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Gender, economic alternatives, and food sovereignty:

Political strategies to bring about positive change to reduce commercial hunting in Yasuní

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Progress Report



Huaorani woman preparing "wild meat"
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*I hunt
You eat
They profit*

*Women move forward
Men and women decide
Change is happening...*

Project funded by:



Leading partner
for the project's community
component:



This progress report is for the project “Diminishing Illegal Wildlife Trade in the Yasuní Biosphere Reserve (YBR)”. It emphasizes that key strategies used to reduce illegal and commercial hunting in the YBR include strengthening opportunities for reflection, decision-making and empowerment of women, the implementation of sustainable economic alternatives that generate alternative sources of income to illegal trade, and the strengthening of food sovereignty in the targeted areas of the project.

The Yasuní Biosphere Reserve (YBR) in Ecuador is one of the most biodiverse places on Earth. The Yasuní National Park, which lies at the core of the reserve, is one of Ecuador’s largest protected areas (approximately 982,000 ha.). It contains the Napo Tropical Moist Forest, and is the headwaters of many rivers of the upper Amazon basin. Distribution maps of amphibian, bird, mammal and tree species across South America show that Yasuní occupies a unique biogeographical position, with extremely high levels of species richness. Just one hectare of this forest contains over 655 tree species on average, more than the number of tree species found in the United States and Canada combined¹.



Huaorani children in Tepapade, a community which is participating in the project
© Ana Puyol, TRAFFIC

The cultural diversity of indigenous peoples who live in Yasuní is also significant, and is part of Ecuador’s tangible and intangible cultural heritage, creating a socio-environmental landscape of global interest. This area is a strategic priority for the Ecuadorian Government, which has launched the **Yasuni-Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini Initiative**, an innovative idea for combating climate

change by not exploiting one of the oil reserves which is in the Yasuni Area. The Preventive Measures Programme, a high-priority government initiative aimed at protecting indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation, such as the Tagaeri and the Taromenane, is also being carried out in this strategic area.



Young Huaorani boys in one of the most biodiverse areas on the planet: Yasuní
© Nicolás Kingman, IUCN/TRAFFIC, 2010

However, as is the case in most conservation and sustainable use areas in the region, various factors in the YBR exert pressure on its extraordinary biodiversity: the implementation of aggressive oil extraction policies; economic and social incentives that encourage the destruction of Amazonian ecosystems; disorderly population growth and urban expansion; and, in general, weak social and institutional capacity to cope with these problems. At the same time, local people have a number of unmet needs that lead them to put direct pressure on the reserve’s natural resources.



Oil field sign in the YBR
© IUCN/TRAFFIC, 2010

Illegal wildlife trade

The sale of so-called “wild meat” poses a threat to wildlife. Ecuadorian legislation prohibits the sale of wildlife while recognizing the rights of rural dwellers to engage in subsistence hunting. However, wildlife from Yasuní National Park is massively exploited for commercial

¹Bass MS, Finer M, Jenkins CN, Kreft H, Cisneros-Heredia DF, et al. (2010) *Global Conservation Significance of Ecuador’s Yasuní National Park*. PLoS ONE 5(1): e8767. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0008767

purposes, mainly for consumption by Amazonian urban populations.

Against this backdrop, several organizations have directed efforts towards reducing wildlife hunting for commercial purposes through applying new approaches that are beginning to catalyse important social changes.

The “**Diminishing Illegal Wildlife Trade in Yasuní**”² project described below is funded by the Spanish Development Cooperation Agency, AECID, led by IUCN/TRAFFIC, and implemented jointly by two strategic members of IUCN³: Fundación Natura and the Randi Randi Group Corporation. This progress report highlights the community work component aimed at reducing illegal wildlife trade.

What is the problem?

Many complex changes have taken place in the traditional ways of life of Amazonian peoples and local communities in the YBR over the last four decades. Their economic needs and the external pressures to adapt quickly to economic models based on the commercial extraction of natural resources has, in many cases, forced these communities to find themselves, in a monetary economy that affects their ancestral ways of relating to nature, to themselves and their cultural history, under schemes which create more social and economic inequity.



Huaorani hunter

© Nicolás Kingman, IUCN/TRAFFIC, 2010

In the YBR, most illegal wildlife trade supplies external markets. Wild meat makes its way into the growing markets of Amazonian cities through the main market of Pompeya, located on the left bank of the Napo River, where up to ten tonnes of wild meat are traded annually. (WCS, 2007)⁴.

Characteristically, indigenous hunters make the least amount of money in the commercial chain, while the owners of traditional small restaurants can earn up to five times the amount the hunter receives (WCS, 2007). In 2010, a plate of *guanta* costs approximately USD 6.50 in a traditional food restaurant in Tena, while hunters earn USD1.00 per pound.

² The formal name of the project is “Diminishing the illegal trade of wildlife and timber species from Yasuní Biosphere Reserve (Ecuador), Oxapampa-Ashaninka-Yanesha (Peru) and Río Plátano (Honduras): Development of economic alternatives for the sustainable use of timber and non-timber forest products”. The project is being implemented simultaneously in the three countries. This report only addresses the case of Yasuní in Ecuador.

³ IUCN: International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

⁴ Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Ecuador Program, Bulletin number 2, October 2007.



Plate of guanta (*Cuniculus paca*) meat served at a popular restaurant in the city of Tena
© Lucy Ruiz IUCN/TRAFFIC

Guanta (*Cuniculus paca*), a large rodent sold in traditional eateries in the main cities, including Coca, Tena, Joya de los Sachas and Lago Agrio, is the preferred meat of the Mestizo populations in Amazonian cities. Other popular dishes include two species of wild pigs: the **Sahino** or **Collared Peccary** (*Pecari tajacu*) and the **Huangana** or **White-lipped Peccary** (*Tayassu pecari*), which are consumed by urban populations in particular, and in the city of Tena by indigenous Kichwa people, especially during celebrations and holidays.

There is also additional pressure from tourists, seeking food with an “Amazon” flavour.

The excessive hunting of large mammals has caused their populations to decline or be threatened with extinction both outside and on the edges of conservation and sustainable use areas.

This is progressively degrading the quality and integrity of these areas, with unpredictable consequences for the social and ecological future of such reserves, reducing the quality of their natural environments.

Another serious consequence of the unsustainable wild meat trade is its effect on the food sovereignty of local and indigenous peoples and their opportunities to maintain long-term sustainable livelihoods strategies, as rodents and wild pigs are their main sources of protein.

What does the project aim to achieve with the communities that hunt wild meat?

Hunting of large mammals in this area is mainly carried out by the Huaorani indigenous people. The Huaorani

Nationality has a territory of approximately 800,000 ha, legally recognized by the Government of Ecuador.



The Sahino or Collared Peccary (*Pecari tajacu*), a highly endangered wild species due to hunting for its meat © Ana Puyol, TRAFFIC, 2010

The project therefore recognized the importance of working with the Huaorani, in particular the women of this Nationality because of 1) the strategic role indigenous women play in the sustainable use of Amazonian biodiversity and in indigenous land management; 2) the value of their traditional knowledge and practices; 3) the political commitment *per se* of empowering Amazonian women; 4) the strategic perspective on food sovereignty that characterizes the issues; 5) the clear resistance of a significant number of Huaorani women to the sale of wild meat in local markets due to a legitimate concern about the future of their territory.

The president of the Association of Huaorani Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon (**AMWAE**), Manuela Ima, and the association's leaders were therefore approached and it was soon apparent they had a clear understanding of the issue.



Oscar Yépez, a social expert at Fundación Natura, facilitating the workshop held with AMWAE leaders to discuss the project
© TRAFFIC, 2010

Following an initial phase of building trust and creating a shared vision, AMWAE has

supported project implementation in the Huaorani territory, with technical support from Fundación Natura and IUCN/TRAFFIC.



Manuela Ima, AMWAE President, key project leader and expert craftswoman © Ana Puyol, TRAFFIC, 2010

Key aspects of project implementation:

- a) Direct and open dialogue on the issues with selected communities, led by AMWAE.
- b) Male hunters were included in the dialogues organized by AMWAE from the outset.
- c) The participatory selection, by both genders, of sustainable economic alternatives based on developed markets already in place helped secure from the outset commitments not to expand agricultural activities.
- d) Commitments to reducing wildlife trade, under a scheme that supports and promotes food sovereignty for Huaorani families. Food sovereignty stresses the need for social groups to produce their own food according to the culture in which they live, and strengthens the capacity of these groups to make decisions to ensure a quality food supply; those who produce should consume the best food, and not vice versa (Alexandra Martínez, Universidad Salesiana, Ecuador, personal interview 2010).



Working groups using photographs to identify problems in their communities © Nicolás Kingman, IUCN/TRAFFIC, 2010

- e) High quality and long-term technical support for the implementation of sustainable production alternatives selected through participatory processes.



Participatory workshop in Gareno: communities voting for their interests regarding production activities to reduce wildlife trade © Nicolás Kingman, IUCN/TRAFFIC, 2010

- f) Strengthening of local governance dialogues, capacities and processes with local communities while implementing productive alternatives to illegal hunting.
- g) The training of AMWAE leaders to ensure their leadership for the long-term management of their lands.



Patricia Peñaherrera, expert in the development of participatory community governance processes, facilitating a workshop in Gareno
© Nicolás Kingman, IUCN/TRAFFIC, 2010

Currently, the project is working with nine strategically selected communities in two areas of the YBR, with more than 70 Huaorani families and an impact on approximately 200,000 ha. of tropical forests.

AMWAE, supported by IUCN/TRAFFIC and Fundación Natura, has undertaken dialogues and ongoing community training on governance and land management, which are necessary groundwork to establish hunting rules, regulations, and ecosystem management, linking scientific knowledge with traditional knowledge.

The principal sustainable production activities relate to the planting of fine aroma cocoa, a native species that is one of Ecuador's "star" export products because of its superior quality and texture. This initiative is being implemented under schemes aimed at both strengthening Amazonian agrobiodiversity and promoting fair trade to ensure indigenous communities are treated equitably in the trading process.

The project has promoted the integration of cocoa production with that of fruit production from citrus and avocado trees and traditional foods such as cassava and plantain. These foodstuffs, together with meat from wild animals, which the Huaorani have the right to hunt⁵, enrich and are part of their diet. Thus, the food sovereignty of these families is strengthened at the same time as their income is increased in a sustainable manner over the medium term.

The goal of the integrated management of so-called "chacras" (traditional indigenous

crop areas) is to include up to 10 plant species with traditional uses.

An agreement was also signed between AMWAE and Fundación Natura (on 20 July, 2010) committing communities not to trade wildlife, but rather to work to ensure their families are adequately fed and their lands are sustainably protected and managed. A commitment was also made not to hunt tapirs (a highly endangered mammal in the Amazon), not even for subsistence purposes.

The various communities are still discussing their own regulations for exercising social control over these agreements, and this process is itself making a very positive contribution to improving local governance.



Nemo Andy, AMWAE Community Coordinator, who leads the project in target areas
© Nicolás Kingman, IUCN/TRAFFIC, 2010

In the northern area of the project, there are plans to implement a fund to support hunters in producing hunting tools (spears and blowpipes) for sale as handicraft items at stores run by AMWAE; this will generate income to compete with the illegal sale of wild meat. Together with the agrobiodiversity-related proposals, this has been one of the main business strategies used in working with hunters to reduce the pressure on wildlife from the communities along the so-called "Vía Maxus" (Maxus

⁵ Although subsistence hunting is not necessarily carried out in a sustainable manner.

Road), the main wild meat suppliers to the Pompeya market.



Huaorani community getting ready to plant fine aroma cocoa in Tepapade
© Manuel Zabala, 2010

The approach of working with women to enable them to have political and community impacts on hunting issues has rarely been used elsewhere in the world (Tim Christophersen, CBD, personal interview, 2010), but the project has demonstrated how strengthening women's political leadership on illegal hunting issues substantially improves governance at the organizational and community levels.

There is still a long way to go, but the application of new policy approaches not normally used to reduce illegal hunting have laid the foundation for participatory work with a vision for change.



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