

**Award Rationale**  
**Fundación Maquipucuna**  
**in Ecuador**



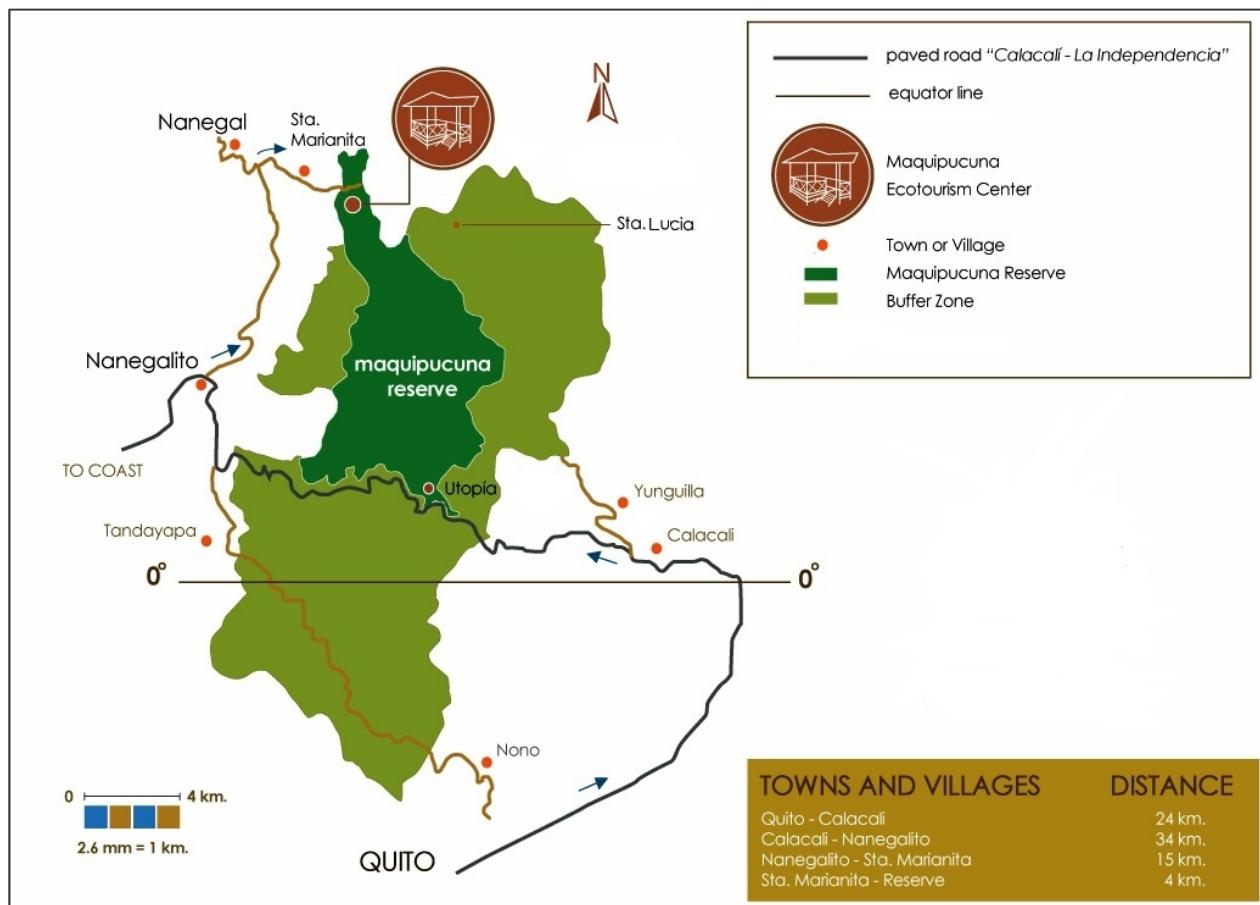
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## **Contents**

maps	1
1. Introduction	2
2. Backround and Setting	3
3. The Project Maquipuna Ecotourism	5
4. Evaluation against the TO DO! Criteria	5
5. Conclusion	9

## Overview Map of Maquipucuna



Reference: Maquipucuna

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The application for the TO DO! 2018 was submitted by Fundación Maquipucuna from Ecuador. The research regarding the application was conducted by the author on behalf of the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V.) from 26th to 31st October, 2017.

The Maquipucuna conservation area and eco logde are situated about two hours from Quito by car, in Pichincha province, Quito district, Nanegal parish. The 6.000 hectares of private conservation area are located in a cloud forest. The area encompasses four different natural habitats at altitudes between 900 and 2.875 m. Maquipucuna is home to an enormous diversity of flora and fauna and is located in one of the five most important biodiversity hotspots in the world.

For the author's visit, the managing team of Fundación Maquipucuna had developed a comprehensive programme that gave good insights into the tourism activities. The author got the opportunity to visit several projects and talk with representatives, "leaders", and people from different groups involved in the projects – also beyond the "normal", arranged programme.

The author was accompanied by the couple Dr. Rebeca Justicia and Rodrigo Ontaneda (the two founders and directors of the foundation), and by trained guides and experts from the region. Five places were visited, representing the entire range of products and services (accommodation, catering, routes, production of coffee, jam and dairy products, and sustainable agriculture). In this way, the author had the opportunity to get to know the tourism project in its holistic perspective. She was able to participate in two programmes with guests from Switzerland and Singapore and had several discussions with the managing team Rebeca Justicia and Rodrigo Ontaneda, and with guides, kitchen staff, and community members.

Fundación Maquipucuna promotes biodiversity conservation through local development initiatives and eco-tourism. The micro-region was declared a conservation area, an eco logde with eco-tourism activities was constructed, and a creative environmental education programme for young people was conducted. Communities were empowered to implement their own eco-tourism and conservation projects: Instead of exploiting nature (deforestation for charcoal production), successful economic alternatives were developed, such as eco-tourism, organic agriculture, and the production of coffee, cheese, and jam. The common vision and long-term, consistent grassroots activities led to today's success story in the communities involved and for nature conservation in general.

And the success has ripple effects. Recently an important milestone was reached with the forward-looking application for a UNESCO biosphere reserve Chocó Andino. It was supported by several communities and the national government. The planned biosphere reserve extends far beyond the Maquipucuna conservation area, up to the Colombian border. UNESCO's decision is expected in the first half of 2018. In this way, the example of Maquipucuna could have impacts far beyond its own boundaries.

The expert in charge recommends awarding **FUNDACIÓN MAQUIPUCUNA** with a TODO! 2018.

## 2 BACKGROUND AND SETTING

### 2.1 Ecuador – Economic setting

Ecuador has a population of about 16.400.000. The capital Quito is situated at an altitude of 2.850 m. With 2,2 million inhabitants, it is the second biggest town in Ecuador. At the same time, Quito is the capital of Pichincha province. The old town of Quito is world cultural heritage. The official languages of Ecuador are Spanish, Kichwua (from the Quechua family of languages from the Andean region), and since 2008 also Shuar (an indigenous language from Amazonia). Another 23 indigenous languages are spoken.

Ecuador is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country where Mestizos, Whites, Arabs, Asians, Afro-Ecuadorians and indigenous people all live together. Statistics on the ethnic composition are difficult to gather and may, depending on the source, provide different results, as they are based on the self-identification of the people interviewed. Any information people provide on their ethnic group is based on subjective cultural factors and social prestige rather than on their real origin.

The last self-identification of 2010 showed that the population consists of about 72 percent Mestizos, ten percent Afro-Ecuadorians, seven percent indigenous people, and six percent people of European origin. According to the indigenous organisation CONAIE, however, about 50 percent of the total population are indigenous people. According to the Human Development Index<sup>1</sup> of 2016, Ecuador ranks 89th of 188 countries and belongs to the group of countries with high human development. Germany ranks 4th (very high human development).

With the election of Rafael Correa (of the party Movimiento País) as new president in 2006, the Ecuadorian electorate decided that a new constituent assembly was needed. The new constitution entered into force as from October 2008 and brought significant changes. It refers to the concepts of Pachamama ("mother earth") and sumak kawsay ("good life", in Spanish "buen vivir") which have their origins in indigenous culture. The economy is to be social and based on solidarity (earlier: social and market-based) and committed to sustainable development. The new constitution guarantees basic social rights to food, health and education, as well as state sovereignty over "strategic resources".

In 1999, the rate of inflation was more than 60 percent, in 2000 almost 100 percent. The Ecuadorian state lost access to international financial markets and bank accounts in the country were frozen in order to support the banking system. The central bank had lost control over all instruments of monetary control – inflation, exchange rate, and the amount of money in circulation. Therefore, in January 2000, Jamil Mahuad, president at that time, announced that the Ecuadorian currency 'sucre' would be abolished and that the US dollar would be the official currency of the country. After this major financial crisis, millions of Ecuadorians emigrated.

The remittances ("remesas") by Ecuadorian migrant labourers are of tremendous importance. After the export of oil and bananas, the "remesas" are the third biggest source of foreign exchange in Ecuador. Due to the low oil prices, Ecuador is currently experiencing a recession. The country's economy strongly depends on oil production, which decreased from 60 percent of exports in 2011 to 30 percent in 2016, followed by banana exports (16.3 percent). The average income in Ecuador is 460 dollars per month; the minimum wage 375 dollars.

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<sup>1</sup> The Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations is a composite index for states. The HDI has since 1990 been published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in their *Human Development Report*.

The HDI does not only consider per capita gross national income, but also life expectancy and the duration of education measured by the number of years of schooling of a 25 year old person, as well as the prospective duration of school education of a child of school entrance age. The HDI was mainly developed by the Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq who closely worked with the Indian economist Amartya Sen and the British economist and politician Meghnad Desai.

## **Tourism**

Tourism in Ecuador is an important and growing economic sector. Ecuador receives more than one million visitors per year. The largest group are tourists from the neighbouring Latin American countries Colombia and Peru (very often backpackers with low purchasing power), followed by almost equal shares of tourists from Europe (Spain, Germany, and others) and the United States. The government wants to become more independent from petrodollars and is striving to make tourism the second largest source of foreign exchange over the next few years.

The country has four different zones of vegetation (Galápagos, coast, Andes, Amazonia) and a high diversity of landscapes and cultures which unlike in the large neighbouring countries are easy and fast to visit in Ecuador. The most important destinations are the Galapagos Islands, the Avenue of the Volcanoes, and the colonial cities of Quito and Cuenca.

Ecuador has over the past few years developed into an attractive tourist destination. World cultural heritage sites, indigenous cultures, the highest biological diversity per square kilometre worldwide, the Galapagos Islands and a high diversity of species captivate visitors. In Ecuador, the globally growing tourism sector has the potential of improving living conditions, creating jobs, contributing to local value added, and involving indigenous communities and overcoming poverty. More value is attached to the resources of nature and they are often protected. In order to realise the positive effects of growing tourism and avoid negative impacts on the environment and the local population, there is a need for more support for sustainable tourism.

Weak points in positioning Ecuador as a sustainable tourism destination are the often low qualification of staff and few opportunities for further education and training, remuneration below average, environmental damage, and inadequate involvement of the local population in the touristic value chain, and high barriers for small and micro enterprises and community-based tourism initiatives to enter the market. Quality and sustainability standards have so far been integrated in only very few companies and destinations. The same also applies to the innovative competence to design new and sophisticated travel products, and to effective market communication.

Ecuador has a credible profile as an eco-tourism destination. Since 2013, it has been awarded several times with the World Travel Award in the category "World's Leading Green Destination". It has a large number of conservation areas: eleven national parks, nine "ecological reserves", and four "biological reserves". By now, they include good examples of visitor management, e.g. NP Galapagos, NP Machalilla, or the Reserva Ecológica Cotacachi y Cayapas. The government has committed to promote sustainable tourism.

Tourism policy in the country is coordinated by the tourism ministry MINTUR which in 2007 adopted the "National development strategy for sustainable tourism". Its core objectives are the improved economic involvement of the local population, the creation of jobs and training opportunities, the protection of national natural and cultural heritage and the establishment of the brand Ecuador as a "sustainable tourist destination" on the international market.

Projects like Maquipucuna can strengthen the sustainability orientation in tourism in Ecuador. Successful examples can serve as a model.

## **2.2 Fundación Maquipucuna**

Fundación Maquipucuna was founded in 1987 by Rebeca Justicia and Rodrigo Ontaneda. At that time, Rebeca Justicia was studying in the US and spent her holidays in 1985 in her hometown Quito. A one day excursion with Rodrigo to the region where today's conservation area is located changed her life. The contact with nature, the diversity of flora, the lush green of the mountains – and then in contrast the devastating deforestation of the surrounding mountains – motivated her to do something before the remaining forests would also be cut down. Driven by the vision to preserve this wonderful region privileged by nature, they wanted to buy 100 hectares of land. Young, inexperienced and enthusiastic, they were convinced that the forest could be saved if every Ecuadorian contributed.

Rebeca had to return to the US to continue her studies. Rodrigo was at that time working with a bank in a well-paid position. It happened that this bank had 3.500 hectares of land in the region, as a guarantee from an insolvent Spanish company.

The idea of setting up a foundation emerged. Obsessed with the vision of saving the rain forest, Rodrigo met Rebeca in the US to develop a concept to purchase the land. Rodrigo gave up his job and both of them completely dedicated their efforts to the search for funders. Soon they were able to buy the first plot and set up the foundation “Maquipucuna” (from Quechua: “Good Hand”). As an NGO they now had access to different conservation funds, especially from the US.

The foundation was the first NGO to purchase land in Ecuador in order to preserve the forest. Eventually, they were able to acquire 6.000 hectares and declare them a private conservation area.

### **3 THE PROJECT**

However, it was not sufficient to just buy land and make it a conservation area. The adjacent communities also had to be convinced and/or involved in nature conservation without depriving them or their livelihoods. The new strategy was: “Rain forest conservation as a basis for sustainable economic development”. In this context, the first ideas related to eco-tourism already emerged. Contacts with US-American scientists gave them the opportunity to organise two groups of scientists who took stock of the wildlife in the region. In 1994, they built the first wooden house with four rooms and applied for funding to conduct a first environmental study in the region. The study was to provide them with information on the tourism potential of the region and about the causes of deforestation. Two nearby communities, Yunguilla and Santa Lucia, had no other income opportunities than to produce and sell charcoal and to clear land for grazing. To do so, they had to destroy the forest. The study, however, showed the huge potential for eco-tourism activities in the region.

Apart from constructing their own eco logde in the conservation area, Fundación Manipucuna supported Yunguilla and Santa Lucia in sustainable development and in building an eco-tourism infrastructure of their own. Instead of exploiting nature, successful economic alternatives such as eco-tourism, organic agriculture, and the production of coffee, cheese and jam were developed.

### **4 EVALUATION AGAINST THE TO DO! CONTEST CRITERIA**

Comparing the activities of the project with the TO DO! contest criteria leads to the following assessment.

#### **4.1 Participation**

##### **In which ways have the interests and needs of the local population been taken into account in the planning phase and throughout the project?**

Participation, taking the interests and needs of the local population into account, is an important working principle of Fundación Maquipucuna. The vision to convert the region into a conservation area could be realised only with participation and comprehensive awareness raising. The communities around the area used to live on hunting and on producing and selling charcoal. Developing alternatives to protect the forest was possible only by organising joint development activities, and thanks to the communities’ trust in the team of Fundación Maquipucuna. Without the agreement and involvement of the inhabitants the region would never have been declared a conservation area.

The first step was the construction of a foundation-owned lodge to provide an example, showing that alternative sources of income can be generated by eco-tourism and an adequate use of natural resources.

The Maquipucuna Eco logde is managed by a local employee. It provides accommodation, serves as a centre for environmental education, and a meeting venue for Ecuadorian and international scientists and tourists interested in nature. The eco logde is part of a geographic triangle within the conservation area Maquipucuna, together with the communities of Yunguilla and Santa Lucia.

In Yunguilla, 65 families used to live on producing and selling charcoal. In an intensive dialogue process and several workshops with community members, the concept was developed to open up alternative sources of income for the community and to successively replace charcoal production. In 1998, a feasibility study on community-based eco-tourism in Yunguilla was conducted, identifying the tourism potential (Precolombian paths, orchids, biodiversity, volcanoes, etc.). The tourism project was initiated by 18 courageous and entrepreneurial families. A first group of Dutch students had to be taken care of and everybody helped. In 1999, during the economic crisis in Ecuador, the possibility emerged to buy an old finca. With the support of Fundación Maquipucuna, the 18 families bought the finca. In 2000, the founded the Corporación Microempresarial Yunguilla (Society of micro-enterprises Yunguilla). More families joined. Other sources of income were created for those who did not want to work in tourism. Groups were formed to produce jam from local fruits, process cheese from their own milk production, and train local guides. In 2005, Fundación Maquipucuna carefully withdrew, as the people of Yunguilla were now able to take further steps on their own. Rolando, president of the community of Yunguilla, said: "In most of the communities, everything goes down the drain when funding stops. Our case is different. We believe in what we are doing, we think like entrepreneurs. We knew how to make use of opportunities." Rolando continued: "The most important result here after 22 years is that all community members underwent a change of mentality. We all unrestrictedly stand for the conservation of the forest, for the protection of the trees and the animals living here".

Earlier, there was only a primary school in the vicinity and at that time Rolando and many other young community members were not able to continue their education. They did not complete secondary school until they were grown-up.

After Fundación Maquipucuna discontinued their financial support, the community successfully acquired further funding for educational purposes, especially to improve the quality of the products produced in the community (jam, cheese). More hectares of land are to be purchased and protected. Yunguilla now owns 27 hectares. The community's objective is to achieve a "good life" for all community members. In 2015, work started for the construction of a big restaurant. The community applied for funding from embassies and ministries in Ecuador. The restaurant will provide space for 100 guests, as Yunguilla wants to increasingly cater to excursionists from Quito.

Many domestic and international guests already come and stay at Yunguilla. Accommodation with the community members is very comfortable. Usually, there are one or two guest rooms to be rented out in every house. Daisy, my host, is 35, studied tourism management and lives in a very nice house together with her husband, two children and the mother. On the first floor, they rent out two guest rooms with attached toilets and showers.

In 1976, 22 families settled in Santa Lucia, the second community in the work environment of Fundación Maquipucuna, to do agriculture. They bought 1.000 hectares of land from the owner of a large estate who had to sell part of his land at cheap prices due to the agrarian reform, and they started a cooperative. Don Eduardo, president of the cooperative, dreamt of large scale animal husbandry on the acquired land. However, this would have meant clearing the land. Besides, it is a mountain area and it was not possible to keep livestock everywhere.

Fundación Maquipucuna then had discussions with some of the members of the cooperative in order to protect the forest and search for sustainable alternative incomes. Don Eduardo was already keeping some livestock, but then refrained from expanding and joined the eco-touristic alternative. In 1999 the cooperative built a lodge in Santa Lucia. As some of the families sold their share, 12 families remained, who took part in the various tourism activities, e.g. as hiking guides, in kitchen management, housekeeping, administration, logistics, etc. Hiking trails were established. The community also has agreements with two universities in the US who supervise scientific projects in Santa Lucia and have people going there several times a year. This area has very attractive scenery. From the peak of the highest mountain in this region at 2.700 m, you get an impressive panoramic view. Edison who also works as a tour guide always looks forward to guests. Good friendships have developed with some of them. He speaks perfect English, like many young people in the community, and is in charge of logistics, and also manager of the lodge. "It pleases us to see that our guests feel comfortable here. We are very grateful to get

something back". Don Eduardo answers the question what else is being planned in Santa Lucia: "We want to continue protecting the forest for future generations. We will do whatever we can to achieve this. Three generations live here together, working together for the same objective."

#### **4.2 Economic benefit**

##### **Ensuring the economic participation of broad local population strata in tourism**

The Maquipucuna Eco logde, the accommodation in Yunguilla, and the lodge in Santa Lucia were the first building blocks to be followed by many other activities. With their own means and external funding, Fundación Maquipucuna supported the early development of eco-tourism and conservation measures. The employees are mainly local people; supplies are purchased locally if possible, and local craftsmen are contracted. In Yunguilla and Santa Lucía, more activities have been developed which take place in addition to the tourism activities. The jam and cheese produced in the communities and the vegetables and fruits cultivated in people's own gardens can be offered at the restaurant. The cheese and jam produced is also sent to Quito and sold there.

#### **4.3 Awareness raising**

##### **Enhancing the awareness of local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development for their economic, social and cultural lives**

The basic idea of the tourism project is the protection of natural resources. The eco-tourism activities are understood as a way to achieve this goal. In the region where Fundación Maquipucuna is working, a change of mentality has happened. People who used to hunt and destroy nature became conservationists. The nature and culture of the communities are seen as valuable goods. They are the foundation of the tourism products and services. These are limited to individual tourists and small groups, as neither the accommodation facilities nor community life allow for too many tourists. In different training programmes, intercultural communication was also addressed. The community members have a high degree of self-confidence and are able to handle possible cultural differences between guests and hosts. Some foreign students stay in the communities, sometimes for several months; others are staying for good.

#### **4.4 Cultural identity**

##### **Strengthening local culture and the cultural identity of local people, avoiding/minimising any social and cultural damage caused by tourism, supporting intercultural encounters and exchange between hosts and guests**

Sharing knowledge is an important component of the tourism products and services, drawing upon the knowledge of the local population about the flora and fauna and the benefits of medicinal plants. In the two communities Yunguilla and Santa Lucía, guests are in close contact with their hosts. The different hikes through the forest are guided by local, English-speaking hiking guides. Mainly local cuisine is offered, which is a subject discussed by guests and kitchen staff. The chefs get immediate positive feedback from the guests, which makes them very proud.

#### **4.5 Decent work**

##### **Creation of qualified jobs and/or improvement of the working conditions in tourism with regard to social security, working hours, education and training, and remuneration**

The workers at the eco logde and in the conservation area are long-term employees. The oldest employee has been working there for as many as 28 years, the youngest ones for four years; the average is more than 15 years.

17 persons have permanent jobs, 14 of them are directly from the neighbouring community of

Santa Margarita. Social security contributions are paid for all employees. During the peak season or as holiday replacement, additional staff is employed on a temporary basis. The employees also have voluntary private accident and life insurances.

The projects in Santa Lucia and Yunguilla are self-determined, self-managed and community-owned. The people producing jam or cheese in Yunguilla earn the national minimum wage; and so does the kitchen staff. For the accommodation of guests at home stays in Yunguilla prices are fixed and are paid by the guests to the community enterprise. Attention is paid to allocating the guests to the host families in a fair manner and in line with a system jointly agreed upon. Similarly, the hosts get a jointly agreed remuneration for accommodating guests.

#### **4.6      Gender equality**

##### **Equal participation of women and men in planning and implementation processes within the frame of their cultural background and values**

Both men and women working at the Maquipucuna eco logde have equal rights. The atmosphere is one of mutual respect, tolerance, and non-discrimination. The communities already have a second generation working in the tourism projects. The young generation has a different understanding and is more open to gender aspects. In most cases, it is the women who control and organise the accommodation of guests. Many young women today have a higher education and have either completed secondary school or even university.

#### **4.7      Environmental sustainability**

##### **Taking into account criteria of low environmental and climate impact and sustainable use of natural resources**

In terms of its origin, Fundación Maquipucuna is about nature conservation. By involving local people and working with them, the approach was developed further into an integrated sustainability concept. Its objective is to protect nature and at the same time enable people in the communities to earn their livelihoods from sustainable economic activities.

There are 1.960 plant species in the region; in the entire country there are 15.700. That means that in the comparatively small Maquipucuna conservation area of 6.000 hectares alone, almost 13 percent of the plant species of Ecuador can be found. The region is a habitat of the Andean bear (spectacled bear). During reforestation, an endemic kind of tree was given preference which the Andean bear enjoys as a favourite food. This made Andean bears return to the region and they have now become a prominent tourist attraction.

The Maquipucuna Eco logde is a meeting place for scientists like Rebeca Justicia herself. At different locations, experimental stations and observation tools have been installed in order to constantly monitor the forest (flora and fauna). The area also has its own weather station. All of this information is used to monitor changes in climate. At the Maquipucuna Eco logde as well as in Santa Lucia and Yunguilla only natural materials (wood and bamboo) were used for construction.

In all the places, the fruits and vegetables used are mainly from people's own cultivation, and free of pesticides of course. Fundación Maquipucuna cultivates coffee in the agricultural part of the conservation area. Thanks to its high quality it also very much in demand in Quito.

Environmental education plays an important role at Maquipucuna. At the eco logde, so-called "Niño Naturalista" (children as nature researchers) workshops are offered. Five to six times a year, entire school classes come to stay at the eco logde in order to experience nature first-hand. For this purpose, there are different "environmental suitcases" (water, soil, air, forest, plants, insects, etc.) being used to have children experience and understand different environmental subjects in a playful manner. Yunguilla runs a workshop where local children can make "something nice" from recycled paper, e.g. post cards or pictures. These items will then be displayed for sale in the community-owned shop.

#### **4.8 Future sustainability**

##### **Ensuring the economic and institutional sustainability of the project**

The income from the tourism activities is used to finance the two communities and the eco logde and to develop them further. Rolando says: "This is not just a conservation project; it is a project for life". The number of tourists has increased over the past few years. New target groups such as senior citizens from Quito are being attracted to visit on one-day excursions. Despite threats to nature by large-scale mining industry projects in the region, the nature conservation activities have been expanded steadily. There are more and more investors who buy land for the purpose of reforestation; others build small ecological accommodation facilities. The eco logde is to be expanded in a comprehensive manner in the near future and a new legal ownership is planned, also involving the staff.

If in early 2018 UNESCO recognises, as expected, the much larger region 'Chocó Andino' as a biosphere reserve, this will significantly strengthen the project Maquipucuna. Being included in the list of UNESCO is another milestone to preserve biological diversity, to strengthen ecotourism activities and the economic development of communities.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

**FUNDACIÓN MAQUIPUCUNA** deserves the TODO! 2018 in every respect, because it combines nature conservation and tourism development hand in hand with local communities in an exemplary manner. The communities are supported in their sustainable development and work in a self-determined manner. They jointly promote ecotourism development in their conservation area Maquipucuna. Maquipucuna is a model and trend setter for socially responsible and sustainable tourism in Ecuador.

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