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Alianza Ecuatoriana para el Turismo Sostenible (AETS)
Associate Award

Final Report

March 22, 2007 – November 14, 2009

Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance/Ecuador - Alianza Ecuatoriana para el Turismo Sostenible (AETS) –

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Prepared By: Gaelle Le Pottier, Program Manager, AETS - Academy for Educational Development on behalf of The Nature Conservancy, Solimar International, Conservation International, Rainforest Alliance, Fundación Metis and the Academy for Educational Development

Submitted By: Eileen Gutierrez, Senior Advisor, Global Sustainable Tourism Program, Academy for Educational Development

Submitted To:

Maria Lorena Correa, Agreement Officer Technical Representative
USAID/Ecuador
Avigiras E12-170 y Av. Eloy Alfaro
Tel: (593 2) 398-5000
Quito, Ecuador

For More Information

Alianza Ecuatoriana para el Turismo Sostenible (AETS)
Italia N32-10 y Mariana de Jesus
Ed. Mariana de Jesus, Office #301
Quito, Ecuador; Tel: (593) 2 3238015
www.gstalliance.org/ecuador

Academy for Educational Development
1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009 USA
Tel: (202) 884-8000 / Fax: (202) 884-8997
E-mail: gstacoordinator@aed.org / Web site: <http://www.GSTAlliance.org>

The GSTA is a Leader with Associates Award. USAID Missions seeking information about establishing a GSTA Associate Award should contact:

Roberta Hilbruner
Development Communication & Sustainable Tourism
USAID EGAT/ENV/ENR 3.8.135
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20523-3800 USA
Tel: (202) 712-5688 / Fax: (202) 216-3174

E-mail: rhilbruner@usaid.gov

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ACRONYM LIST

AED	Academy for Educational Development
AETS / ESTA	Ecuadorian Sustainable Tourism Alliance
AOP	Annual Operations Plan
ASEC	Asociación Ecuatoriana de Ecoturismo [Ecuadorian Ecotourism Association]
BMP	Best Management Practices
C&N	Communications and Networking
CAPTUR	Cámara de Turismo de Pichincha [Pichincha Chamber of Tourism]
CI	Conservation International
CODESPA	Cooperation Foundation for the Development and Promotion of Activities
CORDTUCH	Chimborazo Community Tourism Corporation
CPP	Colegio de Periodistas de Pichincha [Pichincha Association of Journalists]
ECOLAP	Instituto de Ecología Aplicada [Institute of Applied Ecology]
ER	Ecological Reserve
ESPOCH	Escuela Politécnica del Chimborazo [Polytechnic School of Chimborazo]
FAM	Familiarization Trips
FENACAPTUR	Federación de Nacional de Cámaras de Turismo [National Federation of Tourism Chambers]
FEPTCE	Federación Pluricultural de Turismo Comunitario del Ecuador [The Ecuadorian Multicultural Federation for Community Tourism]
FFLA	Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano [Latin-American Future Foundation]
FITE	Ecuadorian International Tourism Fair
FMPT	Fondo Mixto de Promoción Turística [Mixed Fund for Promotion of Tourism]
FPR	Fauna Production Reserve
FPT	Fund for Promotion of Tourism (formerly FMPT)
GIS	Geographic Information System
GSTA	Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance
GWU	George Washington University
HCPP	Provincial Government of Pichincha [Honorable Concejo Provincial de Pichincha]
INGALA	Instituto Nacional Galápagos [Galapagos National Institute]
LAC	Limits of Acceptable Change
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAE	Ministry of Environment
MINTUR	Ministry of Tourism
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NP	National Park
PA	Protected Area
PANE	Patrimonio de Áreas Naturales del Estado (formally SNAP)
PPT	Power Point Presentation
PUCE	Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador [The Catholic University of Ecuador]
RA	Rainforest Alliance
SCALE	System Wide Collaborative Action for Livelihoods and the Environment
SIMAVIS	<i>Sistema de Manejo de Visitantes</i> : Visitor Management System
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SNAP	National System of Protected Areas (now referred to as PANE)
STEP OMT	Sustainable Tourism for the Eradication of Poverty - World Tourism Organization
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
TO	Tourism Operators
UEES	Universidad de Especialidades Espíritu Santo [Holy Spirit Specialties University]
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VCA	Value Chain Analysis
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WSR	Whole System in the Room

I - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past two and a half years, the Alianza Ecuatoriana para el Turismo Sostenible (AETS) has made significant gains in developing sustainable tourism as a means to improve protected areas in Ecuador while demonstrating social, cultural, and economic benefits to rural populations as a result. The AETS management established the first tourism program office within the Ministry of Environment (MAE) to help govern sustainable tourism development in protected areas; implemented a national marketing strategy with the Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) to support the new protected area tourism program; and to demonstrate tangible results, succeeded in eight key protected areas to build visitor infrastructure, implement state of the art monitoring tools and mechanisms to mitigate tourism impacts; create and strengthen four innovative community-based enterprises, increase market access for over one hundred businesses and communities, and gain widespread public support for protected areas in Ecuador. The eight protected areas that benefited directly from the program include: Cotopaxi; Chimborazo; Mangalares Churute; Machalilla, Cotocachi-Cayapas, Cayambe-Coca, Yasuni-Cuyabeno and the Galapagos.

USAID funded the development of the AETS in partnership with the Government of Ecuador and the Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance (GSTA). The AETS itself is an alliance of over 70 Ecuadorian and international partners who represent the Government of Ecuador (GOE), non-governmental organizations, and private sector organizations dedicated to stimulating economic growth, alleviating poverty, conserving biodiversity, and creating greater stewardship for natural resources through sustainable tourism development in Ecuador. The AETS was a pioneering program in Ecuador, the first to comprehensively address structural issues in the sector at the system level, while demonstrating true community-based tourism development.

Program Objectives and Achievements

The AETS was launched in May 2007 at a national “Whole System in the Room” meeting which brought together over 100 key stakeholders engaged in sustainable tourism development in Ecuador to define common ground and major actions for the program. As a basis for its approach, the AETS used innovative approaches such as SCALE™, which rely on participatory and catalytic actions among a diverse group of stakeholders in order to broaden the impact of development initiatives. The approach enabled the AETS to leverage over \$3.0M in additional resources to \$3.0M of USAID funding. The resulting program aimed to ensure better management of Ecuador’s biodiversity and natural resource base; promote benefits from conserving biodiversity to rural Ecuadorians by generating employment opportunities; attract and stimulate investment in the sector; and, showcase the country’s national patrimony to international and national visitors. The program objectives and key outputs are summarized as follows:

- A. *Create an enabling environment for sustainable tourism and implement new models and mechanisms for generating income for protected areas.***
 - A new joint MAE-MINTUR strategic plan for the sustainable management of tourism in protected areas, resulting in the
 - First MAE Protected Area Tourism Program with USD \$2.3M appropriated to implement the strategic plan activities starting in January 2010.

- B. *Implement adequate control and monitoring mechanisms for tourism activities, sensitizing local populations to sustainable tourism.***
 - The first tourism concession management system aimed at mitigating impacts of tour operations on biodiversity implemented in the Galapagos.
 - Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) programs implemented in the seven mainland PAs to measure environmental, biological, cultural and physical impacts of tourism and resources needed to address them.

- Created a new visitor management system (SIMAVIS) that integrates LAC with visitor satisfaction and product development assessments in two protected areas. Its application in Cotacachi-Cayapas helped resolve long-standing conflicts over the use of natural resources.
- GIS maps of all AETS protected areas of focus. The maps contain conservation, tourism and socio-economic data and will serve as a valuable assessment and planning tool for conservation and tourism in each protected area.

C. *Improve tourism-related infrastructure in protected areas*

- Completion of the first phase of an interpretation center for one of Ecuador's most visited protected areas and attractions: Chimborazo. The center will provide much needed facilities to some 5,000 visitors per week and MAE staff.
- Construction of trails, interpretation signage, bridges, an observation deck, and walkway for three less visited attractions and areas: Cotopaxi's Limpiopungo Lake, Manglares Churute's Mangroves, and Oyacachi-El Chaco trail in order to open more opportunities to benefits to local actors from these protected areas.
- Approval of architectural plans for an interpretation center at the entrance to Cotopaxi NP.

D. *Improve the quality and diversification of sustainable tourism products and services offered in protected areas and buffer regions; and promote the development of relationships along the value chain.*

- Developed, trained and equipped, marketed and launched three new community-based enterprises: the Oyaccachi Adventure Tours, the Manglares Churute Mangrove Tours, and The Secoya Lodge.
- Created a new business model for joint private sector- community ecotourism ventures inside protected areas.
- Strengthened a community-based tour operator CORDTUCH through the Best Management Practices Program.
- Secured 10 national and international travel agencies and tour operators to give priority to local sustainable businesses.

E. *Incorporate communities located within and around protected areas in the tourism chain, so that sustainable tourism benefits local population (through training and capacity building).*

- Delivered over 200 hours of training in Tourism Operations, Dining, and Lodging to selected individuals from four protected areas, this training led to the launch of the three aforementioned enterprises.
- Built the capacity of 10 community-based businesses in Chimborazo to improve their service quality, adopt environmentally-friendly practices, and access ecotourism markets.
- Strengthened the bird-watching expertise of 20 certified naturalist guides, certified 39 new naturalist guides, and strengthened skills of 24 additional guides.
- Built capacity of tourism service providers in Cayambe-Coca in how to design sustainable tourism projects, marketing and managing ecotourism products, and on GPS&GIS Maps Training.
- Provided customer service and local gastronomy training to 20 local entrepreneurs, helping them link their services to a flagship tourism business.

F. *Develop and implement a tourism marketing and promotion strategy targeted at capturing local and international markets segments to protected areas.*

- Developed the first joint marketing strategy between MINUR and MAE on promoting Ecuador's protected areas, and implemented key aspects.
- Launched the National Ecotourism Portal of Ecuador to help promote and sell tourism products from over 114 businesses and communities in and around protected areas;
- Developed and printed 5000 Green Passport brochures and tourism brochures with maps aimed at getting Ecuadorian citizens to 'discover, enjoy and protect' their protected areas;
- Developed and printed 40,000 brochures with maps aimed to provide information to national and international visitors about visitor sites in Machalilla and Cotacachi-Cayapas
- Included 37 community-based business in the world-renowned Eco-Index, a website that lists over 1000 certified sustainable business world-wide;

- Published major articles on sustainable tourism in Ecuadorian protected areas in the national press and in the international press as a result of PR efforts and a Press Fam Trip.

G. Strengthen horizontal communication, coordination, and networking throughout the tourism sector system and increase public awareness and support for the sector and the project.

- Implemented a successful environmental communication campaign “Enjoy, Learn and Protect” through radio, TV, journals, websites, and other media, which resulted in numerous articles, radio spots, and TV shows increasing awareness of the importance of protected areas among an estimated 5.4 million Ecuadorians.
- Distributed an electronic newsletter, public reports, and developed the AETS website to ensure widespread communication of activities among AETS partners.

H. Build capacity among sustainable tourism actors to improve their competitiveness and the conservation of protected areas (Workforce Development)

- Although program focus was ultimately reduced to focus capacity building at the protected area level, the AETS developed a capacity building plan to support sustainable tourism development in Ecuador in the future. Recommendations included: establish local tourism training centers at a national level; develop local term volunteer english language programs; create training plans for each PA which focus on prioritized needs, english language, customer service, and marketing.

Biodiversity Conservation

One of the AETS program goals was to clearly link the improved management of protected areas and economic growth activities to alleviating threats to biodiversity. The conservation of forest cover in many of the focus protected areas are critical to addressing global climate change and improved management will help protect key species such as the Andean Condor, the horned screamer, giant river otters, jaguars, ocelots, pumas and their habitats. Policy level work in establishing a tourism program for protected areas within MAE, the institution of limits of acceptable change, and the new model SIMAVIS, will continue to help counteract threats. In summary, the following specific threats are being addressed by AETS activities:

- Increased poverty in and around the protected areas, growth of non-sustainable economic activities, and lack of government policies supporting sustainable income generating activities.
- Illegal hunting and deforestation.
- Expansion of agricultural frontier (i.e., shrimp farming, illegal crab harvesting).
- Lack of regulations and management of tourism activities in protected areas.
- Lack of monitoring and security.
- Road infrastructure development.

Monitoring and Evaluation Summary

The AETS implemented a diverse array activities which led to improved management of over 48, 874 hectares of protected area and 695 direct and 3642 indirect economic beneficiaries in the Cotopaxi, Chimborazo, Manglares Churute, Machalilla, Cotacachi Cayapas, Cayambe Coca, and Yasuni-Cuyabeno Corridor. Over 774 people received training as a result of AETS interventions.

Sustainability of Activities

The AETS activities were intended to equip and strengthen the Ecuadorian Protected Area (PA) system, local tourism enterprises, and relevant public sector institutions to independently sustain efforts once external funding from USAID/Ecuador is removed. Among the over 70 locally-based organizations involved in the AETS, four key locally based NGOs, TNC, RA, CI, and Fundación Metis, led implementation of key thematic areas in concert with MAE and MINTUR. These institutions are expected to continue activities going forward, as the AETS objectives cross-referenced with their organizational strategies. For example, MAE has developed the new tourism program which will implement the PANE strategic plan, continue implementing LAC, ensure maintenance of the new PA infrastructure, and work with CI to implement SIMAVIS. MINTUR will continue to promote and implement aspects of the PA Marketing Strategy and work with ASEC, a local organization, which

will manage and maintain the National Eco-Tourism Portal of Ecuador. Finally, community-based enterprises will be integrated into a "Ecuador Sustainable Tourism Network". The network member's tour products will be promoted and sold through a new website portal and a dedicated sales staff who will target a variety of sales channels - from independent travelers already in the country to international operators at trade shows.

Lessons Learned

The AETS within a relatively short period of time, demonstrated that sustainable tourism in Ecuador's protected areas is viable. Although AETS activities will see more benefits in the medium term, for the short-term the AETS partners have built a strong foundation and made significant contributions to biodiversity conservation and the economic growth of local communities, private sector, and Ecuador as a country. The AETS was an ambitious program stretched across eight protected areas and eight major multi-disciplinary activities among a diverse range of partners. In addition, to external factors such as the global financial crisis, internal adjustments needed to be made to allow for preparation at multiple levels and dimensions in which a diverse range of actors can discover the full potential of sustainable tourism concepts and harmonize diverse elements and processes leading to an integration of all elements. Finally, the AETS program involved testing a new and innovative development model which was based on a horizontal structure designed to ensure true collaboration among several partners. These partners represented economic, environmental, social and government sectors and included international, national, and local organizations. The resulting lessons learned point to addressing many standard program management challenges, however, in the context of a sustainable tourism development program with a horizontal management structure. Top lessons learned include: ensuring strong leadership; providing greater authority to program managers; clearly defining roles and responsibilities; developing comprehensive assessments and baseline data on social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political aspects; selecting partners with appropriate in-country experience and knowledge; involving tour operators and other marketing partners in planning; allowing flexibility in budgeting among partners; facilitating inter-ministerial communication at top levels to ensure program support. Despite, these challenges, the AETS was able broadly influence the concept that conservation and economic development can be complementary activities and install a new level of standard and vision for sustainable tourism development in Ecuador.

Recommendations: The potential of tourism as a tool for economic development and biodiversity conservation provided significant incentives to the GOE to increase investments in sustainable tourism development in and around Ecuador's protected areas. USAID and AETS partners should continue to engage with MAE and MINTUR, supporting the development of new tourism program and ensure continued political support. It will also be important to continue improving monitoring and managing tourism impacts in protected areas, while addressing the need for financial strategies that ensure revenue streams from tourism can be attributed to improving the management of protected areas. To continue supporting and stimulating economic growth as a result of sustainable tourism development, community-level training efforts and workforce development efforts need to continue in tandem with protected area tourism development and monitoring efforts.

II- INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The *Alianza Ecuatoriana para el Turismo Sostenible* (AETS) program started in March 2007 and undertook activities over a two and half year period intended to equip and strengthen the Ecuadorian Protected Area (PA) system, local tourism enterprises, and relevant public sector institutions to independently sustain efforts once external funding from USAID/Ecuador is removed.

The AETS as a partnership of organizations working strategically together to ensure better management of Ecuador's biodiversity and natural resource base; promote benefits from conserving biodiversity to rural Ecuadorians by generating employment opportunities; attract and stimulate investment in the sector; and, showcase the country's national patrimony to international and national visitors. The AETS is part of the Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance (GSTA) whose overall goal is to develop sustainable tourism that:

- Makes optimal use of environmental resources, conserve biodiversity, and protect natural heritage;

- Respects the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities including their traditional values and cultural heritage;
- Provides fairly distributed socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders regardless of gender;
- Encourages investment in sustainable tourism products, services, infrastructure, and destinations.

The implementing organizations involved in the AETS, subscribe to the GSTA principles and played the following roles:

- The GSTA Management group, formed by Solimar International, AED, George Washington University, and The Nature Conservancy, provided GSTA methodologies; resources, support, and guidance for technical, administrative, financial, and contractual management.
- AED, the Academy for Educational Development, as the prime recipient had overall management responsibility for the program under the guidance of the GSTA Management Group. In FY08, AED took on both overall management and in-country management responsibilities to ensure that program goals, deliverables, and results are met on time and on budget in the most cost-effective way possible.
- The Nature Conservancy, through its Quito-based country office, served as the Programmatic Leader for the program through FY08 and subsequently the technical lead for tourism and protected area management policy and site-level activities.
- Solimar International, served as the technical lead for enterprise development, marketing, and related capacity building activities.
- Metis Foundation, served as the technical lead for external public relations efforts, stakeholder communications, and environmental awareness campaigns.
- Conservation International served as the technical lead for protected area tourism management in two key protected areas and provided instrumental support on policy efforts.
- Rainforest Alliance served as the technical lead on the Best Management Practice programs and related marketing activities.
- Ministry of Tourism served as part of the Executive Committee providing overall guidance to AETS implementing partners and providing funding and implementation support for marketing strategies and programs developed by the AETS.
- Ministry of Environment also served on the Executive committee and provided implementation and funding support for protected area visitor infrastructure, tourism monitoring and planning tools, and tourism management systems.

These organizations participated actively in the design of the AETS Program which determined to address the following key sector challenges:

- Lack of Adequate Funding to Support Tourism Development in PAs
- Continued Threats to Protected Area and Tourism Resources
- Undefined Legal/Regulatory Environment
- Lack of Competitiveness
- Lack Cooperation Among Tourism Stakeholders and Involvement of Local Populations

Through a participatory process based on SCALE™, key actions were prioritized and were identified through an initial assessment, design, and stakeholder coordinator phase and include:

- Policy - creating an enabling environment for sustainable tourism and implementing new models and mechanism for generating income for protected areas;
- Competitiveness - improving the quality and diversification of sustainable tourism products and services offered in protected areas and buffer regions; and promoting the development of relationships along the value chain.
- Tourism and Conservation - implementing adequate control and monitoring mechanisms for tourism activities, sensitizing local populations to sustainable tourism, and improving tourism-related infrastructure in protected areas;
- Market Access - developing and implementing a tourism marketing and promotion strategy targeted at capturing local and international markets segments to protected areas;
- Communication and Networking - strengthening horizontal communication, coordination, and networking throughout the system and increase public awareness and support for the sector and the project.

- Community Benefits from Tourism – incorporating communities located within and around protected areas in the tourism chain, so that sustainable tourism benefits local populations.
- Workforce Development – building capacity among sustainable tourism actors to improve their competitiveness and the conservation of protected areas.
- Monitoring and Evaluation – helping to expand the existing knowledge base on sustainable tourism and to determine whether GSTA interventions are having intended impact on poverty reductions; economic growth; sustainable natural resource use; and biodiversity conservation.

Geographically, the AETS chose to focus program activities in seven key protected area locations:

- Yasuni –Corredor Ecoturístico Amazónico including the Eastern Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve and part of Yasuni National Park)
- Cotacachi Cayapas - Parte Alta,
- Manglares Churute
- Parque Nacional Cotopaxi
- Parque Nacional Machalilla
- Reserva Chimborazo
- Reserva Ecológica Cayambe Coca (Papallacta-San Rafael-Chaco-Oyacachi Circuit)

Note: the Galapagos was included on a smaller scale in order to facilitate transfer of learning subsequently and tourism policy work.

II. REDUCING THREATS TO BIODIVERSITY AND CONTRIBUTING TO CONSERVATION

Before delving into the details AETS activities, it is important to highlight that the AETS program was aimed at reducing threats to biodiversity in Ecuador’s protected areas (PAs), while ensuring clear contributions to conserving and improving the management of existing biodiversity—the very resource on which tourism in Ecuador’s PAs relies. It should also be noted that protecting Ecuador’s healthy forests and natural resources contributes to mitigating global climate change and safeguards important species. In order to ensure their protection, AETS program activities were designed to help address a host of threats facing biodiversity in Ecuador’s PAs including:

- Increased poverty in and around the protected areas, growth of non-sustainable economic activities, and lack of government policies supporting sustainable income generating activities;
- Illegal hunting and deforestation;
- Expansion of agricultural frontier (i.e., shrimp farming, illegal crab harvesting);
- Lack of regulations and management of tourism activities in protected areas;
- Lack of monitoring and security;
- Road infrastructure development;

To address these threats, the AETS succeeded at the policy level work to establish a tourism program for protected areas within MAE that will address improving protected area management at a system-wide level. In addition it is expected that the institution of limits of acceptable change and the new model SIMAVIS will be used as tools to help MAE to continue to identify and counteract threats in the eight protected areas of focus. Further, the AETS implemented national and protected area environmental campaigns which engaged media, local radio, and theatre to communicate the importance of protecting biodiversity. It is estimated over 5.4 million Ecuadorians were sensitized to conservation messages as a result of the AETS communication campaign. Finally, each AETS activity was designed to contribute to abating threats specific to each of the focus PAs as follows:

COTOPAXI NP Threats:

- *Visitors going off trail and damaging vegetation and wildlife habitats such as that of the Andean condor*

- *Increased poverty which leads to increased illegal hunting of representative Andean species such as vicuña.*¹

The AETS has worked with MAE to implement Limits of Acceptable Change, a mechanism to monitor negative impacts and put in place measures to mitigate them. In addition, the AETS has provided MAE with a GIS mapping tool that will allow MAE to better plan biodiversity conservation measures. Finally, the Limpio Pungo Trail was improved with more walkways, a bridge, and signage that encourage visitors to stay within visitor site use zones. The trail will eventually benefit future community guides and ecotourism businesses.

CHIMBORAZO Threats:

- *Visitors going off trail and damaging fragile vegetation and the habitats of species similar to those found in Cotopaxi.*
- *Expansion of the agricultural frontier, which is encroaching on wildlife habitats.*
- *Lack of cooperation between MAE and indigenous communities, which leads to continued impacts on the habitats of these important species.*

In order to help provide alternative livelihoods to local communities and better managed visitation to Chimborazo, the AETS has been working closely with local communities to strengthen ecotourism enterprises and attractions. With help from the AETS, local tour operators and home-stays are improving their services and marketing, as well as putting in place ecological practices to help minimize the impact of the some 3,000 visitors they receive a year. In addition, the AETS, recently inaugurated a visitors' center entrance, park guard accommodations, and public bathroom facilities at the entrance of Chimborazo National Park to help better manage the some 15,000 visitors received per year as well as provide revenue to support park management. A second phase, which will be completed by MAE, will include an interpretation center, which will help create awareness among community members and visitors alike on biodiversity threats to the area.

MANGLARES CHURUTE Threats:

- *Shrimp farming and legal crab harvesting are depleting the areas.*
- *Expansion of agricultural frontier threatens areas which are habitats of shrimp, crabs, mollusk, Aquatic birds (especially the "canción" horned screamer) and species of tortoises, ducks, anteater, and badgers.*²

The formation of the Manglares Churute Mangrove Tours, a community-based tourism enterprise, is intended to create an economic alternative for local communities to shrimp farming and overharvesting of crab species. By linking their livelihoods to the health of its ecosystems, community members will likely have an increased sense of stewardship for the protected area. Interpretation provided on the tour will increase awareness of biodiversity conservation issues particular to the area. With these goals in mind, a walkway, dock and picnic area have been built to help support MAE staff and community-run boat tours. In addition, the AETS has been providing training, technical assistance and grant funding to help formalize a community-based boat tour operation, which will be launched before the end of the program.

GALAPAGOS Threats:

- *Giant tortoises, marine & land iguanas, lizards, Darwin's finches, blue & red-footed boobies, albatrosses, cormorants, frigate birds, penguins, flamingos, sea lions, dolphins and whales*²

MACHALILLA Threats:

- *Lack of respect of trails & park regulations by visitors which impact on the habitat/vegetation of dry forest, humid forest and costal marine species such as the Sharpfin Houndshark (listed as vulnerable on*

¹ <http://www.metropolitan-touring.com>

² <http://www.metropolitan-touring.com>

the IUCN Redlist.threatened/endangered species); excessive numbers of tourist boats disturbing whales during mating season, which impacts negatively on reproduction rates.

- *Flora and fauna endangered not only by illegal hunting and fishing, but by tourists in excessive contact with wild species.*

The AETS together with MAE has instituted a “Visitor Management System’ or SIMAVIS which includes zoning guidelines for the Machalilla National Park. In addition, the AETS is helping to provide new income generation options by identifying new tourism products and activities with market demand. SIMAVIS helps reduce the increasing pressure on specific visitor sites by establishing new areas attractive to tourists that are accessible according to MAE’s established management plans. The selection and zonification process was done through a series of workshops and studies involving local actors such as operators, fishermen and diving companies who will themselves later be expected to benefit from the development of new tourism products and services that various areas may be entitled to offer. By including all actors in a chain of economic benefits, conservation efforts are expected to substantially strengthen since local actor gains will depend on the preservation of the natural capital in the area. This strategy is also expected to help improve the quality and diversity of touristic services in a planned and monitored fashion.

CAYAMBE COCA Threats:

- *Possible construction of a road between el Chaco & Oyacachi which will impact on the habitats of wildlife*
- *Deforestation and agricultural expansion impacting on species such as the Andean Condor, Carunculated Caracaras, and various species of hawks.²*
- *Migration to buffer areas around the Reserve*

The AETS has taken three pronged approach to mitigating threats in the area. First, the AETS has worked to develop community-based enterprises as alternatives to agriculture and logging economic alternatives and help increase benefits for local community members from tourism. The Oyacachi Adventure Tours , the development of a joint-venture between communities and international investor to provide both income and jobs to local community members, the certification of new naturalist guides, and additional training to existing guides and local food and beverage provide will ensure an immediate increase in benefits from increased visitation for trekking and hiking in the area. To further support increased benefits from tourism in the area, the AETS completed a series of training activities designed to build the capacity of tourism professionals based in and around the municipalities of El Chaco and Quijos to better plan and design sustainable tourism. Finally, the AETS designed improvements for the *El Chaco & Oyacachi trail* as a strategy to mitigate the construction of the proposed road.

YASUNI CUYABENO Threats:

- *Oil activity - includes: presence of oil wells, contamination caused by human presence in the area, creation of vehicle paths with its direct consequence of new migration to areas the road reaches, illegal colonizing and land trafficking, which threatens important species such as jaguars, ocelots, black caimans , endangered giant river otters, manatees, endangered harpy eagles, all large macaw species (such as scarlet macaws and red and green macaws), spider monkeys, monk soki monkeys, and the golden mantled tamarin.²*
- *Expansion of the agricultural and cattle land border, especially African Palm cultivation next to Secoya’s territory, and*
- *Deforestation and illegal logging which reduces wildlife habitat.*

Together with the Secoya people the AETS is developed a joint venture between the local community, a conservation organization, and a tourism operator to generate jobs and income, while funding a new health clinic, and help safeguard the future of endangered species. The lodge will guarantee funding to help save threatened wildlife and their habitats, and provide better healthcare and education to community members. Five percent of profits will systematically feed into a fund dedicated to conservation activities implemented by a local conservation NGO (VIHOMA). Conservation benefits will also result from the long-term employment of individuals who might otherwise be employed by the logging industry. Meanwhile, the more local residents benefit from nature-based tourism they will become further motivated to protect the most important tourism

attractions - the area's biodiversity and local culture. The expectation is also for tourists to leave the site with a much clearer sense of the importance conservation holds.

III- PROGRAM ACTIVITIES: MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS & OUTPUTS ACHIEVED

Between March 2007 and October 2009, AETS implementing partners conducted a wide array of activities, all focused on achieving the program's overall conservation goals through the development and promotion of sustainable tourism activities inside and near Ecuador's protected areas. Activities described below were organized under thematic sections to better highlight the ways in which each of these activities was able to directly contribute to the program's overall objectives.

A- NEW TOURISM PROGRAM FOR PANE: ARTICULATING NEW GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES & PRIORITIES

After months of close collaboration with the Ministry of Environment (MAE), the Nature Conservancy (TNC) with the technical support of Conservation International (CI) were able to achieve an unexpected degree of success at the end of an eighteen-month multiple-step 'strategic planning' process. While the program had initially intended to help elaborate a new joint MAE-Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) 'Strategic Plan' for the management of the protected areas, the Alliance's work in the end resulted in the more significant creation of a new MAE 'Tourism Program' with a 2.5 million dollars to implement its first year of activity starting in January 2010. The program's activities derive from the recommendations developed by the strategic planning process. More importantly, the program embraced basic principles and measures essential to the sustainable management of Ecuador's protected areas. More broadly speaking, the program is the confirmation of both ministries' new and shared strategic direction, now clearly adhering to the benefits and requirements of sustainable tourism in Ecuador's protected areas.

The Tourism Program came at the end of multiple steps including investigations, workshops, and meetings with technical staff and representatives from both Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Tourism, as well as the Alliance's partners, private sector representatives, communities, universities, and conservation and development organizations. After eight months of this "strategic planning" process, decisions were compiled under the document entitled "Final Recommendations for the Sustainable Tourism Program for the Ecuadorian Heritage of Protected Areas" which defined steps and actions that serve several important and complementary goals: to mitigate the threats to PA conservation through tourism, increase visitations, improve MAE management, monitoring activities and touristic offerings, and generate sustainable and increased state revenue and economic benefits for local communities, all for the purpose of better protecting Ecuador's natural capital. The document was then used as the basis for the elaboration of the PANE Tourism Program.

The program today is divided into the following six principle components:

1. Development of tourism infrastructure and equipment
2. Policies and norms
3. Sustainability mechanisms
4. Promotion, marketing and communication
5. Visitors management systems
6. Generation of benefits to local actors

"This is the first we've seen that many members from both ministries working together in the same room... very first time."

Ivan Hidalgo MINTUR Manager on Tourism & Protected Areas, at an AETS Executive Committee meeting - 11 Feb 09

The Tourism Program for the Protected Areas of Ecuador is today providing a joint platform upon which MAE and MINTUR will be able to fine-tune policies, coordinate initiatives and work to jointly promote conservation of natural and cultural resources inside protected areas, including through the generation of economic and sustainable benefits for individuals living in or near these areas.

MAE has already expressed its intention to publically announce the launch of the program at the AETS closing event and has also already endorsed the publication of the Alliance's Achievement Report in which the creation of its new 'Tourism Program department is again confirmed. By January 2010, MAE is expected to publicly present the final version of the Program, marking a new beginning in the promotion and development of sustainable tourism in protected areas representing close to 20 percent of the overall Ecuadorian territory.

B – MONITORING TOOLS & MECHANISMS: MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS

Tourism Concessions Management System for the Galapagos National Park

The AETS, under the leadership of The Nature Conservancy, provided instrumental technical assistance on the development and institutionalization of a Tourism Concessions Management System for the Galapagos National Park. This is the first time in the history of Ecuador that a concession management system has been implemented in any of Ecuador's protected areas. This event registered an important achievement in the improvement of tourism management in protected areas and will serve as the basis for the tourism management work that will be carried out by AETS in the mainland protected areas. The system will also help manage three new tourism activities in the Galapagos: bay tours; port-to-port tours; and snorkeling tours.

Key activities which led to this achievement, included:

- During January and April 2008 Juan Carlos Garcia and Andy Drumm of The Nature Conservancy worked together with the technicians of the Galapagos NP and representatives of all sectors.
- TNC hired Dornbusch Associates to provide further expertise based on experiences in US Park Service with tourism concessions. In addition, the support of Robert Yearout, a technician of the US Department of Interior.
- Compilation of the existing information on actions undertaken by different stakeholders in Galapagos.
- A highly participatory working methodology including: several meetings with all the stakeholders of the main productive and social sectors in Galapagos; multiple working meetings to validate progress; and, workshops to review and finalize the Management System Document.

The seven steps applied in LAC

1. Selection and characterization of visiting places
2. Identifying impact indicators
3. Methods of measuring the indicators
4. Defining limits or standards of acceptable change
5. Evaluation of actual situation
6. Establishing management actions and costs
7. Monitoring and follow up technical assistance to guarantee LAC is incorporated in the Operational Plans of each PA

The Tourism Concession Management System was approved by INGALA technical group in April 2008. The document will allow for CI to begin work on the development of a Tourism Model for Galapagos. Further, a Memorandum of Understanding between CI, the Charles Darwin Foundation and the Chamber of Tourism has been signed with the purpose of supporting the new tourism model in the Galapagos NP and allowing further counterpart funding.

Limits of Acceptable Change

Starting in May 2008, TNC began implementing the adaptation and first-time application of the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) and Sustainability Threshold³ methodologies in Ecuador's mainland⁴. Based on the success of its application in other areas, the methodology helped measure and mitigate the impacts of visitors in the eight AETS areas of intervention.

³ The Threshold of Sustainability defines the necessary requirements to ensure that tourism operations do not become a threat to biodiversity conservation.

⁴Note that LAC was first designed and applied in Galapagos.

Planning meetings, on-site visits and workshops helped Protected Area Managers and their teams understand how to measure the impacts of tourism and to implement LAC methodology in order to identify the costs related to tourism management in PAs. The multi-step process was mainly implemented through members of MAE at the area level but also included MAE regional and national directors with the expectation that LAC will be implemented in other protected areas in the near future. TNC also offered on-the-ground technical assistance to help with follow up on future corrective actions especially in Manglares Churute where the methodology was continuously adapted and improved over time. In Machalilla National Park and Cotacachi-Cayapas, LAC has been formally integrated into CI's SIMAVIS, as mentioned below.

LAC is a well-recognized methodology designed to measure the environmental, biological, cultural and physical impact of tourism on protected areas. For example, in some cases MAE staff members decided to measure the amount of garbage produced in designated areas over a period of several months or measure the level of deterioration of a given infrastructure such as a bridge. The impact on flora or fauna, based on the application of pre-established indicators able to fit the particular and complex profile of each area, was also measured. Another aspect of monitoring includes the measure of visitors' expectations, an important element in the overall management of an area to ensure a steady rise of income generation in entrance fees which in turn finances essential conservation initiatives. LAC was complemented with the integration of the recommendations developed by the Threshold of Sustainability methodology, which identified the management costs for tourism in 8 protected areas in Ecuador.

With LAC implemented, each area is now technically able to assess the right measures that need to be taken and how much money will be needed to adopt corrective actions. The methodology is also characterized by the broad scope of factors it takes into consideration, and the required involvement of local actors for its proper application.

SIMAVIS: Visitor Management System Mitigating Tourism Impact and Threats to Biodiversity

<p>Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC): measures environmental, biological, cultural and physical impact of tourism on protected areas</p> <p>Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS): designates which activities are available in each area to satisfy different tourist expectations.</p> <p>Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) : Looks to ensure visitor satisfaction while ensuring conservation of an area</p>	<p>Conservation International, together with San Francisco's University Applied Ecology Institute (ECOLAP) successfully established and adapted the Visitors Management System (SIMAVIS) to a coastal area (Machalilla) and to an Andean-coastal area (Cotacachi-Cayapas). As a result, both areas now have a comprehensive management tool at their disposal that links in practical, technical, and sustainable conservation and tourism objectives.</p> <p>The methodology was designed to help mitigate threats to the environment and generate income, incorporating different management systems – including LAC, ROS, and VERP (see table for more detail) to ensure that tourism activities are held under strict environmental norms, while guaranteeing visitor satisfaction for sustainable revenues. And so for example, SIMAVIS will help not only to mitigate the impact of these high volumes of visitors in part by leading visitors to other areas outside the lagoon (Cotacachi-Cayapas) or the Isla de la Plata (Machalilla) but also by creating the opportunity to develop new products/services designed to incorporate local communities into a tourism value chain.</p>
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The elaboration of SIMAVIS by CI-ECOLAP involved in both areas the implementation of the following specific steps⁵:

- a) *Tourism Management System – zonification and determination of acceptable capacity of each individual site*
- b) *In June 2009, teams of environmental experts, experienced guides and local park-rangers conducted several-day long ground studies of Machalilla National Park and Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve*

⁵ Galapagos National Direction published an article in its website relating this positive experience in order to further promote SIMAVIS, which can be found at: <http://www.galapagospark.org/boletin.php?noticia=324>

parks to confirm the establishment and definition of new zones in these protected areas. This thorough ground-truthing exercise is part of the CI-ECOLAP zoning process, beginning with an analysis of natural resources and recreational opportunities in various parts of the parks to define limits of acceptable capacity in each of the zones. The process includes the following conservation steps, among others:

- **Definition of each zone’s restrictiveness** based on an analysis of its biodiversity and possible environmental fragility;
- **Safety study:** determines the maximum acceptable number of visitors/groups in each zone for visitor safety and satisfaction (i.e., avoiding overcrowdings of areas);
- **Definition of a monitoring protocol** based on indicators and standards that will allow managers to make a decision in favor of the conservation of the natural capital of the sites.

The system also offers specific guidelines for each zone establishing how groups should be managed and how visitors are expected to behave to minimize the impact of tourism on the environment.

c) Normative Rules for Tourism Activities

By the end of July 2009, CI together with ECOLAP, Equilibrio Azul and ECOLAX had completed new normative documents, giving the Ministry of Environment legal guidance on how to regulate and monitor touristic activities such as scuba-diving and whale watching.



Whale watching is one of the main tourism attractions in Machalilla National Park

The normative includes standard procedures and rules to be followed by tour operators regarding management of visitor groups, technical regulations, safety procedures, and requisites for staff. The process of creating a normative for whale-watching proved most challenging since it involved coordination among a wide variety of players, including MAE, MINTUR, local tour operators, community organizations, the National Navy, and the Ministry of Defense, since whale-watching mostly takes place in national waters outside of the protected area’s marine space.

d) Identification of New Products and Activities

CI together with Green Consulting identified new products and activities designed to economically benefit local communities while not negatively impacting the environment. New tourism activities in less-known and rarely-visited zones plays an important role in helping to alleviate the excessive number of tourists in zones such as the Cuicocha Laguna in the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve, thereby also helping to alleviate local tensions between competing yet low-revenue generating tourism-service providers.

New tourism products

Kayak trips to Salango Island (Machalilla)

Mountain biking trips through local indigenous communities (Cotacachi)

To ensure that new tourism activities would not only meet the program’s long-term conservation goals and be economically viable, CI and its implementing partner, Green Consulting, diligently completed the following steps:

- Drafted, shared and finalized a **tourism competitiveness analysis** of each area: serving as complement to the “Tourism Value Chain Analysis” document presented in both areas in February 2009, this analysis helped to identify specific actions to improve tourism competitiveness of these parks.
- **Consulted with tour operators** to define specific tourism products they felt could be sold to make sure they would respond to market demands (i.e., can be sold). **Local MAE was then consulted** to see which of these proposed activities would remain environmentally sustainable for these areas.
- Developed **product business plans** in close coordination with local residents, making sure the communities would take an active part in the financial, technical and infrastructural design of these new

products and feel motivated to independently seek financing to start new activities with tangible long-term benefits to the community and their environment.

e) *Practical Application: MAE Cotacachi-Cayapas and Machalilla Staff Visiting Galapagos*



Between September 7 and 11, 2009 CI and ECOLAP organized a trip for MAE Cotacachi-Cayapas and Machalilla staff and members of the each areas Comite de Gestion to see first-hand how MAE staff in Galapagos were already applying SIMAVIS. Due to its high visitation numbers, Galapagos presented an unusually rich scenario for park rangers and managers to experience a variety of challenges and concrete measures taken to remedy them.⁶

The experience not only allowed participants to improve their technical knowledge, but it also allowed them to identify common practical challenges faced in all areas and discuss ways of solving them with a wide variety of peers.

f) *Cuicocha Agreement: Solving a Long Standing Conflict to Allow for Effective Area Management*

In the case of Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve, the adequate implementation of SIMAVIS first required resolving a long standing conflict over the management of the Cuicocha Lagoon, the main point of attraction to a reserve now attracting some 100,000 visitors each year. After 17 months of work on the ground, between June 2008 and October 2009, CI with the support of its local partner Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano (regional organization specialized in environmental conflict-resolution) finally managed to have an agreement reached between long-standing conflicting parties, the municipality of Cotacachi, the community and MAE.

Months of step-by-step individual meetings and shared workshops at first helped MAE, the community and municipality in Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve to identify individual concerns and grievances over the management of the lagoon and its surrounding area. In April 2009 municipal elections led to the election of a new mayor and community representatives who were quickly brought to the negotiation table and in fact contributed to solving this long standing disagreement. On 28 October, all involved parties met, publically acknowledging that there no longer was a conflict over the management of the area focusing instead on ways of jointly work for the benefit of communities and the environment. Discussions today are now therefore focused on ways to strengthen the participation of the beneficiary communities of UNORCAC (specifically those in the buffer zone of the lagoon, which are part of Committee Kuichik Kucha) in the protection and conservation of natural resources by developing new and sustainable tourism activities in the area.

GIS Maps: Monitoring Tool to Measure and Monitor the Impact of Tourism and Other Threats

By February 2009, TNC completed the production of a series of digital and printed maps of all AETS Protected Areas of focus using Geographical Information System (GIS). The maps have a clear thematic focus on conservation, tourism, biodiversity, and socio-economic indicators. After eight months of data collection, verification, and analysis work, the GIS maps became a valuable planning tool for conservation,



⁶ Galapagos National Direction published an article in its website relating this experience in order to further promote SIMAVIS, which can be found at: <http://www.galapagospark.org/boletin.php?noticia=324>

“For us working in the Amazon, it is really important to use this system to help us truly monitor the area.”

-Ubilden Farias Yasuni-
Cuyabeno Park-Ranger

tourism planning and management, marketing and interpretation activities for these areas.

Geographical information was developed and edited to fit international topological norms and thereby sets a standardized format for all Protected Areas. Maps not only collect and visually summarize important information, but can also be used to generate new, synthesized or selected information that help better understand the particularities of each area.

For each area, the following thematic maps are now available:

- Base map: all information related to the landscape, water bodies, roads, communities, cities, etc.;
- Threats map: critical information to this program as it highlights natural and human threats to the environment, such as volcanic eruptions or oil extraction sites;
- Socio-economic map: includes statistics on population growth and poverty indexes for different areas and communities inside the protected areas. It also shows national and international tourists flows in the last ten years, as well as the income and expenditure of each park;
- Tourist Map: offers information related to tourist attractions such as infrastructure, paths, services and operators;
- Flora, Fauna and Vegetation: shows information on local plants and animals. Also outlines how each area is being used for either agriculture, urban or other developments;
- Zonification map: This information is part of the new Visitor Management System (SIMAVIS) developed by the Alliance in Cotacachi-Cayapas and Machalilla.

In July, TNC conducted a day-long workshop to maximize the usefulness of the GIS maps. It brought 20 MAE and MINTUR staff members from various protected areas and departments to train them on how to use the GIS maps for the planning and management of conservation and tourism activities in their respective areas.

Participants were first taught how to update maps and use the software to keep a formal and credible record over-time of evolving threats and factors requiring MAE's attention. An ongoing information gathering process by Park Managers and their staff will create of a Multi-temporal Analysis Database, allowing comparisons of geographic data over time and thereby highlighting in a quantifiable manner important conservation issues such as the expansion of the agricultural borders.

*“This is really helpful!
With this I'm going to be
able to locate shrimp farms
and work on getting them
out!”*

-Bruno Yanez, Manglares
Churute Park Manager

New Tourism Model in Manglares Churute

The Nature Conservancy, in collaboration with the Manglares Churute Reserve's staff, local crabbing associations and tourism stakeholders, elaborated *“The Tourism Model for the Manglares Churute Ecological Reserve”*, which was formally submitted to the Park Director in September 2009. The development of this model includes a complete analysis of the area's current tourism situation, and the implementation of the methodology, 'Conservation Area Planning' (CPA), which prioritizes specific objects within a Protected Area, and establishes actions to mitigate any potential threats to their conservation. Two of the local prominent “conservation objects” (threatened organisms) identified were the local crab and mangroves. These two organisms are key in conservation efforts due to their importance in the area's biodiversity, they are an important source of income for local communities (by artisanal and responsible crabbing), and an important tourist attraction.

The tourism model was, in the end, intended to identify technical requisites, human resources, and infrastructure needed in order to correctly manage the area to promote conservation through sustainable tourism, adapting these needs to a limited budget.

C – INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT: FACILITATING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ACTIVITIES

The Alliance focused on the development of key infrastructure in four protected areas. These infrastructures were intended to help ensure that tourism could not only develop as a sustainable economic activity able to satisfy the expectations of visitors but to also ensure that the impact of tourism is mitigated and conducted in an educational manner for long-term conservation. Below is description of the infrastructural achievements of the program and their relation to the program’s conservation goals:

Chimborazo: Interpretation Center Improving the Management of Tourism

On August 26, 2009, in the presence of the Minister of Environment, Marcela Aguinaga, the Sub-Secretary at the Ministry of Tourism, Esteban Delgado, USAID Representative, Thomas Rhodes, and other key actors, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) inaugurated the construction of the ‘Tourism Center’ located at the entrance of the Chimborazo Wildlife Reserve. The completion of the first phase of the visitation center includes a resting area, a ticket office, public bathrooms, as well as a heating, electrical and water system; all elements essential to providing basic working conditions for MAE staff and basic services for visitors.⁷



The current structure (Phase I) now includes:

- Water line: a 5km extension that goes up to 4,900 meters above the sea-level to provide the center with a adequate water supply;
- Water treatment system and sewage: a grey water system will be incorporated in order to maximize water use and remain environmentally sound;
- Main patio: This patio will allow tourists to rest and talk with park rangers who can provide them with useful information on the area;
- Ticket booth: visitors will be able to buy their entrance ticket and learn about the area’s regulations in this essential new structure;
- Power supply: state power will provide reliable and constant electricity (funded by MAE);
- Restrooms: a first-time but essential facility essential to meet minimal visitor needs in Chimborazo.

The following pictures best illustrate the contrast between the only MAE structure used in the area until the new visitation center was complete:



Before (February 2009)...



...and after (August 2009)

At the inauguration event both ministries of Environment and Tourism formally confirmed their respective financial commitment to the next phase of construction of the Visitation Center, which will include office and living space for park rangers (MAE compromise) and a cafeteria (MINTUR compromise). In addition to

⁷ The Center was in most part funded by USAID with the additional support of TNC and MAE.

national newspaper coverage of the event, MINTUR later published an article in its official website highlighting the benefits of this alliance wide collaborative effort:

“This new center will generate economic development and employment opportunities...with a vision towards conservation, development, recreation and tourism as production mechanisms, improving the livelihoods of indigenous communities in the area.”⁸

Cotopaxi: New Self-Guided Trail, Signage & Interpretation Center Plans

Self-Guided Trail Around the Limpiopungo Lagoon

By the end of June 2009, TNC completed the rehabilitation of Cotopaxi National Park’s Limpiopungo trail. Improvements include:

- New signage offering basic information on local flora and fauna;
- New signage providing information on where tourists can find trails, camp sites, facilities and which activities are not permitted within the protected area;
- New Infrastructure: small bridges and observation deck making the trail not only more accessible but also ensuring that tourists remain on the designated paths and do not disrupt the flora and nearby bird nests.



The park has been increasingly affected by high numbers of visitors (nearly 100,000 yearly) and so the new signage is expected to help visitors better appreciate the richness and fragility of this area by learning more on its local biodiversity and respecting basic rules that will help conserve it. The path will also make the area easier to visit, more interesting for hikers and bird-watchers alike, while at the same time limiting access to areas that may be more environmentally fragile.

Design of Cotopaxi Signage Helping to Set New Tourism Signage Standards

As part of the Alliance’s efforts to help set standards for the design and use of tourism signage in all protected areas, TNC began back in October 2008 to work in close collaboration with the Ministry of Environment to develop and install new touristic signage around the Limpiopungo Lagoon in Cotopaxi national park. It was agreed that the signage should:

- not negatively affect the landscape
- be made of environmentally friendly material that can resist to harsh weather conditions
- offer pertinent information for tourists that helps monitor and manage areas



New observation deck, bridge and one of the information panels installed around Cotopaxi’s Limpiopungo Laguna in late June 2009

⁸ For more on this event go to: http://www.turismo.gov.ec/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1430&Itemid=59

The resulting signage that was built and installed in the spring of 2009 all around the lagoon served as a test case, which the TNC consultant hired to complete this task (Juan Chavez) is now dedicated to further improving under a separately funded USAID program in Machalilla National Park. The standardization process will also become an action-component of MAE's new 'Tourism Program for Ecuador's PANE'.

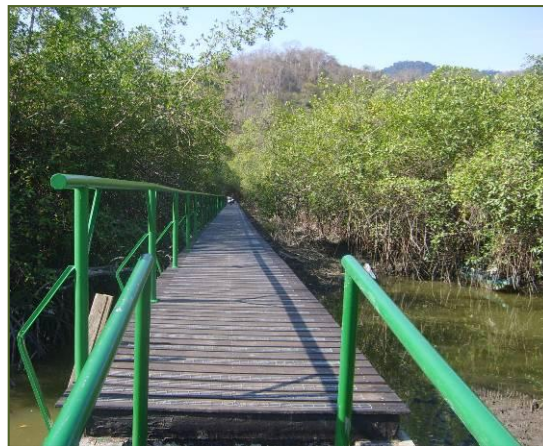
Mariscal Sucre Interpretation Center: Elaboration of Architectural plans

Taking into account the legal and administrative requirements for the management of public funds, as well as the formal requirements for coordination and communication with government ministries in the central facility and in the areas of intervention, TNC worked to complete a number of studies for the design and construction of the new Mariscal Sucre Interpretation Center in Cotopaxi National Park. A first set of architectural and structural plans were completed between March and April 2008. A series of meetings were conducted with members of the AETS Executive committee to review and discuss plans, let to the development of a second set of plans, which was managed by MINTUR and finalized by August 27, 2008.

Manglares Churute: La Flora Pier 1

New Infrastructure Essential to the Development of Sustainable Community Tourism

On 21 April, 2009, TNC inaugurated the construction of the 180 meter (500 feet) La Flora Dock in Manglares Churute. The dock now allows for the first time tours to be conducted any time of the day, allowing the community to engage in a sustainable tourism activities that will motivate conservation efforts. Thanks to the construction of the dock, the new community enterprise "Manglares Churute Mangrove Tour" that was trained and equipped by the Alliance is now able to offer daily tours.



180 meter long La Flora Pier in Manglares Churute

Although one of Ecuador's most biologically rich and unique protected areas, Manglares Churute was until then poorly equipped to receive visitors, especially the many 'high-end' visitors staying overnight in nearby Guayaquil on their way in or out of Galapagos islands. Home to five types of increasingly endangered mangroves, 450 species of plants, 45 species of mammals (including howler monkeys) and 300 species of birds, Manglares Churute only attracted a little over 1000 visitors last year. Meanwhile, mangroves continue to be further endangered especially with the encroachment of shrimp-farming, agriculture and other illegal activities within the reserve.

The dock will be part of AETS's deliberate effort to create alternative sources of income for local communities based on tourism activities. With this specific purpose in mind, Solimar International has dedicated months of on-the-ground research to examine and articulate the most sustainable and environmentally-friendly business opportunities this area could generate (see below for more details).

Cayambe-Coca: Oyacachi-El Chaco Trail Design

In April 2009, The Nature Conservancy finalized the new design of the improvement of the Oyacachi-El Chaco trail. Although the existing trail is mentioned in a number of international traveler guides, it still remains challenging to use in its current state and its use is not monitored to ensure that tourism is conducted there under strict environmental norms. Its limited use today also means that it is not generating income for the local population who is talking about turning the trail into an asphalted road. An increase in the use of an improved trail could benefit local businesses, including restaurants, hotel and handicraft shops, guide and porter services, and could generate other economic activities in the City of El Chaco, and thereby prevent the construction of a large road through the Cayambe-Coca reserve.⁹

⁹ In April, TNC also completed a 'Tourism Demand Analysis Tool' for the Cayambe Coca area, with a focus on how to optimize sustainable economic activities following the redesign and construction of a trail between Oyacachi and El Chaco

CREATION OF NEW COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES

One of the central tasks of the Alliance has been the creation and improvement of tourism products designed to economically benefit local communities as well as to intrinsically depend on the preservation of the environment. While the implementation of new and improved national-wide policies, programs and conservation tools remains at the core of Alliance initiatives, it was also recognized that the sustainability of any conservation effort also largely depended upon the active involvement of the individuals living in and around protected areas. In an environment where local communities have limited means of sustenance, they will likely continue engaging in activities that are today threatening the environment (such as grazing, farming, cutting of trees, fishing and oil rigging) or they will simply not have the clout or the resources to protect their environment against other external threats. And so, laws, norms and policies alone cannot protect the environment unless local communities start to sustainably and directly benefit from their own conservation efforts.

Under the Alliance, three new community enterprises were created in Cayambe-Coca (Oyacachi), Yasuni-Cuyabeno (Secoya) and Manglares Churute. In January 2009, business plans helped to formally identify the touristic potential of each site and the specific business model that could provide long-term sustainability to these new ventures. From April to August 2009, Solimar International conducted a series of training courses to teach new managers how to run their daily operations, while other community members became certified naturalist guides. From August to early October, the three enterprises – all fully owned and managed by local community members – were bestowed essential equipment and materials that allowed them to immediately start operating and offering new touristic activities including boat tours, kayak rentals, mountain-biking and bird-watching. Each enterprise now has a website where potential visitors can learn more about product offerings, special attributes of each area and how to book a tour. Other promotional tools and activities also helped link these new enterprises to private tour operators at the local and international level.

On the long-run here are some of the fundamental reasons why these community-owned enterprises were created and are expected to sustainably contribute to the conservation of the protected where they operate:

- **Membership:** as community-owned enterprises, the sales of touristic products directly benefit local community members and not just a select few individuals contracted by outside private operators – as is most often the case especially in areas with limited experience with tourism. Local residents are therefore motivated to protect a natural capital that directly improves their economic conditions.
- **Business model:** The manager, guides, cooks, boat drivers and other local community members are not only remunerated for their involvement in these activities, but the enterprise's model is designed to have profits fully reinvested into activities of wider benefits to the community, including environmental education, schooling, and health.
- **Ecologically friendly activities:** As protected area based enterprises, target tourists are those interested in ecologically-friendly activities. The Secoya and Manglares Churute enterprises will therefore also be offering tours on kayaks as opposed to traditional motor-boat trips. In Oyacachi, the tour includes a visit of the community's greenhouse which the enterprise is now committed and motivated to better maintain.

AETS New Community Enterprises Oyacachi Adventure Tours

Mountain Biking in the Clouds

Deep in the Cayambe-Coca Ecological Reserve, you will find some of the most exciting mountain biking trips, visit community ruins, cheese factories, fish trout, travel on an old Inca trading route, and soak in Oyacachi's natural thermal pools.

www.oyacachi.com

Manglares Churute Mangrove Tours

Kayaking in Mangroves

Discover and experience Ecuador's biggest mangrove system of mangroves only 45 minutes away from Guayaquil. A unique site to kayaks within the mangroves where thousands of birds rest and simply hike to visit the howling monkeys.

www.mangroveadventure.com

Secoya Lodge

Magicians of the Forest

Over generations the Secoya people have acquired a deep knowledge of the forest, now sharing their wisdom with visitors at the Secoya Lodge. Enjoy this cultural and environmental experience, deep in the Amazon and kayaks in the waters of the Aguarico river.

www.secoyalodge.com

- **Monitoring:** The increasing presence of touristic activities will also result in additional sets of eyes and ears, reporting to MAE staff when coming across illegal activities or potential threats, especially in areas too vast to be fully monitored by small teams of park rangers.
- **Promoting sustainable tourism:** As witnessed in other areas, tours that are themed around conservation and its challenges, usually attract a growing number of tourists that are increasingly interested in tours that are deemed socially and environmentally ‘responsible’.
- **Management & upkeep of infrastructure:** While both MAE and MINTUR are expected to play a critical role in improving the quality of experience of visitors by constructing of new infrastructures, local community enterprises will be expected to contractually and responsibly manage these structures and incur the cost of their proper maintenance, in exchange for their use. Below is a more detailed description of each enterprise and the successive capacity-building activities conducted between late 2008 and October 2009.

“If we were not working in tourism, we - the community of Anangu - would be cutting down the Amazon forests and we would be working for oil companies, or we would be migrating to the big cities” –

Jiovanny Rivadeneira,
Manager of the Napo Wildlife Center

Cuyabeno: Secoya Lodges



The Secoya indigenous group of western Ecuador, known as the “People of 1,000 Colors”, are well documented as one of the most spiritual and knowledgeable Amazonian tribes in the medicinal powers of native plants. It’s no surprise then that the Secoya have recently opened the doors to one of the most culturally unique lodges in the Amazon rainforest, the **Secoya Lodge** (www.secoyalodge.com), located on the borders of the Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve.

The Lodge helps the Secoya maintain their traditional way of life and fend off oil exploitation by petroleum companies, African Palm plantations, and illegal logging all of which has devastated other parts of their territory. Tour packages provide visitors the opportunity to experience both authenticity of the Secoya culture, but also the biodiversity of the Amazon. Highlights of 2, 4, and 5-day Secoya Lodge itineraries include:

- Palm-thatched cabins on the mighty Aguarico River with sweeping views of the surrounding rainforest and large screened windows that immerse visitors in sights and sounds of nature
- Rainforest kayaking and hiking excursions that get visitors close to a diversity of wildlife that includes 500+ birds, 10 species of monkeys (including the smallest primate in the Amazon).
- Cultural presentations and community visits that highlight the Secoya’s rich artistic traditions, folkloric storytelling, and sustainable agricultural techniques.



Cabanas built by the Secoya community as part of their contribution to the creation of their new tourism enterprise.

The “Monkey Sundowner“, where guests enjoy a sunset cocktail on a boat in the Aguarico as monkey troops swing from tree to tree over the river bank.

The construction of the new Secoya Lodge, which is able to house up to 12 people inside the Secoya territory, was the result of the collaboration of various actors including the community itself, VIOHMA (conservation NGO) and Solimar International. While community itself and VIOHMA focused on the construction of the actual cabanas, Solimar was able to furnish and equip new structures including the guest rooms, kitchen, offices and dining area. The construction of this lodge will allow Secoya residents for the first time to host tourists and start generating a steady and sustainable stream of income essential to help preserve their environment and culture in the face of increasing external threats.

Construction started in early 2009 and cabins were built using sustainably-harvested local building materials made of tropical hardwoods. Their design, based on the Secoya’s own architectural style, is part of the project’s goal of promoting and preserving the local culture. Tourists will be able to buy products and handicrafts locally made, and learn more about Secoya’s unique customs and ancestral traditions.

Manglares Churute: Mangrove Tours

Manglares Churute Mangrove Tours (www.mangroveadventure.com), launched last month, now provides an ideal “escape to nature” just 45 minutes from Guayaquil, Ecuador’s largest city. The half-day and full day boat and kayak tours appeal to business travelers, student groups, and international visitors who are looking for perfect extension to any Galapagos Islands tour package.



Declared an internationally recognized RAMSAR wetland site in 1990, the Manglares Churute Ecological Reserve boasts a remarkable 5 types of mangroves, 450 plants species, 45 different mammals, and almost 300 bird species birds. Close encounters with wildlife howler monkeys, 2-toed sloths, bottlenose dolphins, and the South American Coati.



Tours are lead by knowledgeable local nature guides who point out wildlife and also explain the traditional crabbing activity of local fisherman who can be seen hard at work during the boat tour.

Motorized boats with comfortable seats and sun shades feature quiet, environmentally friendly motors to ensure wildlife is not disturbed. Tourists also have the option to get into sturdy kayaks that allow them to penetrate even further into the maze of mangroves to see wildlife.

The full-day tour features a boat tour through the mangroves in the morning, a delicious crab lunch, and then a choice of either kayaking or hiking a short nature trail that is home to a resident howler monkey troop that always offer a great photo moment.

Cayambe-Coca: Oyacachi Adventure Day Tours

Last month the Cayambe Coca Ecological Reserve welcomed **Oyacachi Adventure Tours** (www.oyacachi.com), a small adventure company offering a new way to explore this spectacular region.



Oyacachi otherwise known as “the land of water”, which is easy to see why once you arrive in this small community deep within the highlands of the Andes. The Oyacachi valley features waterfalls, thermal hot pools, rivers and snow-capped Andean volcanoes. The tour company has developed exciting adventure tours that feature the best of the Incan / pre-Incan sites of interest and natural wonders through the valley. The tours also

incorporate the artistic traditions of the local community such as their renowned wood-carving and totem poles. Tour packages include:



Oyacachi to El Chaco Trail 3-Day Trekking Tour - A World-Class Hiking Experience

This multi-day trekking and camping tour follows 42 km of forest trails along an ancient Incan trade route. Experience an incredible cross section of diverse ecosystems as you drop from Andean highlands down to Amazonian lowlands.

Mountain-Biking the Sierra to Amazon Trade Route

Ride an invigorating 20+ km downhill mountain bike ride that descends nearly 800 meters of altitude down a traditional Andes to Amazon Incan trail. Then change your “gears” by soaking in Oyacachi’s therapeutic thermal hot pools, where you can also visit nearby artisan workshops.

Oyacachi’s “Carbon Neutral” Community Tour

An fun and educational tour where clients visit the community’s reforestation project and river water-driven hydro-electric plant. Along the way, learn about the community’s cheese-making and trout farming traditions (which also includes some tasty samples)! Finish your

tour with a visit to the wood carving workshop and famous totem poles, where you can purchase a number of handcrafted souvenirs to take home.

Equipping New Enterprises

To ensure the viability and prompt creation of these new community-owned enterprises, Solimar started to conduct procurement activities to provide each enterprise the equipment it needed to support the launch of new community tourism products in Manglares-Churute, Cayambe-Coca and Yasuni-Cuyabeno by October 2009. In addition to providing equipment needed for new products and enterprise administration, expenditures were also dedicated to promotional products and activities. The particular tours (and their resulting procurement needs) were identified following an extensive market demand analysis that included interviews with the inbound (domestic) tour operators who indicated the tour products that interested their clients, via visitor demand surveys, and through discussions with other tourism representatives and protected area managers.

Procurements included the following elements:

- **Equipment:** Equipment needs in Manglares Churute and Secoya includes a boat and motor, and kayaks, and in Oyacachi the purchase of mountain-bikes and camping equipment for multi-day treks. Also included is field and safety equipment for guides, such as binoculars and first aid kits. The administrative equipment included for all three enterprises includes the purchase of a laptop computer and a color printer.
- **Infrastructure:** Dry bathrooms originally intended for Manglares Churute were instead built in Secoya.¹⁰ In Oyacachi and Manglares Churute, improvements were made to the new enterprises’ sales office. Additional infrastructure costs in Oyacachi, include trail improvements and a small equipment

¹⁰ In early October, MINTUR confirmed that it was going to build a new interpretation center is the exact location where the Alliance originally planned to build the dry bathrooms. These were then built on private Secoya land at the entrance of the Botanical garden where tourists first arrive after a long-journey.

storage shed where mountain bikes and camping equipment can be secured and maintained. In Secoya, procurement activities allowed the lodges to be equipped in full, and a restaurant and kitchen.

- **Promotion:** funds have been dedicated to the important step of supporting the enterprise's marketing strategy and promoting the finalized tour products to target markets. This includes the creation of an eye-catching and informative website, the production of a print promotion (such as posters and brochures), familiarization trips for tour operators, and merchandise that will feature the enterprise's name and logo.

Launch and Promotion of New Community Enterprises

a) Introduction of New Enterprises to Local and International Tour Operators

On September 8, 2009 in front of an audience of 24 Ecuador-based private tour operators, Solimar announced the launch of three new community tourism operations in Secoya, Manglares Churute and Oyacachi, along with the launch of the 'National Ecotourism Portal of Ecuador' (Amigos Program), a new private internet-based platform to promote tourism in protected areas. The event was strategically organized ahead of the 'Latin American Travel Mart' held in Chile from September 23 to 25 with the expectation that tour operators will include these new and innovative products in their own packages while establishing business links with the other international operators interested in sending clients to Ecuador. The Travel Mart is not only the most renowned tourism fair in the region¹¹ but an especially important forum for operations, such as the ones supported by AETS partners, which offer products of greatest appeal to North American and European travelers (e.g. products focused on 'responsible' community and adventure tourism).

Earlier, in June 2009, the Secoya Remolino Community also signed an agreement with a private Ecuadorian operator 'Tropic Journeys in Nature' to formalize a strategic alliance to promoting Secoya-based tours operations. The community's formal ties to a tour operator will provide important access to the market but also long-term technical support to make sure touristic offerings remain consistent in their quality of service.

b) Launch of Promotional Websites

In late September, Solimar completed the design and content of three separate websites linking each community enterprise to a wider local market and international market and serving as virtual brochures with comprehensive tour descriptions, frequently asked questions (FAQs), information on the protected area and a photo gallery. Managers were also trained on how to use and management of their websites, to allow for reservations to be made or to simply provide further information to prospecting customers.

CREATING A NEW PRIVATE-COMMUNITY JOINT-VENTURE

Solimar meanwhile also worked in close collaboration with the Oyacachi community (Cayambe-Coca) to design and build a new and ambitious project, intended to attract high-end visitors with a special interest in the community's isolated and spectacular natural surroundings. This joint venture between the community and a private investor will be expected to generate substantially higher and more sustainable income, while relying on a clientele with high expectations in areas of conservation and cultural heritage.

After months of research, formal and informal discussions, meetings and presentations, the majority of Oyacachi residents voted in favor of the building and operation of the Ukuku Lodge inside their community. In spite of deep and long-term internal divisions, on June 4, 2009 the Oyacachi community came to an agreement in support of this joint community-private investor venture that will bring high-end customers whose primary interest is expected to be focused on Oyacachi's natural capital, thereby making the generation of sustainable income reliant on the community's ability to help preserve their own environment.

¹¹ The Latin American Travel Mart is this continent's most important tourism fair where 300 international tour operators go to "buy" new destinations and products, and bring them back to mostly Europe and the United States. This year, it is expected that community and sustainable tourism will be one of the main qualities sought after - making new Alliance products attractive.

Development of a New Business Model inside Protected Areas

The proposed business models rest on the creation of a joint-company with shared distribution among a private investor (offering cash and technical support) and the community itself in exchange for land, labor, materials and any external donation or loan which Solimar and the investor are working to secure. Because the lodge would be located inside a protect area, the Ministry of Environment would also have to approve the right to operate within. The terms and conditions of ‘co-management’ scheme still need to be legally defined as there are official processes clearly authorizing this type of operation to date. MAE has nonetheless shown an increasing commitment to helping design this example-setting ‘co-management’ contract, assigning one of its own lawyers to work in close collaboration with a lawyer hired by Solimar and by the investor to draft the basis of this contract based on MAE conditions and priorities. The drafting process is one that is expected to continue past the closure of the program, involving additional meetings with the community and MAE to help shape step-by-step the content of this ground-breaking document which could help pave the way for many other private investments to be made inside protected areas – something that was not allowed until now. If finalized, this document will not only pave the way for the construction and operation of Ukuku, but would allow and encourage the private sector to invest in sustainable tourism projects and work with local communities that need additional external resources in order to start any large scale, high-end project that tends to attract fewer tourists but bring much higher economic benefits.

Because the lodge would be located inside the protected area, Solimar had to commission and formally submit a full management plan and studies in order to obtain an environmental license from the Ministry of Environment, in affect allowing the lodge to be built inside a protected area. The license was reviewed and approved by the MAE Sub-Secretary of Environmental Quality and is currently be reviewed by the Sub-Secretary of Bio-diversity. The legal work done to establish contractual basis of this operation inside the community has however revealed that the land where the lodge will be built is not legally part of the protected area and therefore does not require a license. Solimar has nonetheless decided to pursue the issuance of the license in order to guarantee the Ministry of Environment’s ongoing involvement in this project, either through ministry programs such as the “Socio Bosque” or through the signing of a community-investor-MAE agreement that would strengthen the ecological focus and distinctive features of the lodge.

STRENGTHENING A COMMUNITY-BASED TOUR OPERATOR

Chimborazo is a popular destination amongst international visitors, as it is home to Ecuador’s tallest volcano, over 145 endemic species, many of which are endangered. The area is however poverty-stricken, and members of communities continue to engage in economic activities that further endanger their environment as they attempt to improve their living conditions. In response to this, RA and TNC worked closely with CORDTUCH, Chimborazo’s Community Tourism Operator, its 15 member communities, and CODESPA Foundation, a Spanish-based NGO to develop their business plans, improve their management practices and service quality, and help them generate and market more environmentally-friendly and sustainable economic activities.

The Nature Conservancy worked closely with CORDTUCH and CODESPA to strengthen the local capacity to manage a wide array of community –owned tourism products and services. To do so, TNC helped develop the Business and Marketing and Sales Plan for the Tour Operator. The development of these plans involved several field trips, community meetings, indigenous assemblies, in order to identify the changes that need to take place in order to develop a commercially successful tourism operation. The final Plan was approved by CORDTUCH’s Board of Directors in a General Assembly held in September 2009, and these plans will be implemented by Codespa in the following months.

As a result of implementing its Best Management Program (BMP), RA was able to help CORDTUCH work with its member tourism providers offering home-stays, tours, food and beverage services to focus on improving the quality of their products. RA did this through training and technical assistance in management practices, gastronomy, use of environmental technologies, customer service, and safety and security. In addition, helping to develop individual architectural and business plans for service providers. Key recommendations and improvements have been supported by RA and will continue to be supported by CODESPA. Finally,

CORDTUCH has benefited and will continue to benefit from organized Familiarization Trips to expose target tour operators and journalist to the community's improved products and services.

E – CAPACITY-BUILDING OF LOCAL TOURISM PROVIDERS: IMPROVING QUALITY & COMPETITIVENESS

In order to incorporate communities located within and around protected areas in the tourism chain so they may benefit from sustainable tourism development and protected area activities, the AETS provided a series of targeted training and capacity building efforts. These efforts were designed to help provide immediate benefits to participants. Training and capacity building efforts ranged from tourism planning and enterprise development to dining and lodging management, gastronomy and tour guiding. Overall over 720 individuals received trainings as a result of the AETS. Specific efforts are described below.

Enterprise Development Training

Between mid-March and mid-April 2009, Solimar International conducted a two-month training on “Tourism Operations Training Program” to train individuals recently selected by their community to become the managers of community enterprises the Alliance was helping to create. The training was also attended by three ‘mentors’ each assigned to one of the new community enterprise managers to offer daily technical and on-the-ground support until the end of the program.¹²

The two-month training course offered in-class (200 hours) as well as practical field-based training to introduce its participants to the full spectrum of activities involved in the running of tourism enterprises, including reservations-making, payments, staff hiring and coordination, logistics and maintenance. The Managers also learned about “bigger picture” enterprise management concepts such as annual work planning and budgeting, profit sharing and staff training programs.

“This [training] benefits the whole communities, it will give new job opportunities and introduce new forms of sustainable tourism...This is an opportunity we must take advantage of in an excellent way”.

-Romulo Gaiza, manager of Manglares Churute Mangrove Tours

On-the-Ground Follow-Up Training

At the end of the program, each manager, with the support and direct supervision of individual mentors, was expected to return home and finalize detailed tourism itineraries and products inside their respective protected area, create emergency plans, develop job descriptions and hire staff, elaborate an annual operations plan, conduct negotiations with service providers, and finalize systems for the management of income and expenditures. In addition, managers and mentors maintained regular contact with Solimar’s technical staff that provided ongoing support primarily in infrastructure development and the implementation of sales & marketing strategies. Secoya Lodge manager, Fausto Piaguaje, meanwhile continued to spend five days out of every month at the Huaroani Lodge where his mentor Patricio Quinchimbla (the former manager of the Huaroani Lodge) continued instruction on managing all aspects of lodge operation. This timely and particularly hands-on opportunity allowed Fausto to observe and experience the daily operational challenges of an already operating business, with many similarities to those found in the Secoya area.

Testing Products Before their Launch

In September 2009, Manglares Churute Mangrove Tours, Secoya Lodge and Oyacachi Adventure Tours began to promote their nature and adventure tour packages with target markets, particularly “backpacker” clients, through sales partnerships with *Lippi Outwear* and other tourism operators located in Quito and throughout the country.

¹²The training was also attended by a member of CORDTUCH assigned to represent the organization for future product developments and initiatives.

Although long-term sales strategies will focus on mid and high-end clientele as well, offering these packages initially to lower-end clients will allow the community tourism enterprises to “fine-tune” their products and help them identify products or management issues that need improving. Backpacker clients are also ideal to start because “word of mouth” promotion is common and also because they tend to congregate in certain regions of the country where print & web-based promotional efforts can be concentrated.

Finalizing Operation Manuals for New Community Enterprises

By end of June 2009, all Solimar-trained community-enterprise managers had completed drafts of their Operational Manual—adapted to their region and individual business plans. After months of data-collection, community consultations and work with their individual mentors, managers on the ground produced a complete version including detailed procedures on the following elements:

- Job descriptions for all key positions, including manager, guides and cooks;
- Personnel management: procedures for hiring and firing, and staff evaluation;
- Marketing Plan: specific action-plan including the designation of points of sales, ally tour operators, and distribution of promotional materials;
- Internet administration: procedure on the use of the internet for promotions and sales/bookings;
- Finances and budgeting: procedures for recording income and expenses, petty cash, and complete filing system for invoices, checks and receipts;
- Business Procedures for negotiations, signature of contracts and agreements with providers and/or customers;
- Accountability: complete reporting system established for managers to show each community relevant documentation such as financial reports;
- Customer satisfaction: evaluation tools to evaluate the level of satisfaction of visitors and collect statistical data on the level of quality of services offered.



Dining lessons included tips on decoration and use of local products

These manuals will not only provide useful and consistent guidance to the new community-tourism managers but will also provide continuity for when business managers may change in the near or more distant future. Ready but catered templates are also expected to considerably facilitate basic and more complex contractual processes and negotiations, especially amongst tour operators with whom all tourism service providers need to formalize their relations in order to secure a more steady stream of visitors.

Given the complexity and multiplicity of operations, as well as the limited experience of existing managers, Solimar made sure that these manuals were not just handed over to them but developed by the managers themselves first with the support of trainers, then with the support of mentors, through a step-by-step process initiated back in April 2009. Now that the manuals are complete, each community enterprise will have to socialize its content with their community members to gain their approval on key procedures especially those related to accountability systems and the powers and mandate of managers.

Dining and Lodging and Transportation Training

From August 19 to 22, 2009 Solimar trained 14 Secoya community members mentors and managers of three other community enterprises (CORDTUCH, Manglares Churute and Oyacachi) on how to deliver and improve the quality of dining and lodging services. Taking advantage of the Secoya’s newly built cabins and overall infrastructure, the first phase of the training (August 20-22) took place in Secoya. The second phase of training took place in all three other areas where community members had yet been trained. In Manglares Churute and

Oyacachi¹³, the new community enterprise managers in turn took charge of the training activities as one of their first concrete management responsibilities ahead of the official September launch of operations. Trainings included the following topics:

- Lodging/Housekeeping: cleaning and preparation of infrastructure such as bathrooms and kitchens, decoration, use of flowers, towels etc...
- Food preparation & serving: Menu development, menu cost/pricing, hygienic food preparation and food presentation
- Transportation: specific guidelines on the transportation of passengers, as well as the transporting of food, water and other supplies (including emergency scenarios and procedures).

Tips, role playing and guidelines were adapted to the specific needs and particular tourist profiles of each community enterprise. The last in a series of tourism business trainings conducted since March 2009 involved a great deal of role playing to ensure new community enterprise staff members would be ready to put into practice newly learned skills for the launch of enterprises in September 2009.

Best Management Practice Program

Starting early in 2009, Rainforest Alliance began implementing its Sustainable Tourism Best Management Practices Program (BMP) for the first time focused on improving the quality of services of community tourism. CORDTUCH, Chimborazo Community Tourism Corporation, whose members are based in and around Chimborazo, was thereby not only chosen to help yield important lessons learned for its members but also to a wider international audience similarly interested in promoting community-based sustainable tourism.

Chimborazo is a popular destination amongst international visitors, as it is Ecuador's tallest volcano, home to over 145 endemic species, many of which are endangered. The area is however poverty-stricken, and members of communities continue to engage in economic activities that further endanger their environment as they attempt to improve their living conditions. In response to this, Rainforest Alliance (RA) started to work closely with CORDTUCH and its 10 member communities, to improve their practices and services and help them generate and market more environmentally-friendly and sustainable economic activities.

Throughout the program, RA consultants and trainers demonstrated how improved quality and standards could attract and satisfy an increasing number of tourists, especially those interested in operations that are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. To achieve this aim, RA contracted three consultants to complete a series of technical assessments to serve as a baseline and to help identify priority areas of improvement. Along with these, RA offered a series of BMP training workshops and activities as follows:

a) Introduction to Best Management Practices

The February 14-15, 2009 workshop on “*Best Management Practices*” marked the on-the-ground launch of months of intensive training, assessment and consultancy activities with members of the CORDTUCH.¹⁴ The 38 CORDTUCH participants were introduced to the basic principles of BMP. Wider principles that will be marked by distinctively environmentally friendly practices will guide a series of activities to help them better implement and promote sustainable tourism through housing, restoration and guiding services.

b) Management Practices in Community Tourism

Three international community tourism experts were brought to Chimborazo in mid-March 2009 to work with CORDTUCH and design a new-guide on “*BMP Guide on Community Tourism*”, expected to become a new and innovative reference for other programs. A workshop was conducted on 14-15 March 2009 to socialize RA's new guide with in-depth information and tools catered to the needs of tour operators and tourism managers and

¹³ Oyacachi training took place on August 25,26 and 27. Manglares Churute training took place on August 26 and 27.

¹⁴ Two days earlier, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between RA, CORDTUCH and Fundación CODESPA to formally mark the commitment of each party in ensuring these goals are jointly achieved.

members of CORDTUCH. The 29 participants were given an in-depth preview to its content and the tools designed to gauge their own capacity/performance and steps towards achieving BMPs.

c) Serving Appetizing Food

On 23-24 April, 2009 a second round of training workshops was conducted under the expert guidance of Chef Maria Teresa Becerra focusing on how to prepare, present and serve food to customers. The main purpose of this workshop was to improve lifestyle quality, including physical comfort and leisure activities. Based on the feedback, participants then worked towards developing more specific ideas and activities that could help satisfy the experience of any visitors. More specific discussions focused on the features and benefits of renewable energy management related to the development of recreational activities, the use of alternative waste management, and the improvement of infrastructure. By ensuring that these services offer greater comfort through more environmentally friendly practices, CORDTUCH hopes to attract a steadier and larger stream of tourists in the years to come.

d) Use of Renewable Technologies and Waste Management

On 23-24 May, 2009 RA conducted a workshop on the use of renewable technologies and waste management. The workshop led by a local environmental technology enterprise, *Maschana*, was catered to CORDTUCH members (especially owners of hotels and restaurants) and tour operators based near Chimborazo. On this occasion, specialists provided technical assistance in the implementation of environmental technologies that utilize local resources and knowledge with the purpose of improving the quality of life of local families and communities through environmentally friendly and sustainable practices. *Maschana* had participants first identify what could help improve the lifestyle quality, including through physical comfort and leisure activities. Based on the feedback, they then worked towards developing more specific ideas and activities that could help satisfy the experience of any visitors. More specific discussions focused on features and the benefits of renewable energy management, all related to the development of recreational activities, the use of alternative waste management, as well as the improvement of infrastructure. By ensuring that these services offer greater comfort through more environmentally friendly practices, CORDTUCH hopes to attract a steadier and larger stream of tourists in the years to come.

e) Understanding & Experiencing Quality

From July 20 to July 23, 2009 RA brought 20 CORDTUCH members to Las Palmeras and Cusin, two high end haciendas located near Otavalo that are part of the Rainforest Alliance sustainable tourism program, to learn firsthand what it means to offer and improve the quality of services in hotels and restaurants. Participants spent four days – under the guidance of the hotel manager and his staff – learning in detail and in person what ‘best management practices’ really mean at all levels of operations including kitchens, gardens, bedrooms, storage, reception and recycling / compost areas. To better understand the meaning of ‘quality’, participants were also treated as guests for lunch at Cusin, Ecuador’s oldest and better known haciendas of Ecuador.

While experiencing high-end quality food, service and accommodations, participants were exposed to the details and work invested into ensuring that all visitors may feel welcome, comfortable and safe. CORDTUCH members showed great interest in activities which they felt could be implemented on the short term including how CORDTUCH operators could grow and serve their own vegetables (without using any chemicals), and how they could start planting indigenous trees and flowers to quickly improve the physical environment especially for visitors.

By the end of the workshop, members of each of the 10 communities presented a list of short and long-term commitments they felt ready to make in order to improve the quality of services offered. Recurring basic and



CORDTUCH members, guests at the Hacienda Cusín, the first hacienda turned into a high-end hotel in Ecuador back in 1966

relatively low-cost but important actions included planting plants and flowers, painting houses, cleaning areas, and creating vegetable gardens. Longer term commitments included the installing hot water, creating welcome areas and information packages, and improving the quality of local artistry. Rainforest Alliance's upcoming workshops will include follow up activities to help the communities implement some of the most immediate and realizable action plans.

f) *Safety and Security*

RA conducted a two phase seminar on First Aid, accident prevention and accident response as follows:

- 27-28 June – Introduction to ‘Security and First Aid’ measures including pre-hospitalization actions, emergency management, and how to avoid accidents;
- 31-2 July - Evaluation of risks and security of six CORDTUCH operations resulting in six complete action plans, including suggestions on the use of fire extinguishers, handrails on steps, kitchen tools and other elements to avoid accidents and address emergencies.

g) *Technical diagnosis assessment reports*

As of September 2009, RA completed a total of 27 technical assistance plans for CORDTUCH businesses to help objectively and precisely identify areas of weakness and practical ways to improve the quality of their services and products in the short and long term. Assistance plans were completed as follows:

- **11 architectural plans:** pointing to main infrastructural needs and offering simple-to-follow interior design plans to dramatically improve the aesthetics and comfort of operations;
- **2 value chain analyses & 1 agro-business technical proposal** identifying small products, such as organic food products and handicrafts, set within a viable competitiveness analysis;
- **11 alternative technology** implementation plans: helping make businesses more environmentally friendly and attractive to responsible tourists (e.g., green technologies applied to heating, water, and garbage systems).

The assessment reports also served as a baseline to measure improvements made in the last few months of activities with the Alliance. In October 2009, ten new assessments were conducted to measure the degree to which CORDTUCH operators had been able to benefit from their BMPs training program. Assessments showed that the operations developed an increase in sustainability in environmental and economic/managerial aspects of sustainability. This was expressed by an increased awareness of conservation of natural resources with some communities developing reforestation programs and environmental education workshops. Other operations improved their infrastructure taking in considerations sustainability criteria for the efficient use of energy and water. Managerial capacities have improved as operations have strengthened their internal structures supported by community members involved in tourism initiatives. Leadership also played an important role in implementing Best Management Practices in community based tourism operations and, through the work implemented by GSTA in Chimborazo, leaders from different communities improved their capacities and are building empowerment networks among their communities and operations.

Certified New Naturalist Guides and Strengthen 40 Additional

Outside of the BMP, other Alliance members worked to reinforce the skills, qualifications and technical knowledge of a variety of local tourism service providers to overall improve the quality of tourism services inside Ecuadorian protected areas and also to increase economic benefits through higher qualifications and new sources of income.¹⁵

¹⁵ Trainings described below are partly the result of an earlier program component (‘*To build capacity among sustainable tourism actors to improve their competitiveness and the conservation of the PAs*’) that resulted in a George Washington University assessment of training needs.

Strengthening Bird-Watching Expertise in Ecuador

From May 30 to June 5, 2009 Conservation International (CI) had 23 certified naturalist guides from Machalilla and Manglares Churute protected areas undergo an intensive training on bird-watching guiding under the expert direction of one of the better-known bird-watchers of Ecuador, William Perez. The Machalilla-based training included information on bird anatomy, history, evolution, botany and Ecuador's bio-diversity. Practical teachings focused on basic guiding and cordiality-focused skills to further improve the experience of visitors, including through the quick use of reference books offering further details on and drawings of identified birds, as well as the use of their names in English to cater to an audience that is mostly from North American and Europe.

Daily on-site excursions inside Machalilla National Park and at the Ayampe basin (south of the park) helped participants put these new skills to practice, not only through bird-watching but tourist-guide role playing exercises. While participants were all certified guides already, most with preexisting and extensive knowledge of local birds, the training was designed to help them tangibly enhance the experience of their customers and not just learn to more readily identify birds themselves.

"In my twelve years of working here I've never have the opportunity to go through such a complete and useful training."

Local naturalist Guide based in Machalilla national park.
(CI training)

In short, the event is expected to:

- help local community members to specialize in a more-highly skilled and **better remunerated** economic activity;
- provide **greater expertise** that will help attract more tourists interested in one of the Ecuador's most unique ecological assets;
- develop a tourism-related activity that mandates further **conservation** to remain viable;
- improve the quality of a high-end tourism activities which would help Ecuador develop **a niche on the world market**;
- actively **monitor** the condition of bird colonies and their wider natural environment.

The Machalilla - Manglares Churute coastal area is home to some 280 identified bird species (49 of which are unique to this area), in fact offering a richer array of endemic birds than the Amazon area.

New Naturalist Guides in Cotacachi-Cayapas

From August 17 to August 29, the Cotacachi Cayapas Ecological Reserve authorities together with CI and the Fondo Ambiental Nacional invited 22 community members to participate in an intensive two-week training to become new naturalist guides for the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve; a protected area visited by some 120,000 tourists annually but currently serviced by a limited number of qualified guides.¹⁶ The training and certification of new naturalist guides in the area has become increasingly important from a quality of tourism experience perspective, but also from a conservation perspective. Currently, the Park's Ministry of Environment employees on average each have to monitor some 30,000 hectares (i.e., a total area of 243,638 hectares monitored by a staff made up of 8 park rangers) and so will greatly benefit from the daily presence of additional sets of trained 'eyes and ears' on the ground, having certified guides reporting on any tourist infraction or environmental concerns.

To provide future guides with comprehensive knowledge and sets of skills, different portions of the training program were led by various specialists including an environmental engineer and a biologist, as technicians from the Ministry of the Environment (MAE) and the Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR), covering topics related to biology, natural resources, environmental law, tourism law, as well practical ways in which to better communicate and interact with tourists and improve their experience. When commenting on the importance of this course, Park Manager, Marcelo Pantoja, highlighted some of the course's short and long-term benefits for the area:

¹⁶The last naturalist guide training conducted in Catacachi-Cayapas was nine years ago.

- The diversification and improvement of its tourism products;
- Increased monitoring activities, with guides working closely with park rangers and reporting any identified conservation threat;
- A new and alternative source of income for local residents who might otherwise partake in environmentally harmful activities.

Eighteen new Naturalist Guides in Four Protected Areas

Since the new community enterprises that were created under the Alliance needed to have qualified naturalist guides able to legally and technically conduct new community-enterprise tours, in May, Solimar offered a three-week Naturalist Guide training program to capacitate and certify 18 new guides in four different protected areas: Cayambe-Coca, Manglares Churute, Chimborazo and Cuyabeno. The main objectives of the training program were to:

“We are sharing our experiences and acquiring useful and new knowledge that we’ll certainly apply when guiding tourists.”

-Leticia Paca, Chimborazo participant on 13 May 2009 (Solimar training)

- Train participants in broad topics that included biology, ecology, tourism, environmental interpretation, history, and first aid. Endemic ecosystems were also studied, including páramo, mangrove and humid tropical forest;

“The training was excellent; it improved my knowledge including on things I thought I really knew... and now it even gives me a job!”

-Hernaldo, Cotacachi-Cayapas Guide Training participant (CI training)

- Provide participants with basic tools and guiding techniques so they can better communicate information of interest to visitors;
- Provide participants with a sustainable job alternative to improve their living standards while directly linking conservation with sustainable livelihoods;
- Link communities to a local economic value-chain through guided visitations of protected areas.

All participants also participated in an additional week of training inside their respective area to solidify knowledge of their own eco-system, flora, fauna and terrain.

Porter Training in Cayambe-Coca

As a response to increasingly touristic activities in Cayambe-Coca trails, TNC organized a two-day training on 3-5 March for 24 individuals on how to work as a professional porter. The growing number of trekkers, especially on established trails in the area, has raised the need for more qualified porters who are able to not only assist visitors but improve the overall quality of tourist activities, while increasing local income generation and qualifications of local residents. The first day of training focused on various themes related to the protected area (including its biodiversity and the characteristics of the local scenery) with the Ecuadorian Association for Ecotourism (ASEC)’s assistance. A licensed member of the Red Cross also conducted First-Aid training for tourism related situations. The second day focused on security which included the use of tools and equipment such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and map interpretation. Much of the training was based on hands-on activities with on-site use of tools, role playing and situation analysis. By providing new porters with knowledge on conservation and responsible tourism, they will be expected to play a role in monitoring the impact of tourism. All course participants are local residents and will enrich local-know how as well as ensure sustainable local benefits and commitment to conservation. All participants were given additional material on tourism, security, and First Aid for more in-depth information and future reference materials.

Capacitating Tourism Service Providers in and around El-Chaco-Quijos (Cayambe-Coca)

By early June TNC completed a series of planned training activities designed to strengthen the quality of touristic products and the capacity of tourism professionals based in and around the municipalities of El Chaco and Quijos. In collaboration with ASEC, the ‘Ecuador Adventure’ tour operator and the *Termas de Papallacta*, TNC capacitated local actors in the following areas:

- 23-24 May - '**Development of Sustainable Projects**': ASEC offered practical insight into the design of sustainable projects, focusing on the need to secure long-term economic benefits for those involved in its execution while at the same time using resources that do not harm the environment. Specific tools were shared, including how to do 'problem analysis & diagnosis' and how to establish and use impact indicators.
- 3 June - '**Decentralization and tourism marketing**': ASEC's Executive Director provided technical tools and procedures to develop a marketing plan and manage of eco-touristic activities at a local level;
- 4-5 June - '**GPS & GIS Maps Training**': participants received formal and practical guidance from *Ecuador Adventure* on the development of tourism products such as trails, guiding, and on the monitoring of tourism activities.

"Smiling at the client does really help. We have to make the client feel at home."

-Yolanda Baniquio, Participant at the 'customer service' training (TNC)

The direct involvement of tourism professionals in all of these training workshops allowed linkages between local organizations such as the '*Fundacion Rumicocha*', political actors from the Municipalities of Quijos and el Chaco, and local tourism stakeholders to interact in dynamic and personalized manner, for the shared aim at improving local capacity in the development of sustainable tourism products that will economical benefit local communities.

El-Chaco-Quijos Community Members trained on 'Customer Service & Local Gastronomy

On 20-22 May, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in coordination with Fundación Rumicocha conducted a workshop on "Customer Service and Local Gastronomy" in Papallacta. Twenty local entrepreneurs who currently provide services in the Cayambe-Coca ecological reserve participated in this three-day event designed to achieve the following objectives:

- organize an instructive **exchange** between a successful private enterprise ("Termas de Papallacta") and local community business entrepreneurs, and establish the basis for their future long-term cooperation;
- introduce **guidelines** on how to improve the quality of food and dining services not just with the way the food is presented but the way that the kitchen is generally organized and operated;
- Practice a few basic **communication skills** such as how to properly introduce oneself to a tourist.

This highly interactive event first allowed team members of the *Termas de Papallacta* to share their personal experience and explain how, with time, they were able to create and consolidate their operations through increased visitations. Participants were then invited to prepare, present and serve local dishes of their choice so they could then be constructively evaluated by a team of tourism experts. Key evaluation criteria included cordiality, food temperature, presentation and taste.

The workshop is part of a wider Alliance effort to increase the quality of touristic services in areas where local service providers today are generating little if any tourism-related revenues in spite of the richness of areas such as Cayambe-Coca, gifted with hot springs, a wide biodiversity, dramatic landscapes and volcanoes only about one hour away from the capital city. An improved quality and variety of goods and services will give more opportunities for visitors to spend money at the local level and thereby incorporate local actors into activities that depend upon the conservation of their natural capital.

Workforce Development

The AETS has developed a training plan to build capacity among sustainable tourism actors to improve their competitiveness and the conservation of protected areas. An initial approach to implementing the plan has been developed with MINTUR, so that the latter could take on the responsibility of integrating the Training Plan into their training activities nationwide. MINTUR is interested in supporting with specific training processes for the creation of community businesses and companies. Recommendations of an Assessment and Training plan developed by GW University are summarized as follows:

- Establish local tourism training centers

- Develop a long term volunteer English language program
- Enhance offerings for guide training
- Enhance capacity in bird-watching
- Ensure sustainability of training programs
- Provide oversight for training plan implementation and operations

Recommendations specific to each protected area include:

- Create training plans specific to each area and their prioritized needs
- Ensure each Protected Area training plan prioritizes the skill development that will be required to support ESTA product development initiatives
- English Language, Customer Service and Marketing are skills needed in all Protected Areas and should be incorporated into every training plan.

F – NEW MARKETING STRATEGY: PROMOTING TOURISM WITH A FOCUS ON PROTECTED AREAS

PANE MARKETING STRATEGY

In June 2008, Solimar International started working on the elaboration of 2009-2012 PANE Marketing Strategy, organizing workshops with key actors, consulting with experts and holding ongoing meetings with various members of both ministries, tour operators, communities, local governments, NGOs and GSTA-Ecuador alliance members, in order to produce by May 2009 eight complete documents endorsed by both MINUR and MAE: one national marketing strategy and one for each of the eight areas taking into account the particularities of each area.¹⁷

Most importantly, the development of this strategy created a space in which both ministries of tourism and environment could reflect on the mutual benefits of a shared strategy and genuine coordination to promote a type of tourism targeted to a specific audience that could help local communities and the overall country generate higher revenues while at the same time strengthening conservation efforts in large section of the national territory. The strategy did not result in a document but above all in a process that helped refocus promotional marketing efforts to meet their shared goals: increase the number of visitors while at the same time giving greater resources to the protection and improved management of protected areas.

By the end of the AETS program, several key initiatives identified within the Marketing Strategy were fully implemented including the creation and use of

- the ‘Amigos de las Areas Protegidas’ program promoting service provides near protected areas
- a UNEP Green Passport promoting sustainable tourism
- billboards at the entrance of some protected areas
- touristic brochures with maps for three protected areas; and
- a public awareness campaign (see details below).

Key elements of the Marketing Strategy were also incorporated into MINTUR’s recently announced “Marketing Plan for Ecuador 2014”, officially confirming the new way in which protected areas will be promoted. One of the new elements of the strategy includes the promotion of “product clubs”, groups made up of touristic operations selling similar types of experiences. In part inspired by the existing resources and accessibility of the ‘National Ecotourism portal of Ecuador’ created by Solimar and now managed by ASEC (see details below), MINTUR decided that the first ‘product club’ would be eco-tourism.

¹⁷ MINTUR announced the approval of the Marketing Strategy in its official website (“Ecuador Now Has a Marketing Strategy for its Protected Areas”) which can be viewed in the following link:http://www.turismo.gov.ec/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1240&Itemid=43

New Private-Public Platform Dedicated to Sustainable Tourism in PAs (Amigos Program)

As means of actively encouraging new and existing tourism operations located near protected areas to engage in more sustainable practices, Solimar created a new promotional platform – the ‘National Ecotourism Portal of Ecuador’ – to help promote and sale tourism products linked to Ecuador’s protected areas. The website today provides detailed and practical information on some 114 businesses and communities who were often excluded from traditional marketing channels given their remote locations and limited access to information technologies.



Operations located near protected areas are now able to share full details and photographs on available facilities, services, room types, activities (e.g., kayaking, bird watching, lodging, etc.), prices, and reservation information. Information also includes a highlight of the business’s sustainable practices (such as recycling, alternative energy sources, etc.) , and whether they are part of the ‘Smart Voyager’ and Rainforest Alliance’s ‘Best Managing Practices’ in recognition of sustainable tourism practices.

Amigos website featured members	
23	Tour Operators
50	Lodging
10	Communities
31	Volunteer organizations
176	Individual experiences'

Overall, the online platform offer an original focus on responsible tourism (as opposed to tourism alone), presented and worded in a user-friendly and interactive format, with conservation-related and practical information for each of the PAs. The site is available in both English and Spanish, targeting local and international tour operators and visitors interested planning touristic activities in and around protected areas or simply dedicated to sustainable tourism.

In September 2009, Solimar officially handed over the ownership and management of the ‘National Ecotourism Portal of Ecuador’ to the Ecuadorian Association of Eco-tourism (ASEC) to guarantee its sustainability of the program (see sustainability section below).

Key New Promotional Materials: UNEP Green Passport

The ‘UNEP Green Passport’, promoted as an entry to Ecuador’s protected areas, was designed to give incentive to Ecuadorian citizen to ‘discover, enjoy and protect their protected areas.’¹⁸ Each area currently habilitated to receive tourists has its own two-page spread to highlight its particular flora, fauna and touristic attractions. The passport also includes easy-to-follow tips on how to travel responsibly and how to support sustainable tourism. This small format and attractive promotional tool is part of the Alliance’s wider awareness and promotional campaign to promote protected areas as a touristic destination while at the same time promoting greater awareness and respect of the country’s natural capital.

The passport is expected to be printed in larger quantities in the months to come with the support of the United Nations Environmental Program and other agencies. The Ministry of Environment is also contemplating of adapting the passport to make it a paid entry to all protected areas of Ecuador for a determined period of time. This would not only guarantee its wider distribution but also likely help the MAE generate higher income.

¹⁸ MAE and MINTUR also officially ‘sponsored’ the Green Passport.

Others Materials: Touristic Brochures with Maps

Conservation International, in collaboration with Green Consulting, designed and printed 40,000 tourism brochures with maps for Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve and Machalilla National Park. These promotional materials will help to better serve new visitors interested in independently discovering the area and more easily locate areas or activities of interest to them. Brochures will be available free of charge at MAE offices and interpretation centers, but will also likely be reprinted and distributed through private operators offering services near these protected areas.

MARKET ACCESS: Helping Responsible Operators Gain Greater Access to Markets

To become and remain sustainable, enterprises committed to ‘green practices’ naturally need to see the economic benefits of their commitment to best management practices. For this reason, Rainforest Alliance (RA) worked on improving market access to local community enterprises participating in the “Best Management Program” in a variety of ways.

CORDTUCH tour operators added to RA’s worldwide Eco-Index:

1. Guargualla Association
2. Nizag
3. Quilla Pacari
4. Casa Condor
5. Razu Nan Guides
6. Guargualla Artisanal and Tourism Center
7. San Juan Farmworking Organization
8. Women Organization Vision Futura
9. Center for Indigenous Development
10. Palacio Real
11. Balda Lupaxi
12. Caishi Community
13. Farmworking Organization San Pedro de Llucud

Eco-Index

By August 2009, Rainforest Alliance managed to have 7 members of CORDTUCH included in the world-renown Eco-Index, and in the next weeks at least 3 members of CORDTUCH will be included. Launched by RA in 2001, the Eco-Index currently integrates over one thousand sustainable businesses worldwide, implementing best management practices, or certified by partner organizations that follow strict sustainability and eco-friendly indicators. Today, the website today some 10,000 visitors each month and is considered to be the main reference directory for environmentally sustainable operators. To date, 37 Ecuadorian conservation operations such as Napo Wildlife Center appear in the Eco-Index. This achievement is viewed as an important step toward the promotion of the Chimborazo Faunistic Reserve as a sustainable tourism destination for visitors from all around the world. Tourism, as a viable source of stable income, will help conservation efforts and improve the livelihood of indigenous communities.¹⁹

Giving Priority to Responsible Operators

Rainforest Alliance (RA) secured the commitment of an additional 10 national and international travel agencies and tour operators to give priority to hotels and lodges that promote ecologically and socially responsible best practices for tourism businesses. By signing these agreements, local tour operators committed to organizing workshop events and recruiting others to join Rainforest Alliance’s best practices program. International wholesalers meanwhile agreed to survey clients after their return, using diagnosis tools that help assess the success and impact of these promotional practices. The following organizations have entered agreements:

Local Tour Operators:

- Tsaitami Travel
- Advantage Travel
- Campus Trekking
- Chaco Rafting Tours

Outbound Tour Operators:

- Explore UK
- Salinatours Switzerland
- Whole Travel USA
- At Your Leisure Spain

¹⁹To secure its admission into the Index, the Ecuadorian Foundation for Ecological Studies (Ecociencia) committed itself to overview CORDTUCH’s operations to make sure they are being carried out under strict environmental norms and community development objectives, since CORDTUCH has not yet obtained RA’s official certification but has to date demonstrated positive practices and results.

- Ecuadorian Tours
- Come To Galapagos
- Ecole Viajes
- Sawadee Holland
- Latin American Destinations USA

Promoting Sustainable Tourism through the Media

Rainforest Alliance managed to have a number of articles on sustainable tourism in Ecuadorian protected areas in the national press²⁰ published. Rainforest's website also served as an international promotional platform with an estimated 300,000 visitors each month. It also included small articles in its international monthly bulletin sent to some 3,000 subscribers worldwide. These outlets provide two key communications platforms and focus on two strategic audiences: tourism operators and journalists.

Familiarization Trip: Linking Enterprises to International Tour Operators

RA organized a Familiarization (FAM) trip for European and North American tour operators interested in discovering new specialized tours focused on experiences linked to the environment and local cultures. Strong positive feedback from participating international tour operators are expected to result in the inclusion of these experiences in their tour packages and hopefully in the long run increased sales of tours near or in Ecuadorian protected areas and of environmentally-sustainable service-providers. Using outside funds, Rainforest Alliance decided to organize during the last week of November an additional FAM trip this time to introduce CORDTUCH members to domestic tour operators.

Press Trip: Promoting the Value of Sustainable Tourism

Six international journalists meanwhile participated in a press trip seeing firsthand how community-owned and ecologically friendly lodges could offer one of the few tangible and sustainable ways of conserving highly-endangered nearly Amazon forests. Distinct points of interests included CORDTUCH's promotion of an "Andean cultural experience" and its focus on tourism activities aimed at protecting their environment while improving local economic conditions.

The Press and Familiarization trip resulted in sooner than expected positive results with the publication of several articles in a well-known Canadian website, The "Tree Hugger", with an estimated reach up to three million readers worldwide. See articles below:

<http://www.treehugger.com/galleries/2009/08/wildlife-of-ecuadorian-amazonia.php?page=1>
<http://www.treehugger.com/files/2009/08/is-eco-tourism-a-contradiction-in-terms.php>

Other Promotional Initiatives

Other complementary activities were undertaken to help CORDTUCH gain greater market access and increase their sales, including the making of a high-quality professional 3-minute video (with English subtitles) that presents the community and 7 minute video that promotes the model and the people of the organization its

*"Whenever we write about any so-called eco-lodge or resort, we get a pile of comments that flying halfway around the world to tromp through the rainforest is hardly green, and that there really is no such thing as eco-tourism. So when the Rainforest Alliance invited journalists and writers from around the world to visit projects they were working on in Ecuador, I went with a preconceived notion that there would be a fair bit of green-washing involved. **But I quickly learned that eco-tourism has an important role to play in preserving a culture and a way of life, in the face of almost insurmountable foes: Oil and money.**"*

Lloyd Alter - Journalist from Tree Hugger who published a web-based slide show/article the week following his participation in the 2-9August Press trip: "Is Eco-Tourism a Contradiction in Terms?"

²⁰ Titles of articles published include: "Chimborazo Seeks to be a more Promising Destination", "Community Tourism Becomes Sustainable", "and Tourism, an Ally to Conservation "and" Protected and Sustainable Routes".

special attractions in an attractive manner with a focus on the Andean cultural experience and responsible tourism. Rainforest Alliance also helped to develop and translate CORDTUCH's website into English to help further broaden its reach, and make it a more effective marketing tool.

Business and Marketing Plan

At the end of August, TNC submitted to CORDTUCH a final business plan and marketing plan with the purpose of helping it improve the quality and promotion of its products and services in and around Chimborazo. Reports include a general overview of CORDTUCH membership and activities and a more specific SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) analysis of one of its tour operators. Short term specific recommendations in the report included the creation of logos/ branding and ways in which to link the product to an international market (e.g., creation of a website, establishment of consistent quality and conservation-oriented practices). New suggested activities included the offering of a variety of mountain biking tours able to cater to different types of clients depending on scenic preferences and physical conditions. The two documents are expected to help improve the quality and diversity of their tourism products and link them to a national and international market by developing concrete marketing strategies.

G – AWARENESS-RAISING: TO ENJOY, LEARN & PROTECT

The AETS Communication, Coordination and Awareness Raising activities were conducted on multiple fronts with the common purpose of strengthening the impact of all program activities and long-term conservation goals.²¹ Fundación Metis implemented an array of activities to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity conservation in protected areas. This strategy emphasizes the fundamental role that communication plays in informing, connecting, raising awareness and educating the public and key stakeholders around themes of biodiversity conservation.

“Disfrute, Conoce, Protege”

To achieve conservation visitors essentially need to be engaged and change their behavior to become active actors of conservation efforts and consumers of sustainable touristic activities. To this end, and to promote a positive change of attitude towards protected areas in particular, Metis designed and led an environmental communication campaign encouraging Ecuadorian citizens to enjoy the discovery of their protected areas, to learn more about their natural and cultural heritage and to protect their country's fragile ecosystems.

Getting the Media Involved

Naturally, to spread its message, Metis worked closely with the media to help promote principles and applications of sustainable tourism, and its benefits to local economies as well as the environment. As such, magazines, newspapers and national and regional radios participated in a variety of communication initiatives, promoting sustainable tourism as part of their corporate social responsibility. Especially in 2009, Metis' technical assistance to the media – including offering them access to photographic databases, content of interviews with experts, training on specific media-related subjects, use of databases, statistics, news, visual aids, etc – helped create a network of communicators expected to continue to promote these messages past the duration of the program. Over the past six months, four national newspapers, more than forty radio stations, six magazines and a dozen electronic newsletters already spread related news that we estimate to have reached over a million readers, providing information on key activities in each protected area and overall promoting the benefits of sustainable tourism.

²¹ The AETS Communications & Networking Strategy designed in May 2008 through the co-facilitation of AED and Fundación Metis guided work

Focus on the Next Generation

One of the characteristics of the campaign was its focus on children and teenagers, as potent agents of positive societal change. Among other activities, Metis started to work closely with Elé Magazine, a popular children's

*"This section has become a **teaching tool for schools**; teachers use it to introduce children to the world of natural science, ecology and conservation."*

- Beto Valencia, Elé Magazine Director

magazine, to publish bi-monthly articles on the importance of conservation, presented in a graphically friendly way in order to reach this young audience. Based on positive feedback from readers, the magazine decided to make this section permanent, dedicated to information on conservation and Ecuador's protected areas. Following the success of two previous articles on Manglares and Chimborazo, the magazine decided to formally establish this new "Nature Saved" section with the ongoing, active assistance of Metis, which has to date provided the content and pictures needed to make these articles informative and entertaining for young audiences.

A number of teachers and parents confirmed that they were using these articles as teaching tools in science, geography and biology classes, offering easy-to-grasp scientific information that is of interest to students. Magazine Director, Beto Valencia, explains that the collaboration with Metis has proven to be timely and efficient—successfully spreading basic, but important conservation messages.

Entertainment and Community Theatre

This focus on the next generation was furthered through the development of entertainment and community theatre as another effective means of spreading educational message on the environment. School teachers, park rangers, guides, school children, business owners... all attended shows where area mascots came to life, delivering friendly and memorable messages particular to each protected area.²²



Chosen mascots are either endemic or local species and most are endangered, raising awareness of the fragility of their eco-systems and uniqueness of each area. Edgar Castillo, teacher of the Isidro Barrera school explains that *"puppets allow us to spread knowledge to our children and students so they know how important nature is in our lives."*

Radio Spots

This time focusing on the general public, Metis created eleven radio spots to address issues previously recognized as the main threats to conservation in various protected areas. Using humor and an entertaining delivery, the spots identify 'bad behaviors' (such as littering, damage to infrastructure, vehicles trespassing, as well as killing or trafficking of endangered species) and offer suggestions on how to better 'enjoy, know and protect' their protected areas.

40 national stations already committed to airing for free the Alliance's "Enjoy, Know, and Protect" radio spot campaign in support of conservation in protected areas

The radio spots were aired in 40 national and regional radios, reaching an estimated audience of on and a half million listeners. Most radio stations offered to air these messages free of charge for one to three months. Soon after the launch of this campaign, MNTUR contacted the Alliance to offer its support to the campaign by covering additional airing costs to ensure that these messages would reach a wider audience for a longer time period.

AETS Coordination and Information Sharing Tools

For a more limited but more focalized audience, Metis also provided communication tools that helped better coordinate activities and communicate achievements to outside audiences as follows:

²² These activities were the result of multiple preparatory workshops and training sessions conducted in six different protected areas between April and September 2009.

- **Electronic Newsletter:** A monthly newsletter was distributed to over 450 individuals including tour operators, media professionals, and members of MAE and MINTUR to keep them abreast of all AETS activities and major conservation news; Following the circulation of these newsletters, Metis often received requests from journalists for further information on a variety of AETS related activities to publish their own articles which further contribute to the Alliance's efforts to promote sustainable tourism and conservation in Ecuador.
- **Annual Achievement AETS Brochure:** This colorful and easy to browse brochure was designed to help external audiences more clearly understand the different and complimentary types of activities all AETS partners was expected to achieve;
- **AETS website** was also updated on an ongoing basis with AETS activities and other relevant news;
- **AETS library** was also regularly updated including with videos and interviews.
- **Press Package:** a complete electronic press package, offering journalists an interactive reference tool for whenever they wished to write about Ecuador's PAs and sustainable tourism.
- Workshops for journalists on Sustainable Tourism and Web 2.0 technologies

Giving Greater Sustainability to Sustainable Tourism through the Private Sector

To ensure some form of sustainability to AETS' communications and marketing efforts, Fundación Metis and the Ecuadorian Association for Eco-Tourism (ASEC) worked on the creation and development of an ASEC communications strategy that consolidates its links to AETS members and partners, incorporates AETS program information and fully integrates the 'Amigos de las Areas Protegidas' program (now the National Ecotourism Portal of Ecuador). This initiative is part of Metis' efforts to support ASEC's institutional and structural development, involving a series of meetings and workshops, and resulting in the launch of its new website, new communication strategy in September 2009. Joint Metis and Solimar support to this association of private entrepreneurs motivated to strengthen sustainable tourism is expected to help broaden its membership base, outreach, and secure a steadier stream of income to implement its mission and strategy on the longer term.

IV- EVALUATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

A – AETS PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENTS

The activities that Alliance partners conducted throughout the duration of the program, as well as the space and opportunities that the Alliance in itself created resulted in the following principal achievements:

- Evident **strengthening of MAE-MINTUR coordination fostered by a new and shared vision** on the need and ways of promoting tourism in protected areas with long-term benefits to local populations and for the greater sustainability of conservation efforts. The growing level of engagement of ministry representatives and investments made in Alliance-related activities have helped demonstrate their clear and rising interest in promoting and facilitating sustainable tourism inside protected areas;
- Creation of MAE's new "**Tourism Program for PANE**" supported by a 2.5 million dollar program and a dedicated staff. Program designed directly based on the recommendations made as part of the Alliance 'strategic planning' process to find means of improving the management and sustainability of PAs. The expectation had been to have both ministry agree to a common strategy but this process instead resulted in the actual creation of a program with funding and staff to turn recommendations into action;
- Successfully introduced and applied a variety of **monitoring tools and methodologies** inside protected areas to help better measure the impact of tourism, mitigate its impact and improve the experience of visitors. More specifically the following was achieved:
 - Helped establish for the first time a **Management System** for three types of tourism operations in Galapagos to better protect natural resources - approved through a government decree. This quota system ('*sistema de cupos*') will be the first such system to be adopted by the Ecuadorian government, following a government degree passed in 2008;
 - First-time implementation of **Limits of Acceptable Change** in Ecuador (outside of Galapagos Islands). This methodology, applied in 8 protected areas, will help MAE measure the impact of tourism, determine actions and resources required to mitigate its impact;

- The first-time designed & set-up of a **visitor management system (SIMAVIS)** in Machalilla and Cotacachi-Cayapas, successfully establishing a zoning system with norms, rules, policies for each to help better manage touristic activities, reducing the impact on the environment while improving the quality of services and experiences offered to visitors. MAE Minister publically stated her commitment to providing financial and technical support for the development and adaption of SIMAVIS in all highly visited protected areas of Ecuador (SIMAVIS is now part of the Tourism Program for PANE).
- Helped define **norms and regulations** that were designed for whale-watching within the marine area of Machalilla National Park will be adopted as a national norm for all of Ecuador.
- The Alliance helped resolve an ongoing **conflict** over the management of a lagoon at the heart of the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve;
- A new **Geographic-Information System developed**, offering MAE a valuable tool to plan and monitor tourism, collect data, measure changing information overtime and identify evolving threats;
- **New and improved touristic infrastructure** in four different Protected Areas aimed at making visitors more aware and appreciative of natural resources in each Protected Area, helping MAE better monitor the areas and helping attract more tourists in a sustainable manner. The following structures were built under this program:
 - a) *Reception & Interpretation Center in Chimborazo* which now gives shelter to park rangers at the entrance of the park, as well as bathrooms for visitors, and will improve the monitoring of visitors to the reserve;
 - b) *New 180-meter long dock* allowing for much improved tours through Manglares Churute. MINTUR has also announced that it would soon start building a small interpretation center and much needed restaurant in the same area;
 - c) *Improved trail around the Limpiopungo lagoon* for both hikers and mountain bikers, with orientation signs, bridges, and an observation platform to orient and educate visitors on the surrounding flora and fauna;
 - d) Building of Secoya lodge in the *Cuyabeno* buffer zone
 - e) *Design of an improved trail between Oyacachi and Al Chaco in Cayambe-Coca*, as well as the design of an interpretation center in Cotopaxi.
- **Creation of three community tourism enterprises** in Cayambe-Coca (Oyacachi), Cuyabeno (Secoya), and Manglares Churute. The economic benefits generated by these new touristic activities are expected to give local residents greater incentive and clout to actively engage in the protection of the environment against other external threats which would then also become threats to their own livelihood;
- Made significant progress towards establishing the legal bases and political will for the creation of a **new business model inside protected areas**, as part of efforts made to allow for the building and operation of a lodge in Oyacachi (Cayambe-Coca).²³ With time, MAE has shown an increasing commitment to helping define the terms and condition of a contract which could help pave the way for many other private investments to be made inside protected areas – something that is today still not permitted;
- Improve the quality of services of CORDTUCH members following their participation in an intensive **Best Management Practice** training program. Members used their own limited resource to put into practice recommendations made during workshops and final assessments showed that 6 community enterprises had managed to improve their overall practices;
- **Trained and qualified 39 new naturalist guides** from Cayambe-Coca, Cotacachi-Cayapas, Manglares-Churute, Chimborazo and Secoya; also trained **20 guides to specialize in bird-watching**. These new qualification now only guarantee an improvement in the quality of services in these areas but also provide higher qualification and expected income for new and specialized guides;

²³ This activity was not completed as planned. The Alliance had initially committed itself to having a contract signed between MAE, the community and the investor by program end, along with a public event to commemorate this achievement. By October 2009, significant progress was made towards defining the terms of the agreement and getting parties committed to signature of the contract but keys or elements were still missing to achieve this on time. The process is expected to continue past the duration of the program (see sustainability section below).

- A new **Marketing Strategy** to promote Protected Areas, reflecting once again MAE and MINTUR’s growing and shared desire to improve the promotion and management of protected areas for the joint-benefit of conservation and economic growth. In support the implementation of the new marketing strategy, concrete and ambitious marketing tools were developed including
 - **‘The National Eco-Tourism Portal of Ecuador’** springing out of the Alliance’s *Amigos de las Areas Protegidas* program and offering in-depth, easy-to-find information on tourism providers based near protected areas. Now managed by ASEC, this portal is designed to improve market-access to these operations and given them greater incentive to become increasingly responsible;
 - the **Green Passport** designed to attract more tourists to protected areas while at the same time encouraging more responsible behavior;
- Completed a number of initiatives designed to improve market-access and sells of CORDTUCH products and services to help demonstrate the concrete benefits of their engagement into the Best Management Practice program. Initiatives including its inclusion into the **Eco-Index**, the creation of a promotional **video**, the organization of **familiarization trip** for international tour operators and journalists;
- Successfully **engaged the media** to promote sustainable tourism inside protected areas through a series of articles in a wide variety of magazines and newspaper, even created a permanent section in Revista Elé a to create a section dedicated to articles on conservation and Ecuador’s protected areas. Produced **11 radio spots** to promote responsible behavior inside protected areas which 40 radio stations decided to air for free and which MINTUR later decided they wanted to help air on a wider scale.

B – MONITORING & EVALUATION

The AETS PMP summary report for fiscal years 2008 and 2009 is attached as “APPENDIX B - AETS FINAL PMP Report”. Overall the AETS achieved the following results:

INDICATOR 1: *Number of hectares in areas of biological significance under improved management as a result of USG assistance.*

In FY08, the Alliance achieved significant improved management only in Machalilla National Park (8,989 hectares). In FY09, required milestones were reached in all AETS areas of interventions, resulting in the improvement of management in 48,874 hectares.

SELECTED AREAS	TOTAL HAS	% of PA Counted	HAS Counted	FY08-FY09 cumulative HAS	FY 08				FY 09					
					Target Nbr Milestones	Milestones Achieved	TARGET HAS	HAS Improved	Target Nbr Milestones	Milestones Achieved	TARGET HAS	HAS Improved		
ECOTOURISM														
I - Cotopaxi	33,393	16%	5,343	10,686	5	3	5,343	-	5	6	5,343	5,343		
II - Chimborazo	58,560	8%	4,685	9,343	5	3	4,658	-	5	6	4,685	4,685		
III - Manglares Churute	49,894	8%	3,992	7,984	5	3	3,992	-	5	7	3,992	3,992		
IV - Machalilla	56,184	16%	8,989	17,978	4	4	8,989	8,989	4	6	8,989	8,989		
V - RECC (Cotacaxi Cayapas)	24,364	8%	1,949	3,898	4	3	1,949	-	4	5	1,949	1,949		
VI - RECAY (Cayambe Coca)	100,776	8%	8,062	16,124	5	3	8,062	-	5	5	8,062	8,062		
VII - Yasuni-Cuyabeno	1,585,380	1%	15,854	15,854	4	3	n/a	n/a	5	6	15,854	15,854		
Max.Achievable HAS	1,908,551		48,874	81,867	Results		32,993	8,989	33	41	48,874	48,874		

* Number of hectares where activities will be conducted.

INDICATOR 2: *Number of people with increased economic benefits derived from sustainable natural resource management and conservation that are implemented as a result of USG assistance.*

In FY08, it was estimated that 102 individuals had economically benefited from the Alliance’s work (out of a target of 621 individuals for that year). In FY09, the Alliance exceeded its target with 593 individuals (out of a target of 255) directly benefiting from their involvement the Alliance’ natural resource management and conservation activities individuals. Overall, 695 individuals directly benefited (3,642 indirectly) out of a cumulative target of 876 individuals for both years FY08 and FY09.

	FY 08				FY 09			
	TARGETS		ACTUALS		TARGETS		ACTUALS	
	Nbr of Individuals		Nbr of Individuals		Nbr of Individuals		Nbr of Individuals	
	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
I - Cotopaxi	114	570	0	0	0	0	0	0
II - Chimborazo	126	630	0	0	160	800	454	2402
III -Manglares Churute	81	405	0	0	20	100	17	85
IV - Machalilla	93	465	30	150	10	50	23	115
V - RECAY (Cotacachi-Cayapas)	81	405	53	265	10	50	43	215
VI - RECC (Cayambe Coca)	N/A	N/A	19	130	20	100	22	110
VII - Yasuni-Cuyabeno	126	630	0	0	35	175	34	170
TOTAL	621	3,105	102	545	255	1,275	593	3,097

INDICATOR 3: Number of people trained in natural resource management and/or biodiversity conservation as a result of USG assistance.

In FY08, the Alliance trained 73 individuals (out of a target of 70). In FY09, it trained 701 individuals (out of a target of 350), thereby exceeding its overall FY08-09 target of 420 by training a total of 774 individuals.

ECOTOURISM	FY 07		FY 08			FY 09			TOTALS FY 08 & 09		
	BASELINE		TARGET	ACTUAL		TARGE	ACTUAL		TARGET	ACTUAL	
	M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F
I - Cotopaxi	0	0		4	1	25	22	12	25	26	13
II - Chimborazo	0	0		10	1	119	95	92	119	105	93
III - Manglares Churute	0	0		8	0	9	30	14	9	38	14
IV - Machalilla	0	0		11	0	35	55	32	35	66	32
V - Cotacachi Cayapas	0	0		11	0	10	28	8	10	39	8
VI -Cayambe Coca	0	0		13	0	95	99	67	95	112	67
VII - Yasuni-Cuyabeno	0	0		7	0	10	19	6	10	26	6
MINTUR	0	0		5	1	2	9	13	2	14	14
MAE	0	0				45	22	2	45	22	2
Other PAs	0	0				0	27	22	0	27	22
Other Organizations	0	0			1	0	14	13	0	14	14
Subtotal	-	-	70	69	4	350	420	281	420	489	285
TOTAL	0		70	73		350	701		420	774	

C- SUSTAINABILITY OF ACTIVITIES

The AETS activities were intended to equip and strengthen the Ecuadorian Protected Area (PA) system, local tourism enterprises, and relevant public sector institutions to independently sustain efforts once external funding from USAID/Ecuador is removed. This approach created partnerships with over 70 locally based organizations to participate in implementation of activities. Among these, four key locally based NGOs, TNC, RA, CI, and Fundacion Metis, lead implementation of key thematic areas in coordination with MAE and MINTUR. These institutions are expected to continue activities going forward, as the AETS objectives cross-referenced with their organizational strategies. Below is a description of some of the initiatives undertaken by partners in order to give greater sustainability to activities conducted under this program:

- **National Policies:** Overall strategic recommendations on how to best manage PANE were all incorporated inside the new Tourism Program for PANE with funds to implement at least the first year of activities.
- **SIMAVIS:** CI will continue to implement SIMAVIS in Machalilla and Cotacachi-Cayapas. The Tourism Program for PANE plans to implement it in other highly visited areas.
- **New enterprises:** In an effort to help the three recently launched AETS tourism enterprises link their products to the domestic and international markets, Solimar intends to establish a network, made up of community and sustainable tourism providers throughout the country to promote tourism that supports communities and biodiversity conservation in Ecuador.
- **Strengthening Community-based enterprises** – RA through its Best Management Practice Program will continue to support the promotion of strengthened community-based enterprises represented by

CORDTUCH. As an example, a Familiarization Trip is planned for the end of November to bring inbound tour operators to the products and promote their services.

- **Ukuku lodge:** the investor's lawyer and the MAE-assigned lawyer are expected to continue defining and drafting the basis of this contract based on MAE conditions and priorities. The drafting process is one that is expected to continue past the closure of the program, involving additional meetings with the community and MAE to help shape step-by-step the content of this ground-breaking
- **Amigos de las Areas Protegidas** – this program now become '*the National Eco-Tourism Portal of Ecuador*' was handed over to ASEC its up-keep and the long-term promotion of local organizations wishing to partake in tourism and conservationist initiatives. ASEC was capacitated by two different partners to learn to managed the portal but also, more broadly, to redefine its own communication strategy to attract new members and offer better services. The site should serve as a valuable marketing tool for members of ASEC and is expected to increase the Association's existing membership. All institution currently featured of the portal was given a six-month trial membership but will later be expected to start paying a yearly fee and formally join ASEC as full members.
- **Green Passport** – UNEP and the French government have already stated their desire to print additional copies of the Green Passport for a wider distribution (up to 30,000 additional copies). The Ministry of Environment also expressed interest in having the passport become a form of entry pass for protected areas (to be sold in exchange for unlimited visits within a determined period of time).
- Assessments conducted under the Alliance's Best Management Practice program were submitted to CODESPA which intends to use these assessments (especially architectural and environmental practice assessments) to invest in the area, including the renovation of buildings.
- **Awareness raising tools** such as the radio spots on how to 'learn, enjoy and protect' protected area will continue to be aired for free for weeks past the closure of the program and MINTUR also indicated its intension pay for the airing of some of the radio spots on station that have a larger audiences.
- **Maintenance of infrastructure:** MAE is planning on the short-term to install a payment-machine at the entrance of bathrooms inside the interpretation center in Chimborazo to collect fees required to pay for the maintenance of bathrooms. On the longer-term MINTUR plans to give the management of the first-refuge to an organization that would take charge of the cleaning of these bathrooms.
 - a) The Manglares Churute interpretation center that MINTUR will be building will be managed by the "Manglares Churute Mangrove Tours". Discussions between MINTUR and the new community enterprise have led to a change in the design of the center already to give an office space to the enterprise inside the new structure.
 - b) The Manglares Churute dock is now being maintained by the local '*cangrejeros asociación*' who agreed in writing to continue maintaining it in exchange for the right to use it.

D – LEVERAGE OF RESOURCES

By the end of the last quarter, the ESTA reported \$703,660 in cumulative cost share. Note that the cost share reported on SF 269 reflects cost share of cash and in-kind funds according to the cost share definition in ADS 303. Leveraged funding is reported separately from the SF 269 as matching funds. The ESTA reported \$2,345,348 in successful leveraging since inception through September 30, 2009 for the AETS program, resulting in a total \$3,049,008 of combined cost share and leveraged resources.

See "APPENDIX C AETS FY09 COST SHARE AND LEVERAGE STATUS" Report for a summary of cost share and leverage raised thus far in the program.

E – LESSONS LEARNED

In September and October 2009, during the last few weeks of implementation of the program, AETS underwent a lessons-learned process involving the participation of all implementing partners including the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Tourism and USAID. The process entailed several steps including among others

filling out a questionnaire to appraise specific issues, the collection and ranking of recommendations, interviews, and a final lessons learned workshop among all AETS partners including USAID's NRM Bureau, AED HQ Management Team, and the GSTA Management Group. The following points represent the lesson learned in order of priority from the view of the AETS:

An overall big-picture success: The AETS, within a relatively short period of time demonstrated that sustainable tourism in Ecuador's protected areas is viable. Although the benefits of AETS activities will mostly develop over the medium term, rather than the short-term, the AETS partners built a strong foundation and made significant contributions to biodiversity conservation and the economic growth of local communities, the private sector, and Ecuador as a country. The AETS helped to stimulate a positive mentality among the diverse group of stakeholders towards sustainable tourism development and protected areas, while demonstrating important lessons to apply to future participatory development approaches.

Overcoming key challenges: The AETS started with an ambitious program stretched across eight protected areas, eight major activities, and involving nine key implementing partners and over 70 alliance partners. Implementing such a complex, multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder activity requires preparation at multiple levels and dimensions in which a diverse range of actors can discover the full potential of sustainable tourism concepts and harmonize diverse elements and processes leading to an integration of all elements. Despite the initial challenges of project start-up, the AETS was able to settle the debate in Ecuador on whether or not conservation and economic development can be complementary activities.

Establishing new standards: The sustainable tourism sector, like other productive sectors, has its own limitations and difficulties with generating and meeting demand. In most of the protected areas, the AETS was able to instill a new level of standard and vision for sustainable tourism development. The AETS was directly responsible for the development and approval of the PANE Tourism Program and the fact that the subject of tourism in Protected Areas is increasingly gaining strength, with \$2.5 million allocated for its first year of implementation. One of the Alliance's greatest contributions includes MINTUR's involvement in conservation-focused activities and having both Ministries for the first time agree that sustainability is what's best for the country. Both Ministries are now promoting sustainable tourism and are aware of the challenges to be addressed to enable sustainable tourism. Finally, the fact that Galapagos now has a Tourism Concession Management System is a proud result of the Alliance's work.

Despite experimenting with an innovative approach to development, many of the lessons learned were not wholly unusual to implementing development programs. However, in the case of the AETS, which was attempting to implement an innovative participatory approach to development was originally designed to give GSTA Management Group partners equal say in program design and management as well as provide greater autonomy to implementing partners on choosing and executing their activities. The following lessons learned should be taken into consideration for future programs which are trying to shift from traditional development modalities in order to scale up impacts:

Clearly Defined Leadership and a Strong Program Manager: The AETS did experience some classic programmatic challenges, and it became evident that even with a more horizontal structure of responsibility, there needs to be an institutional leader that can govern critical decisions with the participation of diverse partners, yet ensuring everyone can fill their role. The program was initially coordinated among several institutions, each responsible for implementing the main thematic areas and one with an overall coordination role mainly to assure logistical integration and serve as the day-to-day point of communication with the donor. However, the organizations involved were unable to reach a unified vision of the specific program objectives, strategies, and activities. Complicating matters was the need to harmonize efforts among established institutions with their own strategic objectives, cultures, and internal procedures. A key lesson learned was that even within a horizontal

structure, there needs to be one **program manager** who possesses technical capacity and clearly holds decision making power, who is responsible for providing partners with institutional leadership, technical and administrative support, and who can negotiate and coordinate with implementing partners, avoiding any lengthening of processes.

Working as an Alliance: Participation in or creation of an Alliance does not ensure success and is more than just adding organizations together; it requires a robust management system. As noted in the mid-program USAID Bureau evaluation, it was clear that in addition to stronger leadership, roles and responsibilities between partners needed to be more clearly defined. An important change was requiring that each partner have a detailed work plan with clear division of responsibility taking into account each partner's strengths, including coordination aspects. Alliance members needed greater incentive to work as an Alliance and be dedicated to its success beyond the specific interest of each member institution. Related is the fact that partners didn't receive enough orientation to the methodological approach which was being applied by the GSTA, SCALE. SCALE was largely misunderstood with key tools underutilized.

Strategic Planning & Program Design: Another major lesson learned is the need for a robust system of planning which requires comprehensive baseline assessments in order to identify the tourism potential and threats to biodiversity of each area of intervention and adequately plan strategies, outputs, and targets related to achieving biodiversity conservation and sustainable tourism development. These assessments would need to include a comprehensive social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political review of the destination. Further, the program would have benefited from a stronger and clearer PMP, with a baseline, to help it better establish and highlight opportunities and challenges for implementation, as well as taking timely corrective measures. For example, ensuring that any business development efforts are adequately monitored for their impact on increased livelihoods. In this case, the application of SCALE was not sufficient as not only was insufficient time dedicated to orienting partners to its use, but SCALE doesn't include methodologies for adequately addressing or integrating sub-sector assessments, baseline analysis, and program planning and design on conservation and tourism issues. The one SCALE tool that would have supplemented the sub-sector assessments was not implemented due to the aforementioned misunderstanding of how to implement the methodology.

Adequate Capacity among Implementing Partners. Throughout the duration of the program, partners identified some overall implementation weaknesses: The implementing partners should be chosen based on proven capacity to work in the country, with previous experience in the areas, and with knowledge of local realities and local work dynamics, and a strong commitment to accomplishing all planned activities.

Linking community based tourism products to the private sector. Although it is challenging to link community-based tourism products to the private sector, having a demand and supply approach to developing tourism products should be emphasized. It was found that the private sector doesn't trust the ability of community-based products to deliver and maintain desired quality. Local communities need to get involved but must be sufficiently strengthened in order to meet the quality and demand requirements of the market. Sometimes communities don't see themselves as a destination, only as a community, and this can be difficult in helping them develop marketable products. Further, tour operators should be included from the beginning in developing products. Finally, although the Alliance was predicated on widespread communication amongst stakeholders, there was a need for better communication, especially amongst communities, where expectations have been created and not necessarily met.

Allocation of funds: In an Alliance such as the AETS, a certain degree of flexibility in the allocation of funds to partners should be allowed to better respond to changing circumstances and opportunities that may arise during the course of the program. This is particularly true when working with the public sector whose funds and priorities are subject to significant change. Further, it is important to be able to reallocate to funds among partners

and activities based who are performing/not performing and to what is working well and what is not working well. The AETS partners in most cases outperformed their allocated budgets, and so resources needed to be allocated realistically and in proportionate relation to the objectives of the programs, number of partners and sites. Although USAID funds were linked to a SOW at the beginning of the program, flexibility was seen when restructuring the program in response to the mid-term evaluation. It should be noted, that it is important that the type of funding should be considered as well. For example, having a multi-objective program that is only funded with environmental coded funds, makes it difficult to justify spending on small business development. Ideally not all funds would be allocated to specific activities until program goals and program strategies and activities are clearly defined. Partners should have some allocation at the outset in order to become approved to receive funding from USAID and plan in general for an adequate level of effort over the life of the program, however, a significant amount should be set aside to accommodate new opportunities or respond to necessary changes in program goals and activities. Finally, ensuring that an appropriate mechanism exists which allows for collaboration and the ability to revise the activities and budget allocations should be clearly defined for future GSTA programs.

Inter-ministerial coordination and AETS relationships: Underpinning the AETS program was a MOU established with the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Tourism to support program objectives. With time, it became clear that implementing partners needed to coordinate activities directly with individuals with greater decision-making power (high ministry officials) and not just the technical staff that was initially assigned as the Alliance coordinator for each ministry. A key lesson learned was the need to carry out specific activities that invigorate and enhance coordination between ministries, such as linking MAE and MINTUR's operational plans, promoting exchange processes between the two institutions and creating inter-ministerial technical committees. By the time the program closed, it was clear that communication between both ministries had notably improved, allowing them to jointly promote sustainable tourism in protected areas with a clear understanding of challenges and required next steps. In the end, MINTUR focused much of its marketing efforts on the promotion of protected areas, while MAE endorsed the creation of a new tourism program for protected areas.

F – RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the AETS impact on the sustainable tourism development sector, Ecuador continues to face challenges in leveraging its world renowned tourism assets towards wide-spread economic and biodiversity conservation benefits. The AETS succeeded in spurring critical actions such as the development of the MAE Tourism Program and a Marketing Strategy within MINTUR focused exclusively on promoting protected areas, sparking much-needed collaboration among the two government ministries. Monitoring and planning tools are being implemented, and small enterprises have been created and strengthened, while communities living in and around key protected areas have been sensitized to the possibilities of sustainable tourism and the importance of conserving biodiversity – Ecuador's most important tourism resource. Each of these initiatives have been carefully planned to ensure sustainability, in addition, the following are recommendations from AETS Implementation Partners on areas which deserve continued focused support from organizations which may consider tourism as a viable way to stimulate economic growth, while conserving and raising stewardship for areas of biological importance:

- Tourism Valuation provides compelling evidence of the wisdom of increasing government investment in tourism management in protected areas. MAE has provided the vision and initiative to make an investment. In the year that follows, the new tourism program will be initiated and thus the development of its fiscal and political backdrop. USAID and AETS partners through their contacts and influence within the GOE should stay engaged with MAE and MINTUR, monitoring success of the new tourism program and providing support to influence

support for implementation of program activities based on the PANE Strategic Plan developed by the AETS. The architects of the AETS can still influence the ultimate outcome of sustainable tourism in the protected areas of Ecuador.

- A broader recommendation to sustainable tourism in Ecuador is to include formal attention to the Limits of Acceptable Change in tourism activities in protected areas and other natural areas. Quantifying the limits, and managing around them can preserve the natural capital so that it continues to provide an attractive tourism destination. Annual budgets should be devoted to tourism management and monitoring impacts on important biodiversity areas to continue to ensure potential negative impacts are mitigated.
- Improve tourism and administrative infrastructure in all PA that receive tourists.
- Improve financial strategies aimed at increasing the return of revenues raised in protected areas to protected areas.
- Give more attention to workforce development when strengthening any industry's value chain. A supply of trained, qualified employees will keep the industry strong. GWU presented a good plan that MINTUR and other organizations can pick up on. Within the plans recommendations are continued capacity building of communities to provide quality tourism products. Community-level training efforts should continue so that at the community level people can take advantage of tourism as a livelihood.

V - ANNEXES

Annex A – AETS Final Deliverable Schedule

Annex B – AETS final M&E Report

Annex C – AETS Achievement Report