

# The Coda Files

## Karen Wong

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Respect the qualitative. That was Karen Wong's life lesson working with senior social scientist Supin Wongbusarakum as a Coda Global Fellow.

"My academic background is chemistry and I was not aware of all that is included in social science and qualitative methodologies," says Wong of her fellowship experience. "I learned to revalue qualitative data as valid."

As part of her fellowship, Karen created a new web page of resources on the Conservation Gateway to guide conservation practitioners to consider the impact of their work on people. (The page is on the [Gateway's social science and conservation section](#).) This list includes the three recorded internet trainings Supin delivered on different aspects of integrating social science and conservation, which Karen help organize and support.

In addition, Karen assisted with and facilitated a field visit with Supin to a water fund site in an indigenous area of East Cauca, Columbia. "Without Karen, I would not be able to communicate effectively with anybody in the meeting and in the communities," says Supin.

And the trip also helped Karen, too, as she came through the experience to reassess her conservation values. "We like to think that conservation work always is good for

### Coda Fellow: Karen Wong

**Day Job:** Mexico Mosaics Coordinator

**Assignment:** Social Science

**Duration:** March – December 2011

**Task:** Support capacity building to integrate social science into conservation planning and impact measurement.

**Most Important Lesson Learned:** "Conservation is not just biological, but is itself a social and political process."



human wellbeing,” she says. “We have to realize this is not always true, there are trade-offs that must be recognized in order to minimize negative impacts... I strongly believe that TNC is working in many aspects of human wellbeing including income, opportunity, empowerment, and security, even if we don’t use the term explicitly.”

Karen has now moved into her new position as Mexico Mosaics coordinator and is actively using what she learned in her fellowship in her new job. “I am including human wellbeing goals along with ecological and management goals in our conservation business plan and theory of change. Our next step is to define indicators and start measuring.” This puts into practice the cardinal rule of integrating social science into conservation: set socioeconomic objectives first. Only then can you measure a given project’s impact on people. [SC](#)

— [Jensen Montambault](#), applied conservation scientist, Central Science, The Nature Conservancy

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