Perspectives in Tourism

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Indigenous woman in Ecuador

Community based tourism- An Ecuador experience

Helga Serrano

Pedro Humberto Armendariz Carranza

"The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism is a Hong Kong based coalition of Regional Ecumenical Organisations and over seventy secular and faith-based groups. It seeks to unite people around collective efforts that negate the undesirable effects of modern tourism and, in its place, institute socially responsible and ethically oriented tourism. It believes that tourism must be based on justice and sustainability for host communities and that, therefore, tourism planning and practice must be democratised. ECOT advocates respect for the protection and dignity of the human rights of women, children, indigenous peoples and workers in the tourist trade. It opposes tourism projects that create environmental devastation."

ECOT has eleven principal aims:

1. Focus on tourism and the effect it has on the lives of the people of the Third World and their natural environs.
2. Provide opportunities for the local people displaced and otherwise affected by tourism to express their views and concerns.
3. Work for gender justice and child protection in tourism.
4. Protect the rights of workers in the formal and informal sectors of the industry.
5. Denounce unfair practices in tourism and encourage action to change them.
6. Promote a good quality of tourist activity that is appropriate to the quest for a just, participatory, and sustainable society.
7. Empower indigenous peoples and support them in their attempts to get a fair price for their exposure to tourism.
8. Lobby against the violation of human rights related to tourism development projects at national and international level.
9. Provide research and information on the impact of tourism.
10. Engage in analytical study on the implications of globalization on the tourist trade and offer alternative paradigms for justice.
11. Advocate for just practices in tourist trade and to ensure that international trade mechanisms are in line with values of justice for the host communities.

Preface

Tourism is one of the largest foreign currency-earners in Ecuador, affecting the lives of millions of people. While it can bring benefits, these are seldom spread evenly.

The arguments for mass tourism in Ecuador by the government and the tourism industry solely emphasize the economic benefits. Yet the evidence suggests that - while ruling elites, landowners, government officials or businessmen might benefit - tourism can make poorer people even worse off - both materially and culturally. It is only recently, NGOs, communities and environmentalists have begun to wake up to the need for tourism to be developed more responsibly and on the basis of sustainability.

Through this publication series "Perspectives in Tourism", ECOT aims to raise general awareness of these problems, as well as bringing specific projects and campaigns to the attention of readers. In this edition, we highlight the case of the Ecuador YMCA and its attempt to forge an alternative to commercial tourism. As a cornerstone, the Ecuador YMCA seeks to give a fair share of profits back to the local community through its efforts. Towards this, it seeks to involve communities rather than individuals. Because much of the work carried out by the Ecuador YMCA is with rural and indigenous communities, it also attempts to introduce notions of the conservation of biodiversity, environmental sustainability and the lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources. Additionally, the programme promotes a healthy and just respect for traditional cultures and the right of people to say 'no' to tourism.

This study looks at the issue of tourism within the larger context of Ecuadorian economics and social formation. In that sense it argues for forms of tourism which can contribute to the development of nations and its peoples- particularly the poor. They show from experience and study that the YMCA in Ecuador views community-based tourism as a valid development tool. It argues too that tourism has a great capacity to influence social and economic development of populations and its territories. It is, they suggest, necessary to link community-based tourism to local development. This recognizes and implies that the population will assume greater control in the sustainable

handling of their territories, articulating efforts with their local governments, and establishing strategic alliances with national and international organizations.

Many of our constituents are in Latin America where the fluency of language is Spanish. Hence, we have decided to make available Spanish translations of all our publications. This particular publication has two sections in it- first the English versión, followed by the Spanish translation.

Readers are encouraged to make this booklet widely known and used in adapted ways in different circumstances.

L C D (Ranjan) Solomon
Executive Secretary

Community based tourism - An Ecuador experience

Ecuador and its Development

Ecuador is one of those countries in Latin America with major inequality in the distribution of the wealth. There exist powerful groups with enormous wealth while more than 70% of the Ecuadorians live in poverty. Ecuador is said to be an impoverished population because it is a very rich country in natural resources, biodiversity, and agricultural production. The population is also very diverse, with a big mixed population, an important indigenous population formed by 14 indigenous nations with a 10% black population. The Ecuadorians are very hard working, as much in the Coast as in the Sierra or in the Amazons.

Nevertheless, there exist many different factors that prevent its development. For example, the payment of the external debt represents almost 50% of the state's budget. The agreement to importations without any mechanism of internal protection of the economy has weakened national production. In 2002, there were 1778 exporting companies in Quayaguil. By the first semester of 2003, 963 of them had left the business. This situation will worsen if the Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Ecuador, which is quickly being negotiated without considering the opposite outlining of the social organizations, gets signed.

Another factor that has affected its development is the dollarization of the Ecuadorian economy. Since the year 2000, Ecuador has adopted the American Dollar as its currency, in replacement of the Sucre. This has produced an increase in unemployment, which now represents 10%, and underemployment, reaching almost 50% of the economically active population. The dollarized salaries are not enough to cover the basic living expenses of a major sector of the population, which calculates up to 378$US per month, when the minimum salary is only 130$US.

This situation, together with the banking crisis in 1999 and the political instability, has provoked an increase in the social conflict. This has also increased emigration, already that thousands of Ecuadorians have left to the United States, Spain and Italy in search of income for their families.

In Ecuador's case, there has been 20 years of strong economical crisis. This has resulted in a recession in the productive sector, a lack of employment, a lack of income and an economical situation very unfavorable for Ecuadorian families. Social inequality has accentuated, increasing the distance between the rich and the poor. The concentration of the wealth in our country is not only unjustifiable, but it is also immoral and inhuman.

Some of the immediate effects in the conditions of life of the families and youth are unemployment, emigration and difficult access to school and university. The following data will help better understand the situation in Ecuador:

- In 1999, close to 500,000 children and teenagers did not get access to schooling.
- More than 300,000 people have emigrated from Ecuador to other countries looking for work in the last few years. More than 160, 000 children and youth have been left behind without at least one of their parents because of this emigration.
- Violence is one of the major causes of death among youth.
- Suicide is one of the major causes of death among women, especially among female teenagers.
- 17% of women between 15 and 19 years of age are mothers, limiting their possibility to study or work.
- Children under 5 years old don't receive the necessary cares according to their evolving needs.
- Children and youth are victims of abuse at home and at school.

All these are effects of the neoliberal model in Ecuador. Also, it has meant the lost of our sovereignty and the resort to transnational companies, to such an extent that the government has decided to assume the environmental costs caused by the activities of the foreign oil companies that are in Ecuador.

In this sense, the search for a fair and mutually binding model of development is fundamental for Ecuador. The YMCA of Ecuador and YMCA Tours permanently reflect on this, looking for alternatives, collectively with other organizations, in order to face the situation, from an approach of human rights and the right to development. We are working with the concept of Sustainable Human Development: a

development model that satisfies the present needs without jeopardizing the ability of the future generations to satisfy their own needs.

Tourism in the Framework of Development

Although there does not exist clear policies on tourism in Ecuador, several huge monopoly companies, adhering to the alignments of the liberal economy, have looked into dominating tourist destinations. At a local level, the social and economic effects have not seemed to concern them. The transnational companies of tourism want to use to their advantage the fact that underdeveloped countries, like Ecuador, have a weak capacity of negotiation, to impose programs that benefit very little the local society. In spite of the growth of tourism in Ecuador, a benefit for the local population is not demonstrated. In some developing countries, more than two thirds of the income of international tourism never reaches the local economy, due to big currency flight.

On the other hand, although advance in communications and in transport has allowed a greater development of the tourism industry, globalization is creating a loss of the world diversity, which puts at risk the economic development of tourism. As expressed by Ramonet (1999), "from one end of the planet to another, there is a similar lifestyle, expanded by mass media. In every part of the world there is World Culture, the global culture." The impact of these effects must be considered.

But not only do the transnational companies look at the development of tourism as an industry, they also impel the multilateral institutions like the World Bank and agencies of the United Nations.

This leads to a worldwide tourism more and more centralized and competitive, illustrating better than any other economic sector the worldwide reach of the transnational companies. These companies press the governments worldwide to liberalize commerce and to invest in services, using as a pressure tactic the World Trade Organization. In the case of Latin America, this will also deepen with the signing of Free Trade Agreements with the United States. Through these, they will be able to abolish restrictions to foreign property, to facilitate tax exemptions, concessions and contracts, to grant to foreign tourist companies the same benefits as those for local companies, and to allow themselves to transfer staff through the borders, to open branches and to make international payments without restrictions.

All this brings to seriously question the affirmation that globalization and liberalization of tourism will produce wealth and social progress and will preserve the environment. It is clear that a sustainable development of tourism does not exist. We can conclude that the development of tourism cannot be directed towards the sustainability with the political and economic structures established by globalization.

For that reason, it is necessary to give value to the local scale so that it plays a particular role in the accomplishment of a concrete project with participating policies. This means that the efforts to apply tourist, social, environmental and economically sustainable programs will hardly be successful if deep structural changes are not made. It is therefore important to consider tourism within the processes of local development, understood as the well-being of the population: it is that they live in a determined territory, based on democratic values, social justice, without any gender, economic, social, political or belief discrimination.

Tourism and Local Development

What we mean by Local Development is organized and articulated processes of local populations to construct locally a development based on human beings with social, political, economic fairness, and that guarantees sustainability.

In this framework, YMCA Tours has a main objective: to contribute to the development of community sectors with the direct participation of the communities and populations as an alternative to conventional tourism, because at the moment, they are not direct beneficiaries of the economic resource that this activity generates.

This proposal implies that tourism has a great capacity of influencing social and economic development of populations and its territories. Few sub sectors of the economy enjoy this versatility and flexibility to adapt to the conditions of each territory and each population. This is why tourism and strategic opportunity for local development is talked about more and more frequently.

We consider that tourism can be an important instrument to generate work and create companies. Other elements that can be very positive are: reinforcing cultural values, reaffirming local culture, opening the local society to influences of the outside and giving an added value to a territory.

Several circumstances are required in order to obtain this, especially analyze the reality with objectivity, not to fall into the temptation of adopted models of tourist development that attack the local culture and cause an accelerated exhaustion of resources.

Presently in the tourism industry, there is an obvious demand for destinations that offer something "different", an alternative to the usual thing. People want to know other cultures, ways of understanding life and to live other experiences. Although it is important to understand the demand, it is also necessary to contemplate the territory and local population. It is important to find a balance between the necessities of one another to avoid, for example, replacing local culture by the tourist's culture.

It is also important to generate a cultural climate that allows the coexistence between past and future efforts to maintain and transform the spaces according to new necessities.

Community-based Tourism

Since the dollarization, Ecuador has become a more expensive country, even for tourism, in comparison with Colombia or Peru. The lack of political decision of the government to define clear policies, to budget necessary funds and to put more time into tourist development has generated a lot of instability in tourism.

Moreover, the National Congress has no interest in supporting the development of communities and the participation of these in tourism.

Additionally, the war in Colombia is affecting the border populations by creating unavoidable migration. This situation of insecurity has also affected tourism: foreigners are fearful of coming to Ecuador because of the proximity to Colombia.

In spite of this situation, many communities in Ecuador, including natives, afro-Ecuadorian and racially mixed, participate in the development of projects of eco-tourism and ethno-tourism in the Amazons, the Sierra and the Coast. In the Amazonian region alone, there were 30 projects controlled by indigenous groups in the year 2000. These projects vary from initiatives based in small populations to mutually binding companies of small scale with the private sector. Most of the gains from this type of tourism are put into education, health services,

motors for canoes and clothes.

YMCA Tours is a receptive-tourism operator who provides alternative tourism combining conventional tourism, ethno-tourism, eco-tourism, land-tourism, social volunteer work, mutually binding tourism, cultural and fair tourism. This company was created by the YMCA of Ecuador for the development of communities with the purpose of generating economic and mutually binding support for its social projects.

YMCA Tours is a social non-profit organization that uses tourism as an alternative to generate funds for leadership programs and other social projects in Ecuador. It organizes visits for individual tourists and groups, but not only to experience the beautiful and diverse nature of Ecuador, but also to share cultural experiences, social difficulties, dreams and ways of living with the different communities.

YMCA Tours follows the YMCA's (Young Men Christian Association) Christian principles of justice and service to the community, generating alternatives for its development, always having in mind a long-term plan of action for the proposed projects.

The YMCA of Ecuador, founded in 1959, is a civil society organization, working with the process of change and social development, defending life and citizen rights. It works with and for the poor and those excluded from society, especially with youth and women. It is a Christian ecumenical volunteer movement, part of the international YMCA movement. As a civil society organization, it forms alliances with different local, national and international organizations, which creates a powerful network.

In its vision, it says: "we see citizens participating in the management of their human development, exerting their responsibilities and rights, knowing their value as people; within this, we see young people exerting leadership in society. We see the YMCA like a transformation movement, working with the reality of Ecuador and its most immediate needs."
In its mission, it indicates that it encourages local human development, based on Christian principles, with emphasis in youth, children, environmental education and others, by strengthening the YMCA movement.

Where do we work?



The YMCA of Ecuador has branches in Quito, Santo Domingo of the Colorados and Porto Viejo. In these cities, it works mostly in the impoverished sectors with children and youth, promotes education and citizen participation, creation of leaders and community development programs, which include credit for women, plans of local development and urban forums. Even more, it develops programs in the Province of El Oro, Alausí and Canandé. The National Office is located in Quito, the capital of Ecuador.

We are combining efforts with YMCA TOURS to realize the project of a tourism based on solidarity and justice, visiting the social programs developed by the YMCA of Ecuador, as well as participating as volunteers in community work. This way, we hope to build awareness in tourists, so that they support a fair development of the towns and communities of Ecuador.

YMCA TOURS for Justice

Tourism can be a dynamic force and a vector of dialogue between towns if there is an effective management establishing agreements between the public and private sector. Education and community awareness of the value of its patrimony are also determining at this time to make sure tourism becomes a source of prosperity and understanding instead of a threat.

Tourism is one of the main mechanisms of knowledge and intercultural dialogue. It is an activity that maintains a tight relationship with the coexistence and respect of the towns.

YMCA Tours believes in the importance of promoting cultural tourism because, besides generating opportunities of development for the communities, it has the capacity of maintaining our own culture alive as an attraction and thus we do not forget our origins.

Beyond our mission, we apply a professional ethic to serve the community generating work and better opportunities for its development, using different alternatives to create responsible and fair tourism, allowing knowing the realities of Ecuador.

YMCA Tours offers different trips with options from 1 to 18 days. The tourist can choose his preferences in advance and they can be combined with visits to our projects of development without leaving aside tourism. This allows the tourist to feel and know deeply Ecuador and its people. Thus are generated new routes of development of indigenous and other communities.

YMCA Tours, in coordination with the YMCA, believes that it is fundamental to contribute to the participation of the community in the tourist sector through forums and education. This is a strategy to guarantee access to adequate work, income and respect of nature, as sustainable alternatives in the long term.

At the moment, YMCA Tours has diverse types of alternative tourism, known as fair tourism and as the meeting of human beings as equals, to rediscover and to learn history, to celebrate the unknown and to share the fruits of progress between the towns. Special attention is put to guarantee the rights of children and women. Some of the components of this type of tourism are:

- ***Mutually Binding Tourism***

This implies that visitors or "tourists" who arrive through YMCA Tours come to know the social reality of the country, volunteering in one of the social programs developed by the YMCA. This is usually done in mingas (non remunerated community work). Moreover, when these volunteers or tourists return home to their country, they look for a way to continue supporting the communities they have visited. Therefore, a tight relationship is maintained. They tend to share their experience with other people who are interested in visiting Ecuador. This tourism is combined with visits to sites of cultural and historical interest.

- ***Tourism with Families***

YMCA Tours offers lodging in a family or a community in where the visitors will be part of the family. This is an alternative to lodging in big hotels. The visitors will share valuable time and experiences with the family allowing them to know more about our culture. They can even choose to eat with the family to savor Ecuadorian food and practice the Castilian language. This alternative lodging represents an extra income for the families.

- ***Educative Tourism***

YMCA Tours maintains agreements with different language schools of Castilian that maintain principles and interests similar to ours. This way, we can offer language programs with fair prices and goals directed to the development of the community and to the support of our social projects. One of the schools is located in Quito in the same building as the YMCA's national office and works jointly with YMCA Tours. The school does not limit itself to only teaching the language, but it also shares the culture, geography and history of our country during the learning process.

This year, YMCA Tours will try to organize workshops and seminars on Development in Ecuador and in Latin America. These will be based on the experience and the expertise of the staff of the YMCA of Ecuador. The participants will get to know in greater depth specific projects of development.

- ***Eco-tourism***

YMCA Tours means by eco-tourism a trip to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, without altering neither the ecosystems nor the local culture. Ecuador, being the country with the greatest biodiversity by square kilometer in the world, it has much to offer, as much in the Galápagos Islands, as in the Amazonian forest. We are different from those companies that practice tourism using the word "eco" in a false way, offering in its name Ecological tourism, but when it is time to conduct the tourist operation, nature is not respected.

- ***Community-based Tourism***

We have developed this experience mainly in the Canandé tropical humid forest through the "Save Canandé" project. Its objective is to preserve the biodiversity of the forest. The YMCA elaborated this project jointly with the inhabitants of the towns near Canandé: Unión Lojana, Simón Silver Torres and Cristóbal Colón. The funds generated by the visit of tourists go directly to the benefit of these communities.

It is important to indicate that the development of indigenous and other communities begins from the moment the tourist arrives in Ecuador. We try to use, as much as possible, transport service from non-profit organizations, and at the same time, generate work for the impoverished sectors.

CANANDE - Unión Lojana Community: Tourism Experience Based in the Community

Inside the jungle, at the limits of the Ecological Reserve Cotacachi - Cayapas in the Esmeraldas Province is the Lojana Unión community, lodged in the creek of the Canandé River.

In the past, this community lived on the exploitation of the wood from the forest; for that reason, it was faced with environmental problems such as deforestation and erosion of its earth. Moreover, there was the emigration of young people to the big cities because of lack of work.

The destruction of its tropical humid forests is due to the activity of wood extraction by private companies and also by its own inhabitants, who, worried about not having any sources of income, must destroy trees to sell them to companies. The main company, Botrosa, has managed to participate in the community meetings, trying to discredit the people who worry about the preservation of the native biodiversity.

In spite of these problems, an intact primary forest still exists very close to the Cotacachi Cayapas Reserve, where howling monkeys of the coast, whitetail deer and parrots can be easily appreciated, among others.

After a community diagnostic, the YMCA and the inhabitants of the three towns near Canandé (Lojana Unión, Simón Silver Torres and Cristóbal Colón) elaborated a project of conservation of the biodiversity of the zone. The main objective was to transform a big part of this territory into a natural reserve and to implement alternative activities for its conservation and development.

The elaboration of a community micro-company of tourism was organized with the inhabitants of Lojana Unión, with 15 partners, as well as the construction of an ecological cabin. This organization participates in the tours for tourists and in the decisions on the use of the cabin. Some people are guides, assistants in the kitchen or work on activities to improve the service. The eco-tourism company was created with a communitarian criterion, which complicates things because this type of community tourism is not clearly regulated in Ecuador.

The project has created spaces for the active participation of the women. One of the inhabitants who most actively identified herself and collaborated with the initiatives of the project was the director of the school of the Cristóbal Colón community, professor Enma Revilla, who is a leader in the community and who recognizes that the project has meant "the accomplishment of long hoped dreams that were not fulfilled and finally, they are beginning to become reality. Before, we wanted to do things for the environment but we did not know how, as for now, we have learned…"

In the agro-forestry activities of the School, the children participate in clearing and seeding trees.

This micro-company has the capacity to take care of national and foreign tourists, supplying visits to the forest nearby and is permanently supplying its services thanks to its relationship with YMCA Tours. The partners of the company have become qualified in their roles as guides, management and cooks, which has allowed the inhabitants to better develop its potential and to participate actively in the tourist activity.

As a result of the tourist activity in this zone, other communities have shown interest in initiating their own activities for the tourists. The inhabitants have begun to understand the importance of conserving the forest, using it like a resource to generate income. They have also

begun to value other resources of the forest that can be used to make souvenirs and artifacts.

The inhabitants are also interested in participating in the tours for tourists, receiving them in their homes, sharing their food, anecdotes and knowledge inherited about life in the forest, as a complementary activity to the visits of the forest.

The YMCA also supported them via its leadership school, which generated good results. The participants have improved their capacity of leadership and value the meetings and workshops, as a contribution to their personal and community development. Their participation in the workshops and in environmental debates such as Ecological Network and the mobilization against the Free Trade Agreement has made them more careful about information on natural medicines or native seeds.

Therefore, the YMCA contributes to a sustainable development like organic agriculture and alternative tourism. The community has organized and created a micro-company of ecological tourism. Reservations are coordinated through YMCA Tours.

Canandé is an agro-tourist destination that gives the tourist the opportunity to learn more about the rural environment in which this community lives. They can learn techniques of sustainable cultivation of cacao, coffee, tropical yucca, fruits, etc.

Agricultural practices used to be conventional with monocultures and the use of agricultural chemicals. Canandé was not the exception until four years ago, when the YMCA of Ecuador decided to support it for it to become a non-contaminated system of production, with a conservation philosophy.

Objectives of the Community

To make agro-tourism known and to encourage community participation in activities of reforestation of Canandé.

To recycle organic matter.

To recover material that can be reused.

To build awareness in the community through environmental education.

Actors in the Community

Juvencio Torres, President of the Micro-company

Gilberto Narváez, Manager of the Micro-company

Activity coordinators, the people responsible of the Unión Lojana Community Project

Another of the important activities in Canandé is the recycling of the water in the kitchen, bath and shower. They treat their own water from cisterns and they put it back into the ground. Organic matter is also used, via the remainders of animals and people.

With the goal of preserving the environment, the members of the companies have placed 4 containers to separate:

* Plastic: garbage that comes from the town is returned to the town (batteries, plastic, glass, etc.)
* Matter taken from animals (remainders)
* Matter not eaten by animals (rinds of citruses, etc.)
* Products from the washing of plates and food waste (treatment of water)

Benefits for the Community

* Economic income - through guides, lodging, food, cleaning of cabin, etc.
* Participation in agricultural activities - learning, working and exchange of ideas and cultivation techniques.
* Environmental education.
* Preventive health.
* New alternatives of work are created.
* Recovery of the main Forest of this sector.
* Opportunity to know other cultures.
* Learn to value the richness and the importance of our own culture.

Difficulties for the Community

* This type of tourism, which can include voluntary work, becomes difficult when resources are unavailable to buy the necessary materials for the volunteer.
* Sometimes, the lack of volunteers or conventional tourists causes demotivation and preoccupation in the community, forcing them to do the only thing they know: to destroy the forest and create income by selling wood.
* Nearby communities reject this community due to their opposition to stop their activities, such as fishing, hunting and cutting trees.
* The lack of knowledge of other languages can also be a difficulty when receiving foreign tourists.

Conclusions

- Community-based tourism is a valid development tool, as demonstrated in the case of Canandé. Also, it is a form of resistance to initiatives that hurt the environment.
- It is necessary to link community-based tourism to local development. This implies that the population will assume greater control in the sustainable handling of their territories, articulating efforts with their local governments, and establishing strategic alliances with national and international organizations. This will allow a greater impact.
- If tourists are looking for existential experiences, where they can share and learn with indigenous communities and others, immersed in their natural habitat, it is possible to do so in an atmosphere of respect and dignity. Therefore, community-based tourism, composed of cultural products and the inheritance of ancestral civilizations, can have a lot of potential.
- It is required to design policies and mechanisms so that tourism does not become a negative factor, harming the environment, the cultural patrimony, the values and symbols of the Indian towns.
- It is important for local governments to support and guarantee community-based tourism, facilitating an appropriate canalization of resources.
- Another main topic is to support and institutionalize the exercise of the companies of community-based tourism under the support of the collective rights of the Indian towns, consecrated in

the Agreement number 169 of the International Organization of Work.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the YMCA Tours' proposal to develop community-based tourism as an alternative began four years ago, using this type of tourism as one of the strategies for the development of communities.

Some difficulties may be encountered when realizing this type of tourism, especially when it comes to presenting YMCA TOURS and Canandé, because traditional means of marketing cannot be used. Therefore, YMCA Tours takes advantage of its WebPages and its relationships with international organizations, the YMCA network and NGOs to present its fair tourism.

It is clear that the problems Ecuador is facing are not only found in Ecuador, but in Latin America and even in the countries of the North. One of the central elements of any alternative is to build new perspectives of development directly from the society. That is where the YMCA and YMCA Tours have been particularly involved. It is fundamental that the social ties between natives, mixed, NGOs and environmentalist sectors translate in alliances that generate a new type of development.

We are aware that there is much to do. We are convinced that we must continue the search and the work to obtain a fair development, where the rights of women, children, men and youth are respected. We are aware that we must support the communities so that they can improve their quality of life. We try to create intercultural bridges and to defend the natural space in which dreams, hopes and the enjoyment of life can be a reality.

More information can be had at: www.ymcatours.org and www.acjecuador.org

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Turismo basado en la comunidad - una experiencia en Ecuador (Spanish Translation)

El Ecuador y el desarrollo

Ecuador es uno de los países de América Latina con mayor desigualdad en la distribución de la riqueza. Existen grupos poderosos con enorme riqueza, mientras más del 70% de los ecuatorianos vive en la pobreza. Ecuador tiene una población empobrecida, aunque es un país muy rico, en recursos naturales, biodiversidad, producción agrícola y ganadera. Su población es muy diversa, con población mestiza, una importante población indígena conformada por 14 nacionalidades indígenas y un 10% de población negra. Su gente se caracteriza por ser muy trabajadora.

Existen diversos factores que obstaculizan el desarrollo. El pago de la deuda externa, por ejemplo, representa casi el 50% del presupuesto del Estado. La apertura a las importaciones, sin ningún mecanismo de protección interna de la economía, que es uno de los condicionantes más fuertes de los organismos internacionales para la renegociación de la deuda, ha debilitado la producción nacional. Esta situación se agravará si llegara a firmarse el Tratado de Libre Comercio entre Estados Unidos y Ecuador, que se viene negociando con mucha rapidez y sin considerar los planteamientos contrarios de las organizaciones sociales.

Otro factor que dificulta el desarrollo es la dolarización de la economía ecuatoriana. En efecto, desde el año 2000 Ecuador adoptó el dólar estadounidense como su moneda, en reemplazo del sucre. Esto ha producido un aumento del desempleo, que se ubica en 10%, y del subempleo, que alcanza casi el 50% de la población económicamente activa. Los sueldos y salarios dolarizados no alcanzan para cubrir la canasta básica de un amplio sector de la población, cuyo costo se calcula en USD 378, cuando el salario mínimo es USD 130.

Algunos de los efectos inmediatos en las condiciones de vida de las familias y los y las jóvenes, son el desempleo, la migración y las dificultades para acceder al colegio y la universidad. Los siguientes datos ayudan a comprender la situación del Ecuador:

- En 1999, cerca de 500.000 niños, niñas y adolescentes no estudiaban.
- Más de 300.000 personas han migrado de Ecuador hacia otros países en busca de trabajo en los últimos años. Más de 160.000 niños, niñas y jóvenes se han quedado sin uno de sus padres por la migración.
- La violencia es una de las principales causas de muerte de jóvenes.
- El suicidio es una de las principales causas de muerte de mujeres, especialmente de adolescentes.
- El 17% de las mujeres entre 15 y 19 años son madres, limitando sus posibilidades de estudio y trabajo.
- Niños y niñas menores de 5 años no reciben los cuidados acordes con sus necesidades evolutivas.
- Niños, niñas y jóvenes son víctimas del maltrato en la familia y en la escuela.

La Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes Ecuador e Ymca. Tours reflexionan de manera permanente sobre esto, conjuntamente con otras organizaciones, desde un enfoque de los derechos humanos y del derecho al desarrollo. Nos manejamos dentro del concepto de Desarrollo Humano Sustentable: es decir "un modelo de desarrollo que satisface las necesidades del presente, sin comprometer la habilidad de las futuras generaciones para satisfacer sus propias necesidades."

El turismo en el marco del desarrollo

A pesar de no existir políticas claras sobre el turismo como un eje del desarrollo en Ecuador, varias empresas grandes monopólicas, adhiriéndose a los lineamientos de la economía liberal, han buscado dominar los destinos turísticos. Sin importarles los efectos sociales y económicos que esto genera a las comunidades. Las empresas transnacionales de turismo se aprovechan de los países subdesarrollados, como el Ecuador, por su débil capacidad de negociación para imponerles programas que poco benefician a la sociedad local. A pesar del crecimiento del turismo en Ecuador, no se evidencia mayor beneficio para las comunidades.

El turismo y el desarrollo local

Entendemos como Desarrollo Local los procesos organizados y articulados de poblaciones locales para construir desde lo local un desarrollo basado en los seres humanos, con equidad social, política,

económica, y que garantice la sustentabilidad y la sostenibilidad.

La Ymca. Tours se ha propuesto como macro meta: Contribuir el desarrollo de los sectores comunitarios proponiendo como alternativa la participación directa de las comunidades y las poblaciones que acogen al turismo, ya que actualmente ellos no son actores ni beneficiarios directos del los recurso esta actividad genera.

Esta propuesta implica reconocer que el turismo tiene una gran capacidad para hacerse presente e influir en el desarrollo social y económico de las poblaciones y sus territorios.

Consideramos que realizar esta actividad genera muchas oportunidades: Los valores culturales son reafirmados, damos a conocer nuestra realidad a influencias del exterior, se generan fuentes de trabajo, entre otros.

Para lograr esto es necesario no adoptar modelos de desarrollo turístico que rompan la armonía del desarrollo socioeconómico, agredan la cultura local y provoquen un agotamiento acelerado de los recursos.

La búsqueda de destinos que ofrezcan algo "distinto", alternativo a lo habitual, para percibir más y mejor la integración con el medio ambiente, conocer otras culturas y formas de entender la vida, crea una oportunidad para el desarrollo de las comunidades.

Es importante también generar un clima cultural que permita la convivencia entre el esfuerzo pasado y el esfuerzo futuro para mantener y transformar los espacios de acuerdo a las nuevas necesidades.

Turismo basado en la comunidad

A partir de la dolarización, Ecuador se ha convertido en un país más costoso, incluso para el turismo, en comparación con Colombia o Perú.

Existe un completo desinterés de parte del Congreso Nacional por apoyar el desarrollo de las comunidades y la participación de estas en el turismo como actores.

Adicionalmente, la guerra en Colombia está afectando a las poblaciones

fronterizas por los desplazamientos forzosos. Esta situación de inseguridad ha afectado también al turismo.

A pesar de esta situación, en Ecuador una amplia gama de grupos comunitarios, incluyendo indígenas, afro-ecuatorianos y mestizos, participan en el desarrollo de proyectos de eco-turismo y etno-turismo en la Amazonía, la Sierra y la Costa.

En nuestro caso de la Ymca Tour, también busca contribuir y apoyar el desarrollo de las comunidades mediante el desplazamiento de grupos nuestros grupos de turistas, estudiantes y voluntarios.

La Y Tours es una operadora de turismo receptivo que provee alternativas de turismo convencional, el etno-turismo, eco-turismo, agro-turismo, voluntariado social e intercambios culturales, turismo solidario, turismo cultural y de justicia. Esta empresa fue creada por la ACJ Ecuador para el desarrollo de las comunidades y con el único fin de generar apoyo económico y solidario para sus proyectos sociales.

Como una organización social sin fines de lucro que emplea el turismo como una alternativa de generar fondos para el entrenamiento de líderes juveniles y el desarrollo de otros proyectos sociales en el Ecuador, YMCA Tours organiza visitas para turistas individuales y grupos, pero no solo para experimentar la diversidad de la hermosa y diversa naturaleza de Ecuador, sino también para compartir con las diferentes comunidades experiencias de la cultura de nuestra gente, las dificultades sociales, los sueños y nuestras diferentes maneras de vivir.

YMCA Tours sigue los principios Cristianos de justicia y servicio a la comunidad de la ACJ (ASOCIACIÓN CRISTIANA DE JÓVENES), generando alternativas para su desarrollo, tratando de que nuestro plan de acción para los proyectos propuestos sea a largo plazo.

La ACJ Ecuador, fundada en 1959, es una organización de la sociedad civil, comprometida con el proceso de cambio y desarrollo social, en defensa de la vida y de los derechos ciudadanos. Trabaja con y para los pobres y excluidos de la sociedad, en especial los y las jóvenes y las mujeres. Es un movimiento de voluntariado, cristiano ecuménico, que es parte del movimiento internacional YMCA. Como organización de la sociedad civil, coordina su trabajo con distintos actores locales,

nacionales e internacionales, con quienes trabaja en redes y alianzas.

LA Ymca TOURS por la justicia

El turismo puede ser una fuerza dinamizadora y un vector de diálogo entre los pueblos si se hace una gestión eficaz que establezca acuerdos entre el sector público y el privado. La formación y la sensibilización de la comunidad de acogida sobre el valor de su patrimonio también es determinante a la hora de asegurar que el turismo sea una fuente de prosperidad y de entendimiento en lugar de una amenaza.

El turismo es uno de los principales mecanismos de conocimiento y de diálogo intercultural. Se trata, pues, de una actividad que mantiene una relación bien estrecha con la convivencia y respeto de los pueblos. LA Ymca Tours cree que hay que promover el turismo cultural, ya que además de generar oportunidades de desarrollo a las comunidades, tiene la capacidad de mantener viva nuestra propia cultura y así también recuperamos nuestro origen en lugar de olvidarlo.

Nuestra ética profesional es de servicio a la comunidad. Por eso la Y Tours en coordinación con la ACJ consideran fundamental contribuir con foros, procesos de formación y capacitación para la participación de la comunidad en el sector turístico como actor inmediato. Esta es una estrategia para asegurar acceso al empleo, ingresos adecuados, uso adecuado y respetuoso de la naturaleza, como alternativas sostenibles a largo plazo.

Actualmente YMCA Tours está realizando diversos tipos de turismo alternativo, resumido en lo que se conoce como turismo de justicia, entendido como el encuentro de seres humanos como iguales, redescubrir y aprender la historia, celebrar lo desconocido y compartir los frutos del progreso entre los pueblos. Tiene especial cuidado de garantizar los derechos de niños, niñas y mujeres. Algunos de los componentes de este tipo de turismo que promueve Ymca Tours son:

- ***Turismo solidario***

Esto implica que los visitantes, o “turistas” que llegan por medio de YMCA Tours vienen a conocer la realidad social del país realizando un voluntariado en uno de los programas sociales que desarrolla la ACJ. Esto se realiza generalmente en mingas (trabajo comunitario no

remunerado). Además de proporcionar el trabajo voluntario, generalmente cuando estos voluntarios o turistas regresan a su país, buscan la manera de continuar apoyando a las comunidades que han visitado. Se mantiene así una relación más estrecha, que debe ser alimentada de manera permanente. También se asegura que ellos compartan su experiencia con otras personas, que se interesan por venir a Ecuador. Este turismo se combina con visitas a sitios de interés cultural e histórico.

- ***Turismo con familias***

YMCA Tours ofrece como alternativa de alojamiento el hospedaje en una familia o una comunidad en donde pasarán a ser parte de la familia. Con ellos compartirán tiempo muy valioso y experiencias que durante la estancia del huésped le permitirá conocer más de nuestra cultura, puede escoger comer con la familia y practicar un poco el idioma castellano. Esto tan bien representa un ingreso económico para las familias, en lugar de recurrir a los grandes hoteles.

- ***Turismo educativo***

YMCA Tours mantiene convenios con diferentes escuelas de enseñanza de castellano, de las cuales hemos escogido la que nos brinda las garantías legales y mantiene los principios e intereses idénticos a los nuestros. De esta manera podemos ofertar programas de enseñanza del idioma con precios justos y con metas dirigidas al desarrollo de la comunidad y el soporte de nuestros proyectos sociales. La escuela se ubica en Quito en el mismo edificio de la oficina nacional de la ACJ y trabaja conjuntamente con YMCA Tours. La escuela no se limita a enseñar el idioma, sino sobre todo a compartir la cultura, geografía e historia de nuestro país durante el proceso de aprendizaje.

Otra oferta que Ymca Tours atenderá este año es la organización de talleres y seminario sobre el tema del Desarrollo en América Latina y en Ecuador. Esto se realizará en base a la experiencia y la experticia de los técnicos de la ACJ Ecuador. Al mismo tiempo, los y las jóvenes participantes no solo podrán conocer con mayor profundidad proyectos de desarrollo específicos, sino también se está explorando la posibilidad de que estas pasantias sean validadas como crédito de sus estudios universitarios.

- ***Eco-turismo***

YMCA Tours entiende el eco-turismo como el desplazamiento hacia áreas naturales para entender la cultura y la historia natural del ambiente, sin alterar los ecosistemas ni la cultura local. Siendo el Ecuador el país con la mayor biodiversidad por kilómetro cuadrado en el mundo, tenemos mucho que ofrecer, tanto en las Islas Galápagos, como en la selva Amazónica. Nos diferenciamos de aquellas empresas que practican la industria turística monopolizada utilizando la palabra "Eco" de una manera falsa, ofreciendo en su nombre turismo Ecológico, pero a la hora de realizar la operación turística no se respeta la naturaleza.

- ***Turismo basado en la comunidad***

Esta experiencia la hemos desarrollado principalmente en el bosque húmedo tropical Canadé, mediante el proyecto "Salvemos al Canandé", cuyo objetivo es preservar la biodiversidad del bosque. La ACJ elaboró este proyecto conjuntamente con los habitantes de los pueblos cercanos al Canadé: Unión Lojana, Simón Plata Torres y Cristóbal Colón. Los recursos generados por la visita de turistas van directamente en beneficio de estas comunidades.

Es importante señalar que el desarrollo de las comunidades indígenas y de otras empieza desde el momento en que el turista llega a Ecuador, ya que en lo posible tratamos de utilizar el servicio de transporte que ofrecen fundaciones y empresas sin fines de lucro y que a la vez generan trabajo a los sectores más empobrecidos.

1. CANANDE - Comunidad Unión Lojana: experiencia de turismo basado en la comunidad

Al interior de la selva, en los límites de la Reserva Ecológica Cotacachi – Cayapas en la Provincia de Esmeraldas, se encuentra la comunidad Unión Lojana alojada en la rivera del rió Canande.

En el pasado, esta comunidad vivía de la explotación de la madera del bosque nublado, por ello se vio enfrentada con problemas ambientales como la deforestación y la erosión de sus tierras. A esto se suman problemas como la migración de jóvenes a las grandes ciudades por la falta de empleo.

Está amenazada la destrucción de sus bosques húmedos tropicales por efecto de la actividad de extracción de madera por parte de las empresas privadas y de los propios habitantes de la zona que al no tener otras fuentes de ingreso, talan árboles para venderlos a las empresas. La principal empresa, Botrosa, ha logrado participar en las reuniones comunitarias, tratando de desacreditar a las personas que se preocupan de la preservación de la biodiversidad nativa. También han entregado regalos como pupitres o atención médica, causando en muchas ocasiones perjuicios por la falta de conocimiento del tratamiento de enfermedades de la zona.

A pesar de estos problemas, todavía existe bosque primario intacto por encontrarse muy cerca de la Reserva COTACACHI CAYAPAS donde se pueden apreciar fácilmente monos aulladores de la costa, venados cola blanca, tigrillos y loros, entre otros.

Mediante un diagnóstico comunitario, la ACJ y los habitantes de los tres pueblos cercanos al Canandé, Unión Lojana, Simón Plata Torres y Cristóbal Colón, elaboraron un proyecto de conservación de la biodiversidad de la zona. El objetivo principal era transformar gran parte de este territorio en una reserva natural e implementar actividades alternativas para la conservación y el desarrollo de la misma.

Con los habitantes de Unión Lojana se organizó la constitución de una micro empresa comunitaria de ecoturismo, con 15 socios, y la construcción de una cabaña ecológica. Esta organización participa en la atención a los turistas y en las decisiones sobre el uso de la cabaña. Otras personas son guías, ayudantes en la cocina y realizan actividades para mejorar el servicio. La empresa de ecoturismo fue creada con un criterio comunitario, lo que significa una complicación para gestionar la personería jurídica, porque esa figura de turismo comunitario no está claramente reglamentada en Ecuador.

El proyecto ha propiciado espacios para la participación activa de las mujeres. Una de las personas que más activamente se identificó y colaboró con las iniciativas del proyecto fue la directora de la escuela de la comunidad de Cristóbal Colón, la profesora Enma Revilla, que es una lidereza de la comunidad quien reconoce que el proyecto ha significado “la realización de sueños largamente esperados que no se cumplían y por fin se empiezan a hacer realidad, antes queríamos hacer cosas por el medio ambiente y no sabíamos como, pero ahora ya

estamos aprendiendo…”

En las actividades de agro-forestaría de la Escuela, se ha logrado la participación de niños y niñas quienes están desbrozando y sembrando árboles en la zona.

La micro-empresa tiene capacidad de atender a turistas nacionales y extranjeros, ofertando visitas al bosque primario cercano y que gracias a su relación con YMCA Tours, está permanentemente ofertando sus servicios. Los socios de la empresa se han capacitado en sus roles de guías, gerencia, nutrición y cocina, lo que ha permitido a la gente desarrollar de mejor manera sus potencialidades y participar activamente en la actividad turística.

Como consecuencia de la actividad turística en la zona, otras comunidades se han interesado por iniciar sus propias actividades de atención a turistas. La gente ha empezado a valorar la importancia de conservar el bosque usándolo como un recurso para generar ingresos. También han empezado a valorarse otros recursos del bosque que pueden ser usados en la elaboración de recuerdos y artesanías.

La gente está también interesada en participar de la visita de los turistas, recibiendo a los visitantes en sus hogares, compartiendo su comida, anécdotas y conocimientos heredados sobre la vida en la selva, como una actividad complementaria a las visitas al bosque y las casadas.

La ACJ también apoyó con la capacitación mediante la escuela de líderes y liderezas, que ha generado buenos resultados, porque los participantes han mejorado su capacidad de liderazgo y valoran las reuniones y talleres, como un aporte al desarrollo personal y comunitario. La participación de los colonos en espacios de formación y debate de temas ambientales como la Red Ecologista y las movilizaciones contra el Tratado de Libre Comercio, han provocado que tengan más cuidado con la información sobre medicinas naturales o semillas nativas.

Así pues la ACJ contribuye con las herramientas técnicas para un desarrollo sustentable como agricultura orgánica y turismo alternativo. Mientras que por su lado la comunidad se organizó y conformó una microempresa de turismo ecológico. A través de YMCA Tours se coordina la operación de reservaciones.

Canandé es un destino agro turístico que da la oportunidad al visitante de interactuar en el ambiente rural en donde vive esta comunidad, en donde se puede aprender técnicas de cultivos sustentables, en la producción de cacao, café, yuca, frutas tropicales, etc.

Las prácticas de agricultura eran convencionales, con limpieza, quema, monocultivos y el uso de químicos agrícolas. Canandé no era la excepción hasta que cuatro años atrás, la ACJ Ecuador apoyó para que se convirtiera en un sistema no contaminante de producción, con filosofía conservacionista.

Objetivos de la Comunidad:

Dar a conocer el agroturismo y la participación comunitaria en actividades de reforestación del Canande.

Reciclar materia orgánica y aprovecharla.

Recuperar material que se puede convertir en desechos.

Concienciar a la comunidad a través de la educación ambiental.

Actores de la Comunidad:

Juvencio Torres, Presidente de la Micro Empresa

Gilberto Narváez, Gerente de la Micro Empresa

Coordinadores de actividades, principales responsable del proyecto de la Comunidad Unión Lojana.

Otra de las actividades importantes en Canandé es reciclar el agua de la cocina, baños y duchas, es decir tratan su propia agua desde cisternas y la devuelven al suelo. Se utiliza también
la materia orgánica, a través de los desechos de los animales y de las personas.

Con el fin de preservar el ambiente, los socios de las empresas han colocado 4 recipientes para separar:

* Plástico: basura que viene del pueblo se devuelve al pueblo (pilas, plásticos, vidrios, etc.)
* Materia aprovechada por los animales (lavaza, desechos)

* Materia que no comen los animales (cáscaras de cítricos, etc.)
* Productos del lavado de platos y desperdicios de comida (tratamiento del agua)

Beneficios para la comunidad

* Ingresos económicos - a través de la guianza, alojamiento, comida, limpieza de cabaña, etc.
* Participación en actividades agrícolas - aprendizaje, trabajo e intercambio de ideas y técnicas de cultivo.
* Educación ambiental integral.
* Salud preventiva
* Se crean nuevas alternativas de trabajo
* Recuperación del Bosque primario de este sector
* Oportunidad de conocer otras culturas
* Aprender a valorar las riquezas y la importancia de nuestra propia cultura

Dificultades para la Comunidad

* Este tipo de turismo, que puede incluir trabajo voluntario, se dificulta cuando no existen recursos para comprar los materiales que permitan aprovechar el trabajo del voluntario o voluntaria.

* La falta de grupos de turistas voluntarios o convencionales genera desmotivación y preocupación a la comunidad obligándolos en ocasiones a hacer lo único que conocen Talar el bosque y obtener recursos a través de la venta de madera.

* Existe un rechazo a esta comunidad por parte de otras comunidades cercanas debido a la resistencia que presentan a la hora de tener que deforestar el bosque o realizar actividades que atentan con el equilibrio natural de este lugar como la caza y pesca indiscriminada.

* La falta de capacitación en otros idiomas puede ser también una dificultad a la hora de recibir turistas extranjeros.

7. Conclusiones

- El turismo basado en la comunidad es una herramienta de desarrollo válida, como se evidencia en el caso de Canandé. También es una forma de resistencia a iniciativas que dañan el medio ambiente.
- Es necesario relacionar el turismo basado en la comunidad con el desarrollo local, esto implica que las poblaciones asuman mayor control en el manejo sostenible de sus territorios, articulando esfuerzos con sus gobiernos locales, y estableciendo alianzas estratégicas con organizaciones fraternas nacionales e internacionales. Esto permitirá tener un mayor impacto.
- Si actualmente los turistas buscan experiencias vivenciales, donde pueden compartir y aprender con comunidades indígenas y otras, inmersas en su hábitat natural, esto se puede ofrecer en un ambiente de respeto y dignidad. Así es factible que se potencie el turismo comunitario, compuesto de productos culturales y la herencia de civilizaciones ancestrales.
- Se requiere diseñar políticas y mecanismos para que el turismo no se convierta en un factor negativo, que atente contra el medio ambiente, el patrimonio cultural, los valores y símbolos de los pueblos indios.
- Es importante comprometer a los gobiernos locales, las instancias públicas y privadas, a apoyar y garantizar el ejercicio del turismo comunitario, facilitando la adecuada canalización de recursos.
- Otro tema central es apoyar e institucionalizar el ejercicio de las empresas de turismo comunitario bajo el apoyo de los derechos colectivos de los pueblos indios, consagrado en el Convenio número 169 de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo.

Finalmente, es importante destacar que la propuesta de YMCA Tours como una alternativa para desarrollar el turismo basado en la comunidad, empezó hace 4 años, apostando a este tipo de turismo como una de las estrategias para el desarrollo de las comunidades.

Para realizar el tipo de turismo que ofrece YMCA Tours existen dificultades, especialmente cuando se trata de dar a conocer YMCA TOURS y Canandé, por cuanto no puede utilizar medios de marketing tradicionales. Por lo tanto, tiene que ser muy original a la hora de realizar sus ofertas. Aprovecha entonces el uso de la página web y la relación con organizaciones internacionales, la red YMCA y ONGs.

Está claro que los problemas que enfrenta Ecuador no son solo del Ecuador, sino de América Latina e incluso de los países del Norte. Uno de los elementos centrales de cualquier alternativa es construir desde la sociedad, nuevas perspectivas de desarrollo. Es allí donde ha estado involucrada particularmente la ACJ e YMCA TOURS. Es fundamental que los tejidos sociales que se articulan entre indígenas, mestizos, sectores ambientalistas, ONGs, se traduzcan en alianzas que generen un nuevo tipo de desarrollo.

Estamos conscientes que hay mucho por hacer. Estamos convencidos que debemos continuar la búsqueda y el trabajo por lograr el desarrollo con justicia, donde se respeten los derechos de las mujeres, de los niños y niñas, de los hombres, de los y las jóvenes. Estamos conscientes que debemos apoyar a las comunidades para que mejoren su calidad de vida. Se trata en definitiva de encontrar puentes interculturales, de defender el espacio natural en el que caben los sueños, las esperanzas y el disfrute de la vida.

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About the authors



Helga Serrano is International Relations and Communication Director, ACJ Ecuador, (YMCA Ecuador). She has written extensively and important publications include *Political Doctrines and Social Communication*, *Multinationals and the Third World*; *Current Economic Policies*; and another on *Political Doctrines and Social Communication*. At the NGO meeting related to the UN Commission on Human Rights, Geneva, March 2001 se presented a paper on the *Right to Food.* Another important contribution was a paper on *Globalization and Human Rights* at the Human Rights Summer University in Geneva, Switzerland, July 2000. She has, to her credit, over 25 publications, videos, and investigations on issues of justice, development, and human rights in Ecuador.



Pedro Humberto Armendariz Carranza is a 'Tourist planning & development planning Engineer. He has specialized as a guide to biologic reserves**.** In his current role as coordinator of Ecuador YMCAs Alternative Tourism Project, he has coordinated several international tourism programs. He has also developed models of 'receptive tourism' with indigenous communities. He was recently speaker at a seminar on 'Natural, cultural and tourist richness in Ecuador' and a panellist at the WSF intervention on Community-based tourism as a tool against poverty and oppression. . Pedro previously served in the hotel industry as Commercial & Administrative Director, Claudia Tours, CIA, Ltd. before opting to work in the 'Alternatives-in-tourism' sector.



Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism (ECOT)
Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism (ECTWT) Ltd.
96, 2nd District, Pak Tin Village, Mei Tin Road
Shatin, N.T. Hong Kong SAR, China
Tel: (852) 2602 3669
Fax: (852) 2602 3649
E-mail: ranjan@ecotonline.org
http://www.ecotonline.org

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