

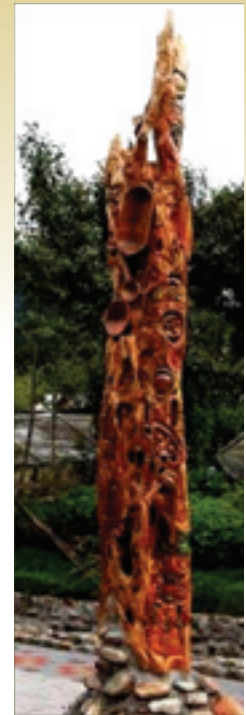
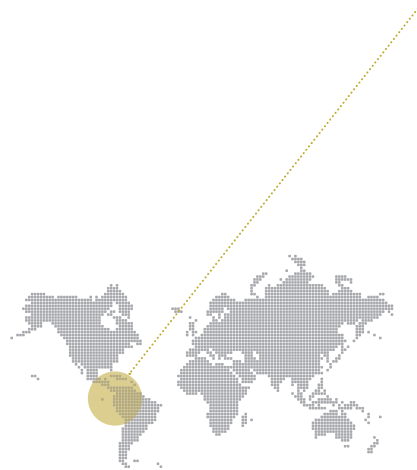
Linking Biodiversity and Benefits in Ecuador

Creating Sustainable Alternatives for Underprivileged Groups



Alejandro working on products that he is now selling.

Alejandro and Mesías, two members with disabilities of the Oyacachi community in Ecuador, proudly attended the inauguration of the unique “Sculpture Plaza” after having actively participated in its careful elaboration. Alejandro (deaf, mute and mentally challenged) and Mesías (mentally challenged) spent six-months sculpting one of the wooden totems, paying close attention to its many intricate details and along the way, developing advanced carving and artistic skills.



Sculpture created by Alejandro and Mesías

The Sculpture Plaza shows the value of biodiversity through artistic creations as unique representations of Oyacachi’s culture. The sculptures made with local natural products have proved attractive to tourists, while at the same time beautifying Oyacachi. This initiative, originally designed by the community’s Artisan’s Organization in close collaboration with local NGO Samiri-Progea, received financial and technical support by the Ecuadorian Sustainable Tourism Alliance (AETS) a USAID funded program.

According to Alfredo Cassasco, the President of Samiri-Progea, Alejandro and Mesías showed keen interest from the outset in participating and learning more. He then realized that their participation was going to be key, not only because of their unusual skills in wood carving, but also because “it exemplified so well how individuals with disabilities people have no limits, but talent that needs to be revealed and expanded.”

Since the inauguration of the Plaza, Alejandro and Mesías have become more widely known and accepted among the Oyacachi community. Alejandro is now selling approximately five sculptures each month, anywhere from \$30 to \$60, allowing him to contribute in a significant manner to his household’s income.