

Las Lianas

Resource Center for Science, Culture, & Environment

Program Update--Winter 2009-2010

Protecting Environment and Rights Accompanying Indigenous People's Struggles

When we write about Las Lianas' work with indigenous groups in Ecuador, we use words like partnership, collaborate, or support. These words come close to, but aren't exactly the same as, *acompañar*, the Spanish word that best expresses what we do. Meaning, literally, accompany, it expresses the idea that we are "traveling with," and working alongside, the groups we help, letting them set the route while we provide resources—skills, information, services, and material support—that they may need to meet their goals.

The work starts with the assumption that, to support indigenous people's autonomy, we need a program that respects and defers to that autonomy, and is flexible enough to really place us with them when they need us. This can be challenging for planning and fundraising, but when we succeed, we ensure our contributions are relevant and valuable. The following reports describe some highlights from 2009, as Las Lianas has accompanied Ecuador's indigenous nationalities and confederations in a variety of ways.



Challenging new mining law

The ink was barely dry on the new Ecuadorian constitution last fall, when the government began to push forward a new mining law that threatened many of the rights—to consultation, to a clean environment, and to ancestral lands—that the constitution confers on indigenous peoples.

The indigenous movement responded with both political



protests and a legal challenge, led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador. Las Lianas' Bolívar Beltrán is part of the legal team supporting the challenge, currently before the Constitutional Court. We are also, along with several other legal and human rights groups, assisting CONAIE in bringing the issue before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States.

Negotiating for water rights

Indigenous organizations have also mobilized to propose environmental and social policies that address the right to water and to preempt moves to privatize or commercialize that essential resource. Backed by mass mobilizations around the country, indigenous leaders from CONAIE, CONFENIAE (the Confederation of Indigenous Amazonian Nationalities) and ECUARUNARI (the Kichwa Confederation of Ecuador) rejected government proposals that prioritized industrial uses of water and failed to guarantee access for all. Instead, they called for a law that would recognize water as a human right, prevent its privatization or control by a small group, promote water distribution that ensures food self-sufficiency, and involve participatory decision making.

The large protests have won government agreement to dialogue. Now Las Lianas is providing legal and technical support to the indigenous representatives who are negotiating a draft waters law with the government.

Accompanying Indigenous Struggles

Winning title to ancestral lands

Las Lianas has continued our on-going collaboration with the Shuar, Achuar, Shiwiar and Zápara nationalities of Ecuador's south-central Amazon region. As this newsletter goes to press, dates are being set for the presentation of new land titles, to 208 square miles in the name of Achuar communities, and 486 square miles in the name of the Shiwiar. In the case of the Shiwiar, this will be the first ever title in Ecuador that is granted in the name of an indigenous nationality (rather than a constituent community or a group of families).

Organizational building and legal recognition

Our work in the southern Amazon involves more than simply gaining title to lands, important as that is. As we have reported in the past, historically, the only way for indigenous nationalities or their constituent communities to gain legal recognition in Ecuador was to incorporate along the lines of social organizations such as clubs, non-profit organizations, or unions; no legal mechanism existed for the Ecuadorian government to formally recognize their existence as a people.

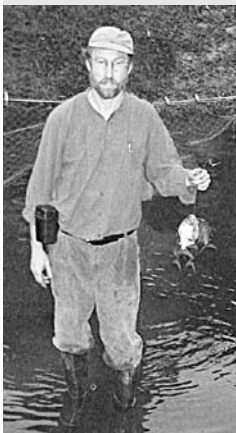
Several years ago, we assisted the Achuar and Shiwiar become the first nationalities to take advantage of a new

process allowing self-identification as an indigenous nationality with legal recognition granted by a council of representatives from each of Ecuador's indigenous peoples (CODENPE). This year, Las Lianas accompanied both the Shuar and Zápara as they formally declared themselves indigenous nations and were recognized by CODENPE.

This was the final stage of a long internal process by which each nationality established appropriate governing laws or constitutions and, in the case of the Zápara, resolved internal disputes between two competing organizations. The result is that the Shuar and Zápara now have greater right to autonomy in the governance management of their affairs and lands, and they are able to claim the other collective rights laid out in the constitution.

Meanwhile, in the highlands, Las Lianas is assisting ECUARUNARI, the Kichwa federation, develop a ten-year strategic plan. We are also collaborating with them in exploring the concept of a plurinational state through the compilation and publication of essays and interviews with Ecuadorian and international thinkers, both indigenous and non-indigenous, as well as assisting in drafting a position paper on the subject.

Growth and Change for Las Lianas



A note from Las Lianas Director Jim Oldham

When I began the work that has become Las Lianas, it was as a program of ISIS at Hampshire College. As activities and partnerships have grown and evolved—from Secoya Survival Project, to Amazon Project, to our many current programs—so too has the organization.

From a one man project based at a US college we have become, for the past five years now, an independent organization incorporated in the US and Ecuador, with an office in Quito, two staff members in the south and one in the north. We have gradually shifted greater programmatic responsibility to Ecuador, while I've increasingly focused on organizational development, long-term planning, and communications with supporters and funders. These shifts address a desire to build our capacity and

visibility in Ecuador, and create a local NGO that can partner with indigenous organizations over the long term. They also provide financial savings and other efficiencies (including a reduced carbon footprint).

We are now taking the next steps, moving all paid positions to Ecuador to allow closer internal coordination, while giving greater day-to-day independence to the southern half of the organization. I'll switch from a staff role to that of an active board member, maintaining Las Lianas' voice in the US on behalf of Ecuador's indigenous people and their allies, while ensuring on-going assistance in their struggles.

For our supporters, these changes will scarcely be noticed. You will still get program updates like this one, and be able to read more about Las Lianas on our (newly updated) website. You can continue to make tax deductible donations as always—on-line or by mail, and I'll still sign the thank you notes. We will keep you informed about events, including occasional visits by our program

Continued on next page

2009 Aquaculture Highlights

New book from Las Lianas: *Experiences in Community Aquaculture*



Even as our program expands, many more Amazonian communities than we can reach would like an environmentally appropriate way to provide protein for their families. While other organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, are implementing fish farming programs of their own, we worry when we see non-native species introduced, fish ponds built without parallel capacity building, or other unsustainable approaches.

In order to help more communities, and to promote a vision of community-led development where beneficiaries are also planners, extensionists, and evaluators, Las Lianas has just published *Experiences in Community Aquaculture: Contributing to Food Security in the Amazon* (title translated from Spanish). The book reports on the history of our program and emphasizes the elements that have been crucial to our accomplishments. In addition to appropriate technologies and native fish, it has chapters on fish farmers as researchers, extension through village-to-village training, and challenges, both internal and external, that we face. Throughout we emphasize empowering communities to address their own needs. The book will be distributed for free to interested communities and organizations in Ecuador.

Growth and Change

Continued from previous page

coordinators, where you can learn more about events in Ecuador.

One of the things I was proudest about when we left ISIS and incorporated Las Lianas, was that we did it seamlessly--our community partners wouldn't have noticed if we hadn't told them. This change will be similar. My Ecuadorian colleagues, Bolivar Beltran and Antonio Almeida, have been buiding and guiding our programs for years. They are ready to expand *Centro Lianas*, as we are known in Ecuador, to continue to become more effective in carrying out our mission in support of Ecuador's indigenous people.

Fish Farming Extended to Southern Amazon

Three, then nine, then 15, now 26—this progression represents the growing number of Amazonian communities receiving aquaculture training and support from Las Lianas in of each of the last four years. This year, with support from two Ecuadorian non-profits, we brought our sustainable fish farming methods to 13 communities in the southern Amazonian provinces of Pastaza and Morona Santiago. This expansion is in addition to our continued partnership with another 13 communities in Ecuador's northeastern province of Sucumbíos.

In the South, we are working deep in the rainforest, near the Peruvian border. The only access is by air, flying in on small planes—some flown by the Achuar owned and managed transport company that Las Lianas helped organize and incorporate—to dirt runways built in small rainforest villages. Any outside materials we need are brought in ahead of time by canoe to reduce costs.



Fish farmers in the Shuar village of Yuwintsa release young fish into a newly built fish pond where they will raise them for food.

The majority of the participating communities are part of the Achuar nationality, the rest belong to the Shuar nationality, both groups that we have been supporting in our ancestral lands program. The fish farming extension addresses community desires for sustainable development that is in harmony with their land management and rainforest preservation goals. This work builds on introductory training sessions we provided in 2008 in two communities, attended by representatives from many of the others. To date, we have helped to build 50 ponds in these communities for family or collective use, while providing training in fish management and fish to stock and raise.

How You Can Help...

And Why We Ask

Las Lianas is a collaboration not only with our partners in Ecuador, but also with our supporters here. Individual donors are critical to Las Lianas' work, providing 25% of our income.

Private giving is important not just for the total received, but also because the commitment of individual donors ensures long-term sustainability in a way grant funding cannot, and because strong donor support attracts foundation funding. We are very grateful for all the donors who have chosen to accompany the indigenous people of Ecuador through Las Lianas. The accomplishments we celebrate belong to all of us.

Give Ponds, Fish, or Title to Land

When giving presents, please consider gifts that benefit indigenous communities. To order one of the symbolic gifts below, send a tax-deductible donation and tell us the gift you want, whom it is for, and where to send it. We will provide an attractive certificate describing the gift and our program, with a greeting of your choosing.

Fifty dollars buys 500 fish, providing 1 to 2 fish meals a week to a family of five for a year! For \$100 (1000 fish), your recipient will also receive a 5x7 color photo from our program.

A gift of \$250 helps win title to 2500 acres of ancestral lands. We will provide a certificate and a small framed photo symbolizing the present.

For \$500, sponsor a fish pond. Your friend will get a certificate and framed photo. Later in the year, we will send them a picture with information about the beneficiary family.

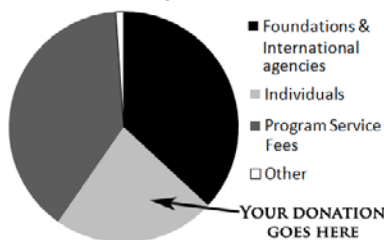
Tell Friends About Us

Do you know people who would be interested in reading about Las Lianas? If you send us their names and addresses, we would send them an introductory letter and a copy of our newsletter, with a choice to remain on our mailing list or not. We can also provide Las Lianas materials for you to share. Please help us reach a wider audience.

Link to Our Website

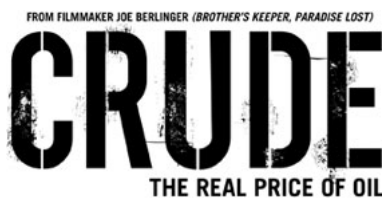
laslianas.org

Las Lianas Funding Sources



Oil and Justice in Amazonia—*Film Review*

In 1993, Ecuador's Amazonian people filed a class action suit against Texaco and began an epic struggle to seek compensation for harm to the environment and human health. Coincidentally, the same visit by Amazonian leaders to Amherst, Massachusetts, that provided the opportunity to file the suit was also the impetus for the creation of the program—the Secoya Survival Project—that evolved to become Las Lianas. Although we have no formal involvement in the suit, many of the people involved are friends or colleagues. We have watched with interest and concern as the fight for justice has gone on, initially in the US and now in Ecuador. Here, Las Lianas board member Robert Hinrix reports on a new documentary about the suit and the issues it addresses.



Three years in the making, *Crude: the Real Price of Oil* is a compelling and thorough examination of Chevron/Texaco's poisoning of Amazonian Ecuador

and its people, and the resulting trial that continues to this day. Beautifully shot, the film opens with the verdant imagery of the river and its banks, and the plaintive song of a Secoya elder. It lays out in a clear timeline the essence of this case, in which 30,000 Amazonian plaintiffs are suing the world's fifth largest corporation for the ecological destruction of their homeland. Director Joe Berlinger focuses on

two lawyers in the case, giving the film a human dimension and some of its best moments. Steven Donziger is the charismatic New York attorney leading the case from North America. But it is Pablo Fajardo who makes the story of a ten-year-old legal case so compelling. A young Ecuadorian attorney and former oil worker, he is taking his first case ever. His passion and wit come across clearly when we watch him debate the oil company's lawyer on site, in front of judges touring the area on fact-finding missions.

Crude is a primer on not just the cost of oil, but on international law and media relations. The first two thirds of the film lay out the case: the cancers and skin diseases of residents, the misuse of oil exploration technologies, and the acquiescence and perhaps collusion of previous Ecuadorian governments. But, with the election of the Rafael Correa, we sense a shift. Suddenly our heroes have the president's ear: they attend his inauguration, and he even makes a trip to the region to see abandoned wells and ponds. By the end of the film, Trudy Styler (wife of Sting) visits as well, and the Police play a benefit for the cause. Suddenly Fajardo is famous, winning awards and appearing with rock stars and in *Vanity Fair*. While the case is not settled, and may not be for years to come, Chevron/Texaco may already have lost in the court of public opinion, thanks in no small part to Joe Berlinger's *Crude: the Real Price of Oil*.

For further information see www.crudethemovie.com.