

Project Update: September 2014

I am writing to update you on project activities. So far I have completed the fieldwork in Ecuador, where I stayed for over 2 months. In my last update, I had described my activities in Quito and my preliminary visits through indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

After this preliminary contact, I spent a few more days in Tena (a small town where I was based), conducting meetings with local researchers, members of the Environmental Ministry and professionals of conservation and development organisations. At that time, I also interviewed leaders of indigenous social movements. This process allowed me to adapt my methods and my qualitative interviews to the local conditions, culture, language and context. I thus defined the communities to visit and to conduct the fieldwork, with the criteria of geography (for covering the main areas of the Sumaco region), ethnicity (for including communities that were indigenous-Kichwa, settlers and mixed), and remoteness (for selecting villages that were more and less accessible, with differing distances to the main road, as well as river vs. road access).

In total, I visited 10 villages, across the provinces of Napo, Orellana and Sucumbios. In most places, I had the support of the Sumaco Biosphere Reserve park rangers, for establishing contact with leaders and families of each community. Formally, I interviewed an average of three families in each community, but I also conducted a kind of ethnographic work, by interacting in the daily life of local people and subsistence activities, building trust and talking about the research topics in a more informal structure.

For the interviews, I adopted a qualitative method of semi-structured questionnaires, in which flexibility is allowed with the purpose of gaining as much information as possible, including issues not previously predicted. The main topics approached in the interviews were complementary to the information already available in the PEN data base that I have been processing; for instance, I collected non-quantitative values of forest relevance, such as culture, identity and wellbeing. I also gathered information on conservation incentives and the existence of locally developed natural resource management systems. Lastly, I asked questions regarding the perceived institutional blockages and local visions of alternative policies that would be suitable for promoting both forest conservation and better livelihoods.

The formal interviews were recorded, and I am now investing time to transcribe them. Within less than two weeks from now (October 5th 2014), I will be travelling to Acre (Brazil) and Pando (Bolivia), and by mid-November 2014 I will travel to Abaetetuba (Pará, Brazil), where I will conclude the fieldwork.

That said, by the end of the year, I plan to submit the final report to Rufford. Nevertheless, I will continue working on writing and preparing publications, and I will keep sending updates of each of the results achieved.

In attached, I am sending photos taken during the fieldwork in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

