



WWF

PROJECT

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# Socio Bosque

## The guardians of the forest

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In Ecuador, where nearly 100,000 hectares of forest disappear each year, a vast forest protection programme was launched by the Government. "Socio Bosque" is a partnership project with the people living in the forest, which rewards landowners and Aboriginal communities for each hectare of preserved forest.

Since 2008, thanks to the Socio Bosque Programme, no less than 1.2 million hectares have been protected in the whole of Ecuador, including 170,000 beneficiaries and more than 9 million \$ divided between them.

Part of the Ecuadorian forest is in the hands of indigenous communities or private farmers. These populations have always lived in and with the forest, which constitutes the foundation of their cultural heritage. Nevertheless, to meet basic necessities, money for education, health and development, it is understandable that the communities are tempted to use their land for agriculture or forestry, or even to sell it to private entrepreneurs. This issue is the purpose of the Socio Bosque programme: to give the forest the value it deserves and, at the same time, offer the preservation income for communities to invest in their development. And this over 20 years.



**Region:** Mira and Pastaza Basins, Republic of Ecuador

**Duration of the project:** 2 Years

**Objectives:** Raise awareness on the Socio-Bosque programme to improve the living conditions of the indigenous communities and to protect native forests

**Beneficiaries:** The indigenous communities and the native forests

**Partners:** Altoprico and WWF-Ecuador

# How the Socio Bosque programme works

The Socio Bosque programme aims to transfer the forests management and conservation to voluntary rural families, indigenous and local communities in exchange of remuneration. This programme is funded by the national budget, although other sources of funding are being sought by the Government. The Socio Bosque programme provides direct financial incentives, based on a hectare per year ratio, over a 20 year period. After payment, the money can be invested by the community according to its needs, improving its well-being.

## The objectives are:

- Preserving native forests and other native ecosystems, and protecting their vast ecological, economic, cultural and spiritual value. The aim is to preserve 3.6 million

hectares of forest and other native ecosystems in the coming years;

- Substantially reducing deforestation and associated greenhouse gases emissions;
- Improving the living conditions of farmers, indigenous communities, and others in rural areas of the country. It is forecasted that between 500,000 and 1 million people could benefit from the Socio Bosque programme. One of the main side benefits of the programme is that it maintains land resources in the hands of the indigenous communities, creating an alternative to economic pressure from foreign investors.

# What WWF does

In 2014, the government and the representatives of the Awa and Chachi communities have called WWF to support the communities and peoples of Pastaza and Mira basins.

When coming to us, the representatives of Chachi and Awa communities had clearly identified their problem to the Socio-Bosque programme, the lack of information for the community to make informed decisions and how to implement them.

Thanks to a financial support of the Belgian WWF-Ecuador, WWF-Belgium and the local NGO Alotropico have decided to work together, firstly, to alert local populations to the project in order to gain their support and, secondly, to establish the conditions for their entry into the programme. Even though this cooperation project is planned over a period of 2 years, its impact will be much more important since the commitment in the Socio Bosque programme is for 20 years.

Therefore, we will promote technical understanding of the programme by organizing various information sessions as well as creating the tools and forums where the issues of forest protection are debated democratically.

The trainings are particularly important as the requirements for the implementation of a Socio Bosque programme are not insignificant. Certain administrative, technical or organizational skills are needed and literacy, geographical or cultural constraints can affect the communities.

There is of course no obligation for the communities to subscribe to the programme, but it is paramount for them to be aware of the potential benefits. It is only after having been fully informed that the communities can decide to join, or not to join the Socio-Bosque programme.



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## The impact of deforestation

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, the annual deforestation rate in Ecuador is about 1.2 to 1.7% per year (between 89,000 and 124,000 ha / year). In this region of the Amazon forest loss and changes in natural vegetation cover is the result of logging and farming. Forests are converted into intensive crops fields, oil palm for example.

The situation is even more problematic as the affected areas by deforestation are precisely the ones where biodiversity once was the highest, with the greatest carbon stock.

# Why Ecuador is so valuable

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Jaguars are strong swimmers and climbers and require large areas of tropical rain forest and stretches of riverbank to survive. Poaching and habitat loss due to deforestation continue to threaten the survival of these marvellous cats. WWF has worked with the government of Brazil to successfully protect large blocks of Amazon forest for the jaguar. In Peru and in Ecuador, WWF continues to track jaguars to learn more about their habitat requirements.

Although Ecuador is a relatively small country, it is blessed with one of the highest biological diversity in the world. It benefits from its exceptional location, sitting on the equator and the high Andes mountain range, with two ocean currents along its coast. With so many ideal and distinct habitat conditions, Ecuador boasts 25,000 species of plants (compared to the 17,000 species in the whole of North America), 1,600 birds and 369 mammals. Their most famous ones include the jaguar, the coati or the spectacled bear.

But despite being a biodiversity jewel, Ecuador also has the distinction of having the highest deforestation rate and worst environmental record in South America. Oil exploitation and dumping, road building and logging have had a catastrophic impact on Ecuador's rainforest, which now only covers less than 15 percent of the country's land mass.

Logging in Western Ecuador has caused a dramatic loss of more than ninety percent of the country's rainforest in this region. After an area has been logged and abandoned, settlers will set up homesteads, slashing and burning the surrounding forest for agriculture and cattle pasture.

It is therefore crucial for the Government and WWF to act, with full participation of the indigenous communities, towards a better management of so many fantastic ecosystems. It will mean a change of mentality, gaining and spreading knowledge as well the allocation of resources. The road ahead of us is still long but positive changes are possible and indeed happening.

# Why empowering women is important

Success in conservation and sustainable management of natural resources is only possible if it is supported by those concerned and involved. We must work with a gender perspective in order to improve our understanding of the different roles and responsibilities, relationships, needs and interests of the communities we will be working with.

Besides being a fundamental ideological standpoint, empowering women will positively influence the whole community as it has been proven that women are generally better revenue managers and invest primarily in the collective needs of the family.

In indigenous cultures, the roles of men and women are traditionally well defined and are influenced by the dynamics of production and reproduction. Many women have called for more management responsibilities and are beginning to enter the trade activities in search of resources which will ensure their family's needs, such as food, health and education.

Through the Socio-Bosque programme, the project will not only provide access for families to new financial resources but will also ensure that women's considerations can and will be taken into account, thus ensuring families welfare as a whole. Specific activities will be dedicated to enhance their decision and action capacity, particularly in the management of resources generated by the Socio-Bosque programme.



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## How you can help

It is thanks to the contribution of our supporters that we are able to develop this project and many others. We have been active for more than five decades on all continents. Today we are supporting over 1300 conservation projects in the world.

We need your support. Donations can be made on our bank account BE12 3100 7350 7292.

Our combined efforts will ensure a bright and sustainable future for species and their ecosystems. This is essential if we want to leave a healthy and living planet for the next generations.

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### Why we are here

WWF acts to stop the degradation of our planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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