

Las Lianas

Resource Center for Science, Culture, & Environment

Program Update--Fall 2007

Project Glimpses & Highlights

As many of our readers know, the bulk of Las Lianas activities over the past two years has fallen under two major programs: indigenous aquaculture and protecting ancestral lands, and this work continues in 2007. In addition, we have also returned to the issue of indigenous justice systems, developing a project with indigenous partners in the highland Quichua communities of Ecuador to document their traditional legal systems and developing a proposal to have these recognized in the national justice system. Finally, we helped organize the closing piece of an international indigenous people's exchange between representatives from Ecuador, Guatemala and the USA, begun in 2006. This newsletter provides brief reports on each of these activities.

Indigenous Justice

Indigenous cultures have their own traditional methods for resolving conflicts and disputes. This year, Las Lianas is partnering with Ecuarunari (the Confederation of Quichua Peoples of Ecuador) to document the systems of laws and justice practiced by Ecuador's indigenous nationalities, and develop a proposal for integrating these systems into the national legal system. This initiative aims to contribute ideas to the constituent assembly that will be elected to review, debate, and revise the Ecuadorian constitution, with the goal of having the constitution recognize the legitimacy of these traditional forms of justice and governance.



Resolving conflicts and settling disputes is a communal effort in traditional Quichua communities, as illustrated by the community assembly in Quisapincha, Tungurahua Province (above). Las Lianas is working with indigenous organizations (right) to win formal recognition of this process in Ecuadorian Law.



This project follows on work we did several years ago to draft a proposed law of indigenous justice on behalf of the indigenous caucus of the Ecuadorian Congress. The current project is a 9-month effort involving regional workshops to gather local information on indigenous justice as currently and historically practiced, national dialogues with a variety of governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and international consultations.

Las Lianas and our Ecuarunari partners have met with Ecuador's Chief Justice who has agreed to collaborate in seeking ways to incorporate indigenous justice in the

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Project Glimpses

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modernization and reform of the national legal system. Project Director Bolívar Beltrán has also represented Las Lianas at conferences and meetings in Bolivia and Guatemala to get an international perspective on these issues. The project has gained significant media attention, with reports in the national Ecuadorian newspaper *El Comercio*, as well as in regional papers and radio.

Indigenous Aquaculture

Aquaculture extension is in full swing, with Las Lianas staff making visits to, and working with, a total of 9 villages, representing 3 nationalities—Secoya, Quichua, and Shuar—along the Aguarico River in northeastern Ecuador. We are working hard on developing local training capacity, establishing fish reproduction in more ponds, and documenting our results.

Capacity building: In February, we led workshops for experienced Secoya aquaculturists to become trainers in the other communities where we are extending the project. Since then, these individuals have been accompanying our



Young fish collected from flood plain lakes in January (top), were about 5 times as large by July (bottom) when the fish farmer raising them began redistributing their offspring to neighbors.

project coordinator, Antonio Almeida, to help him train these new communities and develop their own skills at leading workshops and community education. We have also developed a curriculum of training modules that guides both the training of trainers and the sequence of workshops being provided in the new communities.

Fish Reproduction: The number of fish farmers carrying out full-lifecycle farming of lake fish is gradually growing as we collect, reproduce, and distribute these fish to more ponds. In January, a fish-collecting trip to Largarto Cocha, on the Peruvian border brought back 50 wild lake fish to stock in ponds for reproduction. In June, we organized a workshop where one of our most successful fish farmers presented his experiences and methods to a group of farmers. We then worked with him to collect 100 fish of two lake species that he had raised in his pond, which were then distributed among 5 other families.

Other support: Since January, we have distributed over 13,000 hatchery-produced fish for grow-out aquaculture to farmers in our partner villages. We have supplied materials for the construction of 6 new fish ponds, three of which are complete so far this year, and we are working with residents of two of the new villages to evaluate and improve existing ponds in their villages, which they built prior to beginning the partnership with Las Lianas.

Ancestral Lands

This year, our project on Ancestral Lands has focused on completing the task of titling the traditional lands of each of our partners so that they will have full legal control of all their ancestral lands. This is the final step before they are able to take on our ultimate goal, a territorial unification that provides a single title under the name of each nationality, which we have been working toward for so long.

FIPSE (the Shuar Federation): This year's work has allowed them to obtain another six land titles covering a total of 22,000 hectares. The only land of theirs that remains to be fully titled is territory that lies within some protected areas. Titling this remaining land requires extra steps since we also have to coordinate with and meet the expectations of the Ministry of the Environment; this is where we and FIPSE will turn our attention next.

Achuar: We have done the preparatory work to obtain five new legal titles covering 95,000 hectares. The coming months will be dedicated to moving the paperwork through the government bureaucracies; we anticipate having the titles finalized by December.

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Highlights of Las Lianas' Work

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Resolution of borders: In order for the titling to go forward, it has been necessary to resolve differences about the borders between indigenous groups. One important result of our work is that, in June, the Achuar and Shiwiar nationalities signed an accord that eliminated disagreements about the borders between their two territories.

In addition to the work described above, and as part of our efforts to strengthen the indigenous organizations we partner with, Las Lianas has provided legal assistance for the establishment of an Achuar owned air company to provide transport to and from their communities. This is another first for indigenous nationalities in Ecuador.

International Exchange



In February, the international cultural exchange between Ecuador, Guatemala, and the US, begun one year earlier, concluded with a gathering that Las Lianas hosted in Ecuador. Six indigenous Guatemalans and two Native North Americans visited Ecuador for a week and met with representatives of many different Ecuadorian nationalities. Many of these same individuals had spent time together previously in the US, so this was the continuation of a dialogue around the definition of indigenous culture and how best to strengthen cultural traditions and pass them from one generation to the next. The week included visits to a number of indigenous Andean communities, where we learned about the history of struggles for land reform, experiences in recovering lost or dying artistic traditions, the renaissance of cultural and religious celebrations, and similar topics.

We then gathered in a conference center outside Quito with 24 participants (12 Ecuador, 6 Guatemala, 6 US),



exchanging ideas and information about programs and organizations in each of the countries and discuss opportunities for long term cooperation between indigenous communities in the three countries. In spite of obstacles of language, distance, and financing, there is a lot of interest in maintaining the connection and we will work with the Institute for Training and Development, project organizers, to find ways to facilitate long-term collaboration.



Scenes from cultural exchange. Left: People of Peguche, Imbabura, participate in a blessing with flowers and water, part of Pawkar Raymi, a traditional Quichua festival celebrating the flowering season that has been reinvigorated in recent years. Top: Women of the Llano Grande community, in Pichincha, display the detailed embroidery of blouses that they have copied from examples handed down from their grandmothers to recover a dying art form. Bottom: Exchange participants from Guatemala, the US, and Ecuador gather around a Quichua weaving that includes a quote from a Seneca leader translated to Spanish and "Thank you, Las Lianas" in Quichua.

Many ways to support Las Lianas

Your donations make Las Lianas' work possible and we are very grateful for the support. While we know you donate because you believe in the work, we also want to make supporting Las Lianas fun and give something back. That's why we offer the opportunity to use your tax-deductible donation to give a fish pond or fish as a present, as described below. In addition, we are now pleased to offer sets of beautiful notecards for sale to benefit our programs. Remember that we continue to sell Secoya hammocks and other crafts. Write us (address on page 2) or see our website (laslianas.org) for details.

Notecards celebrate bird diversity

Thanks to the generosity of artist Ann Colley, who has donated her artwork, Las Lianas is offering notecards for sale featuring watercolors of four birds of the American tropics. The cards are 4¼ x 5½ inches. We are selling

sets of 16 cards (4 of each bird) for \$20, or you can purchase three sets (48 cards) for \$50. Send a check or money order to Las Lianas at the address on page 2 or order on-line (where you can see the images in color) at laslianas.org.



Give 1000 Fish...or a fish pond!



Last year, many supporters enjoyed the opportunity to contribute to Las Lianas while honoring loved ones, so we are repeating the offer: Make someone proud by giving 1000 fish or by sponsoring a fishpond in their name. Your gift allows Las Lianas to help more rainforest families start farming fish while providing a meaningful and attractive present for someone you care about. Here's how it works.

- A donation of \$35 buys 350 fish. These are young fish a family can raise and begin harvesting in 8 months. You'll get a letter of acknowledgment and we'll mail (to you or to the recipient, your choice) an attractive certificate describing the gift and our program, with a salutation of your choosing (up to 25 words).
- \$50 buys 500 fish. This provides 1 to 2 fish meals a week to a family of five for an entire year! In addition

to the certificate described above, we will include a 5x7 color photo from our fish-farming program.

- A donation of \$100 buys 1000 fish. Your recipient will get a certificate, a photo, and a complementary rainforest-seed necklace.
- For \$500, you can sponsor a fishpond. The donation covers material costs, transport, and training for the beneficiary family. Your friend or family member will receive a certificate and framed photo symbolizing the present. Later in the year, we will send them a report with pictures and a description of the beneficiary family.

To order, send your tax-deductible donation and tell us the gift you want, whom it is for, and where to send it.

