

TITLE: Fair Trade Guayusa Tea (*Ilex guayusa*) and Sustainable Development among Indigenous Peoples of Amazonian Ecuador

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

How do indigenous peoples, who have traditionally lived by subsistence farming, hunting, and gathering, view fair-trade agroforestry projects? To indigenous people, do such projects offer viable development alternatives to environmentally destructive economic activities such as mining and petroleum extraction? On a broader scale, can sustainable development projects, such as the guayusa tea project, create real economic and social benefits for the community?

The investigators of the project will undertake participatory research that documents how indigenous people view and experience the fair-trade guayusa tea (*Ilex guayusa*) cultivation project. By implementing a participatory guayusa project in Sapo Rumi, in coordination with FSU International Programs and Fundacion Runa, the team will be able to evaluate if fair-trade guayusa cultivation is a viable development option. The investigators aim to document Kichwa perceptions of environmental changes in relationship to globalization, while exploring the viability of alternative community-based projects that aim to protect the environment and that have positive social outcomes.

The project will be conducted this summer (2012) during the FSU International Program in the community of Sapo Rumi, in the Napo province of Amazonian Ecuador. Under this program, the team will conduct and implement research on the involvement of the village of Sapo Rumi with the NGO Fundacion Runa (www.runa.org), in creating alternative income that supports community development projects. With the recent proliferation of 'social entrepreneurship' and foundations that support sustainable agriculture, indigenous communities hypothetically no longer have to choose between living in poverty and exploitation of community land. The idea of fair-trade agriculture has gained popularity internationally, and rural communities now have channels to sell local commodities on the global marketplace. Fundacion Runa partners with Amazonian communities to harvest Guayusa, a native plant that makes a sweet-tasting caffeinated tea. The partner company, Runa Tea buys the harvest at a premium and sells it on the U.S. market. The communities that participate are able to sell this harvest at designated fair trade prices, which create sustainable income that promotes traditional indigenous culture instead of destroying it. Fundacion Runa is an expanding organization that provides sustainable agroforestry projects and certifies villages in the Amazon as fair trade entrepreneurs.

When arriving in Ecuador, the team will do a survey and interviews in order to understand how Runa people identify with, and view their environment, and how they view different development alternatives given their cultural values, skills, and way of life. The team, by using Fundacion Runa's database, will be able to forecast marginal revenue that could be generated by seasonal harvesting of a guayusa crop.

The group will then participate in a workshop given by Fundacion Runa, the community, on how to implement and maintain a guayusa project, as well as set up an administrative

structure in the community. Foundation Runa will provide the community with the saplings.

Once the workshops have been completed, the participants will then get to work preparing the site for planting the guayusa trees. Work will be done by the team in collaboration with community. As participants of the project, the team will follow the anthropological methodology of “participant observation” to document attitudes and thoughts about the project, as well as general ideational and social patterns of Kichwa culture, while the work is being done.

This phase will take close to two weeks to complete. Once the land has been properly prepared, Fundacion Runa will bring the trees to be planted and provide technical assistance in how to plant and nurture them. The planting phase should take about a week, and during this time, the investigators will also seek guidance and attempt to plant other valuable trees around and within the guayusa area that are often found by guayusa trees in forested areas.

The team is well suited to execute the project. Mr. Marcus, a finance major, has experience with fair trade while Ms. Wood, an interdisciplinary social science major, has a background in cultural anthropology. Dr. Uzendoski, who will supervise the project, will help the team to design the surveys and provide assistance throughout. The Human Subjects requirements for this project are covered under Dr. Uzendoski’s IRB approval.

Once the project has been completed, the team will conduct a survey on the outcome and perceptions of the project, as well as interview people on the way they see the project as contributing to community and cultural development. A final report will be generated, and a copy will be given to Foundation Runa as well as to the Community of Sapu Rumi.

In conclusion, this project will contribute towards a better understanding of how small scale agroforestry projects, such as the guayusa initiative, are able to generate revenue. Furthermore, the team will also analyze how fair-trade projects can help towards improving current living conditions while also maintaining the health of the environment, the basis of indigenous cultural identities and practices.

PERSONAL STATEMENT:

Last spring I boarded my first international flight to a land which I had very little knowledge of or even much interest in. Suffice to say I took a leap into the unknown, and the lesson has taught me well. Spring break in Ecuador was a truly engaging experience; I spent my time traveling the nation and staying with the families of my two friends who are native to the country. The immersion into Ecuadorian daily life was a blessing which truly opened my eyes to the immense variety of experiences which this world can provide. My time in Quito ignited an interest in South America and upon coming home I enrolled in Dr. Alexander Avina's seminar on Latin American Revolutions. When deciding what the topic of my research paper was going to be, naturally I was drawn to Ecuador.

The fall semester of 2011 was a scholastic journey I will not soon forget. For much of the last two decades Ecuador has been embroiled in political turmoil to the point many believed it to be a failed state. Along with collapse of effective state governance, this period produced what many academics see as the most successful Indigenous Rights movement in the southern hemisphere. Many reforms have taken place since, and the movement has come to encompass broader issues of environmental rights, education, and redefining democracy. My research set out to ask if this movement could represent a unique opportunity to change how Ecuadorian democracy is structured in the new century. The fair trade Guayusa project will allow me articulate some of my conclusions by observing the mechanisms of the movement in the microcosm of an indigenous village. Studying how indigenous communities can create sustainable development locally is the perfect frame for painting the broader picture of what the movement could look like within the larger context of Ecuadorian state structures.

Perhaps more exciting than building on my historical research from fall, this project will allow me to gain real world experience with my degree in Finance from the Florida State University. For much of my collegiate career I have questioned the motivation for my pursuit of a B.S. in Finance. The prospect of applying my passion for social sciences to my degree in finance leaves me vigorously rededicated to my own education and impels my drive for constant self-improvement. In endeavors such as this, the science of finance is a wonderful tool which can be used to enrich the lives of others and generate impact toward the social good. This project will give me the opportunity work hands-on in the sectors of micro-finance, fair trade development, and social entrepreneurship. I hope to use my time in Ecuador to explore a career in multinational finance, sustainable development, and international relations. This research will act as the springboard for carving my niche within the business world and help to enlighten the path which is uniquely suited for my nature.

BUDGET:

Researcher 1: International Travel	\$900
Researcher 2: International Travel	\$900
Room and Board for both researchers @ \$40 a day each for 30 days	\$2400
Local Transportation to and from Sapo Rumi to Foundation Runa and to Tena City (pickup) and transportation in Quito	\$300
Agricultural Work Supplies (machetes, boots, gloves)	\$100
Office and Research Supplies (notebooks, printing, Internet access, payments to consultants/interviewees)	\$200
Medical supplies and vaccinations	\$200
TOTAL PROJECTED EXPENSES:	\$5100