance' to achieve its goals, it is clear there are more stakeholders who are more invested in the project and involved in its success.

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's Impact

Payment for Environmental Services (PES) / Pago por Servicios Ambientales (PSA)

The PES has been implemented both in Costa Rica and other countries. By 2020, the program had allocated payments to thousands of landowners, covering approximately 1.3 million hectares of land and representing nearly 26% of Costa Rica's total area. It has created a total of 12,118 contracts between the government and landowners who receive funds between 2010 and February 2024.⁷⁷ These huge numbers explain how this program has become a cornerstone of Costa Rica's environmental policy framework.

This policy has profoundly impacted the country's biodiversity and ecological conservation efforts. Costa Rica's Payment for Environmental Services (PES) program has significantly contributed to reforestation and forest protection. As a result, the country has reversed its deforestation trend and now boasts 59% forest cover, up from a low of 40% in 1986. This increase in forest cover has enhanced biodiversity, improved water quality, and increased carbon sequestration. The United Nations supports this, stating that the PES program has significantly bolstered biodiversity in the country.⁷⁸

Additionally, the PES program has seen a steady increase in applications. For instance, in 2020 alone, over 1,200 landowners applied to participate in the program, illustrating its popularity and the growing awareness among local communities regarding the importance of conservation.⁷⁹ The program's success is also reflected in the substantial financial incentives provided to landowners, which not only help sustain their livelihoods but also promote sustainable land use practices.⁸⁰

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's role in both ideating and implementing the PES program during his term as National Park Service Director (1995 - 1998) gained him popularity in the environmental policy-making arena of Costa Rica and propelled him to securing key leadership positions such as Minister and Viceminister of the Ministry of Environment and Energy in 1998. This program also gave him international recognition, which paved the

⁷⁷Estadísticas de PSA," FONAFIFO, accessed July 31, 2024.

⁷⁸Sebastián Rodríguez, 'How Costa Rica reversed deforestation and raised millions for conservation', *Diálogo Earth*, 7 January 2022.

⁷⁹German Obando, 'Comparing access criteria and compensation: Results-Based Payments for REDD+ in Costa Rica', *UNDP*, 21 December 2022.

⁸⁰UN-REDD Programme, 'Costa Rica's Payment for Environmental Services (PES) Programme' 2020.

way⁸¹ for him to serve later in roles at prominent global organisations such as Conservation International from 2006 - 2018 and the Global Environment Facility since 2020.

The PES program was so successful it was implemented after the 2000s in other countries that copied the Costa Rican model, such as Morocco in 2015, Peru in 2020, and now the Dominican Republic in 2023.⁸² This program has also contributed to international discussions and frameworks on climate change, including developing the United Nations' REDD+ program, which aims to reduce deforestation and forest degradation emissions. This shows how this program has opened a door for new ways to address deforestation and the impact a relatively young Latin American democracy can have on global climate policy.

Marine and Coastal Project for the Ministry of Environment and Energy

The Marine and Coastal Program has been fully integrated into the Ministry of Environment and Energy operations, leading to the designation and effective management of marine protected areas (MPAs) and the implementation of policies to safeguard marine biodiversity.⁸³ Through comprehensive legislation and dedicated efforts, the program has established a framework for the sustainable use and conservation of marine resources, ensuring long-term and economic benefits for the country.

The program led to many positive aspects in Costa Rica. First of all, MPAs have to be established and expanded to protect significant marine habitats and species. This has ensured the preservation of vital ecosystems, including coral reefs, mangroves, and aquatic wildlife.⁸⁴ Moreover, it led to the improvement in the management practices that have promoted sustainable fishing, helping to maintain fish populations and marine health. Sustainable practices have helped stabilise the fishing industry, ensuring long-term economic benefits for coastal communities.⁸⁵

Coastal and marine conservation efforts have bolstered ecotourism, attracting tourists interested in diving, snorkelling, and viewing wildlife. This has provided a significant boost to the local economy, especially in coastal regions. In 2019, there were nearly 3 million tourists in Costa Rica, of which 80% are considered ecotourists.⁸⁶

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's work in marine conservation gained global attention, further establishing him as a key figure in international environmental policy circles. His

⁸¹Alexandre Pinheiro Rego Senior Communications Officer. Carlos Manuel Rodríguez reappointed as CEO and Chairperson of the Global Environment Facility. GEF. 24-06-19. *Translated by authors from Spanish*

⁸²United Nations Climate Change, 'Payment for Environmental Services Program Costa Rica' *United Nations Climate Change*, 2023. 2023 Global Climate Action Awards section.

⁸³Diego Vincenzi Chief of Staff, Minister of Environment and Energy, Costa Rica. How Costa Rica made its seas work for fishermen and for sharks. World Economic Forum. 24-04-29.

⁸⁴Diego Vincenzi. How Costa Rica made its seas work for fishermen and for sharks. WeForum 29-04-24.

⁸⁵Diego Vincenzi. How Costa Rica made its seas work for fishermen and for sharks. WeForum 29-04-24.

⁸⁶Adopt Rainforest. Costa Rica - from large-scale deforestation to a paradise for eco tourism. 2021.

environmental leadership and the achievements of the Marine and Coastal Program have elevated him as a leading figure in environmental conservation. He was honoured as the recipient of the inaugural Global Ocean Conservation Award by six organisations dedicated to promoting marine conservation.⁸⁷

Costa Rica's Marine and Coastal Program serves as a model for other nations, promoting the adoption of similar initiatives worldwide. This program's success contributes to international efforts to address climate change, including initiatives like the Convention on Biological Diversity and various United Nations frameworks. This global impact on climate change is related to the later signing of the San Jose declaration between Costa Rica, Colombia, Panama and Ecuador, which established a voluntary regional cooperation mechanism between the signing parties in the Eastern Tropical Seascape (ETPS) region.

ETPS is a highly productive ocean region located along the Intertropical Convergence Zone, where warm and cool currents converge, producing a rich and diverse assemblage of marine species. The participating countries agree to safeguard these species and their habitats with the San Jose Declaration. On July 24, 2006, the Blue Moon Fund recognised Rodríguez's efforts in promoting this declaration with the Conservation Leadership Award.⁸⁸

With establishing the Marine and Coastal Program, such significant international cooperation and recognition might have occurred. The program has not only benefited Costa Rica but has also influenced global marine conservation strategies, contributing to the overall fight against climate change.

Global plan to protect tropical forests that were used for the UN's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation program (REDD)

The policy framework for the UN's REDD program has been widely implemented across tropical countries⁸⁹. This initiative includes creating national strategies to reduce deforestation and forest degradation while enhancing forest carbon stocks and emphasising sustainable forest management. Over 60 countries have adopted a REDD program, each at various stages of implementation, ranging from initial readiness phases to fully operational projects. These stages involve extensive planning, capacity building, and the establishment of monitoring and verification systems to ensure effective implementation and outcomes.⁹⁰

In Costa Rica, implementing REDD strategies has led to a remarkable transformation of the forestry sector. The country, which once had the highest deforestation rates in Latin America during the 1970s and 80s, has almost completely reversed forest loss by the 2000s. Between 1997 and 2019, these strategies prevented the release of 200 million

⁸⁷Arlo Hemphill. First annual Global Conservation Award announced at World Ocean Day. EurekaAlert. 08-06-2005.

⁸⁸World Economic Forum.Carlos Manuel Rodríguez Echandi Biography. 2022.

⁸⁹REDD+ Costa Rica. Background | REDD+ Costa Rica. (n.d.).
<https://www.reddcr.go.cr/en/background>.

⁹⁰REDD+ Costa Rica. Background | REDD+ Costa Rica. (n.d.).
<https://www.reddcr.go.cr/en/background>.

tons of CO₂, turning the forestry sector from an emissions source to a carbon sink, with net sequestration of -4.4 million tons of CO₂ annually by 2019.⁹¹

Costa Rica has reaped significant economic benefits from its participation in carbon credit markets, thanks to REDD strategies. Despite challenges in accessing total potential payments, the country has received approximately 8.7% of potential payments, translating to millions in financial incentives for verified emissions reductions. These funds have supported sustainable forest management practices among local communities and landowners.⁹² The Payments for Environmental Services (PES) program, a precursor to REDD, has been instrumental in this success, paying landowners to maintain and restore forests and thereby demonstrating the power of valuing ecosystem services in driving conservation efforts.⁹³

The REDD program has played a pivotal role in strengthening local forest management and monitoring capacities in Costa Rica. This has not only contributed to long-term environmental sustainability but also ensured economic stability. By fostering a green economy, Costa Rica is effectively mitigating environmental risks and ensuring the resilience and prosperity of its economy and communities in the face of climate change.⁹⁴ However, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez has also highlighted the challenges and shortcomings of REDD. He pointed out that the program has often been governed by individuals needing more practical experience in forest management. According to Rodríguez, these leaders focus more on monitoring and assessment rather than addressing the underlying causes of deforestation. He criticised the inadequate compensation rates for carbon offsets, which do not match the actual cost of conservation, thereby undermining the program's effectiveness.⁹⁵

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's leadership in the REDD global initiative has solidified his reputation as a key figure in environmental policy, enabling him to push for more comprehensive and collaborative approaches to climate change mitigation and forest conservation.

The REDD program fosters international collaboration, encouraging countries to work together to combat climate change and protect forests. It supports the global policy framework for climate change mitigation, aligning with commitments under the Paris Agreement and other international accords. By promoting sustainable forest management and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, the REDD program plays a crucial role in the global effort to address climate change.⁹⁶

In conclusion, the widespread implementation of the REDD program across tropical countries has not only helped reduce deforestation and enhance forest carbon stocks

⁹¹German Obando, 'Comparing access criteria and compensation: Results-Based Payments for REDD+ in Costa Rica,' UNDP Blog, 21 December 2022.

⁹²German Obando, 'Comparing access criteria and compensation: Results-Based Payments for REDD+ in Costa Rica,' UNDP Blog, 21 December 2022.

⁹³Sebastián Rodríguez, 'How Costa Rica reversed deforestation and raised millions for conservation,' *Diálogo Earth*, 7 January 2022.

⁹⁴Arild Angelsen. *Transforming REDD+ Lessons and new directions*. CIFOR. Page 117. 2018.

⁹⁵Rhett A. Butler, *The post-COVID opportunity for the environment: An interview with the GEF's Carlos Manuel Rodríguez*, *Mongabay.org*. 22-10-2020.

⁹⁶*REDD+ Costa Rica*. Background | REDD+ Costa Rica. (n.d.).

but also provided significant economic and environmental benefits. Carlos Manuel Rodríguez has contributed substantially to global climate policy, advocating for sustainable practices and international cooperation in the fight against climate change through his work with the REDD program. However, his insights into the program's shortcomings underscore the need for more effective implementation strategies and fair compensation for carbon offsetting to achieve its goals truly.⁹⁷

Conclusion

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's journey from a nature-loving child to a pioneering environmental lawyer has shown to continue fighting for the climate cause even after working as an environmental lawyer and minister, now serving as CEO and chairperson of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Rodríguez's transformative impact on Costa Rica's environmental policies includes his role in creating and managing protected areas and biological corridors, as well as involving local communities in biodiversity conservation. These efforts were crucial in shaping the government's and civil society's relationship. His lifelong dedication to preserving Costa Rica's rich biodiversity and implementing innovative policies, such as the Payment for Environmental Services program, underscores his commitment to the well-being of nature and society. His achievements highlight his deep-rooted belief in the intrinsic value of nature and the moral responsibility to protect it for future generations. The PES program, established under Rodríguez's guidance, has promoted sustainable land use practices by providing financial incentives to landowners for maintaining forest cover. This policy has preserved vast tracts of forest and enhanced the livelihoods of rural communities.

From an early age, Rodríguez was captivated by the natural beauty surrounding him in Costa Rica, a country renowned for its rich biodiversity and vibrant ecosystems. This early connection with nature was more than a childhood fascination; it was the foundation of a lifelong mission. As he grew older, Rodríguez's passion for the environment led him to pursue a career in environmental law, where he sought to intertwine legal frameworks with ecological preservation. This professional path enabled him to influence policies directly, making significant strides in environmental protection at a national level.

One of Rodríguez's most notable achievements is establishing the Payment for Environmental Services (PES) program. This innovative policy has been instrumental in promoting sustainable land use practices by providing financial incentives to landowners for maintaining forest cover, which protects watersheds, conserves biodiversity, and sequesters carbon. The PES program is a testament to Rodríguez's forward-thinking approach, integrating economic incentives with environmental stewardship. This program has preserved vast tracts of forest and enhanced the livelihoods of rural communities, proving that economic development and environmental conservation can go hand in hand.

⁹⁷Rhett A. Butler, The post-COVID opportunity for the environment: An interview with the GEF's Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, Mongabay.org. 22-10-2020.

Rodríguez's pragmatic approach is evident in his recognition of Costa Rica's vulnerability to climate change. The country's unique geographical location and diverse ecosystems make it particularly susceptible to the adverse impacts of climate change, such as increased frequency of extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and shifting climate patterns. Understanding these risks, Rodríguez has championed policies that build resilience and adaptive capacity within local communities. His efforts in climate adaptation and mitigation reflect a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of environmental challenges and the need for integrated solutions.

Moreover, Rodríguez's motivation stems from a pragmatic understanding of Costa Rica's vulnerability to climate change. His strategic efforts to mitigate environmental risks and promote sustainable practices reflect a recognition of the immediate and long-term threats posed by climate change to his country. This dual motivation—combining altruistic passion with survivalist pragmatism—has driven Rodríguez to champion policies that protect the environment and ensure the resilience and prosperity of Costa Rica's economy and communities.

Meanwhile, Minister of Environment and Energy Rodríguez played a pivotal role in enhancing Costa Rica's environmental policies. He advocated for expanding protected areas, ensuring that over a quarter of the country's territory is now under environmental protection. This protected area network is a cornerstone of Costa Rica's conservation strategy, safeguarding critical habitats and providing refuge for countless species. His work in establishing biological corridors has been equally significant, facilitating the movement of wildlife between protected areas and enhancing ecological connectivity.

Rodríguez's dedication to involving local communities in conservation has been a critical aspect of his approach. He understands that sustainable conservation can only be achieved with the active participation and support of local populations. Rodríguez has helped build a sense of ownership and responsibility among local communities by fostering community engagement and promoting participatory conservation practices. This inclusive approach has led to more effective and enduring conservation outcomes, as communities are more likely to support and sustain initiatives they have helped design and implement.

Beyond his national achievements, Rodríguez's influence extends to the global stage. As CEO and chairperson of the GEF, he oversees a multibillion-dollar fund addressing global environmental challenges. Rodríguez continues to advocate for innovative and impactful solutions to climate change, biodiversity loss, and other pressing environmental issues in this role. His leadership at the GEF exemplifies his commitment to leveraging international cooperation and funding to drive meaningful change.

Rodríguez's work reflects his values and a broader vision for a sustainable future. His achievements demonstrate that environmental conservation is not a luxury but a necessity, integral to society's well-being and the planet's health. By aligning economic development with ecological preservation, Rodríguez has shown that achieving a harmonious balance between human needs and environmental sustainability is possible.

Furthermore, Rodríguez's pragmatic approach upholds his deep-rooted altruism. He chose his love for nature and positive changes over money. He is driven by a genuine

love for nature and a profound moral responsibility to protect it. This intrinsic motivation is evident in his relentless efforts to champion environmental causes, even in the face of significant challenges. Rodríguez's ability to inspire and mobilise others around this shared vision has been a cornerstone of his success, enabling him to build broad-based support for his initiatives.

To this extent, we can categorise him mainly as an altruistic climate leader since he shows a true passion for the climate. We can also call him a leader motivated by survival since, as he mentioned several times, Costa Rica is vulnerable to climate change's consequences. This also inspired him to keep working in this field.

In conclusion, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez's journey is a testament to the power of combining passion with pragmatism in the fight against climate change. His unwavering commitment to environmental conservation, innovative policy-making, and inclusive approach to community engagement have made him a transformative figure in the field. As he continues to lead the GEF, Rodríguez's legacy will undoubtedly inspire future generations to carry forward the mantle of environmental stewardship, ensuring that the natural world remains a vibrant and thriving part of our shared heritage.

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