CASE STUDY 19

Socio-economic development and the promotion of ICH in Ecuador

*Runa Tupari* Native Travel is a community tourism project run by farmers in several rural communities in the Cotacachi canton of Ecuador.[[1]](#footnote-1) The project received financial assistance from the Dutch NGO Agriterra[[2]](#footnote-2) in its initial two-year period (2001–03), but soon became self-sustainable.

The project is an initiative of the Union of Peasant and Indigenous Organizations of the Cotacachi Canton (UNORCAC)[[3]](#footnote-3) in Ecuador. UNORCAC was founded in 2001 by members of a number of rural communities in the canton and aims to improve their socio-political standing and address their basic needs (education, health, infrastructure, food). UNORCAC won the Equator Prize in 2008 for its outstanding community-based efforts to reduce poverty through the conservation of biodiversity.

#### Tourism generates income and helps safeguard local ICH

*Runa Tupari* offers home-stay accommodation with small-scale local farmers, who provide food and lodging for visiting tourists. Local farmers and landowners constructed guest houses for this purpose using traditional materials and methods, thus reinforcing traditional building practices. The farmers teach visitors about the traditional lifestyle of the Indian family, including the tending of the domestic garden and food preparation. *Runa Tupari* also offers tours of the region and showcases the ICH of local communities.

One tour, the ‘Indian Village Tour and Cuicocha’ shows visitors the traditional ways in which local communities make mats from the *totora* plant, Andean musical instruments and ponchos. Local people are employed at the travel agency and about twenty-five of them have been trained in tour guiding, basic ethnobotany, birdwatching and English. The Ministry of Tourism licenses tour guides.

The project has been successful and visitor numbers have shown strong growth. It has faced challenges, however: the tourist trade is highly seasonal and some tourists make impractical demands on home-stay hosts. *Runa Tupari* also faces problems of additional waste management associated with the home-stay lodges. Nevertheless, tourism brings much-needed employment to the local community, providing income for farmers and their families. The project develops local business expertise and provides training in other valuable skills such as tour guiding.

Such projects not only contribute to socio-economic development and the development of new skills within the community. They also contribute to the safeguarding of the ICH: promoting traditional skills (such as lodge building) and fostering a renewed understanding, awareness and appreciation of their ICH, both within the community and among visitors.

For further information:

* Agriterra: http://www.agriterra.org/en/text/about-agriterra
* Agriterra. Solutions: Our Cycle of Co-operation:   
  http://www.agriterra.org/assets/uploads/15068/solutions\_agriterra\_en.pdf
* Runa Tupari Native Travel: www.runatupari.com
* UNORCAC homepage: http://unorcac.nativeweb.org/

1. . Runa Tupari means ‘meeting the indigenous people’ or ‘meeting the Indians’. See the Runa Tupari website: http://www.runatupari.com/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . See the Agriterra website: http://www.agriterra.org/en/text/about-agriterra [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . See the UNORCAC website: http://www.unorcac.org/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)