

Evaluation of the project

**COMMUNITY TOURISM YUNGUILLA
RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

In Ecuador



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for

Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V.

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Administrative Structures of Ecuador: The Provinces
(Capital Quito is located in the province of Pichincha)



Source: <https://de.wikipedia.org/>

The cantons of the province of Pichincha
Cantons are the official residence of the mayor



Source: <https://commons.wikipedia.org>

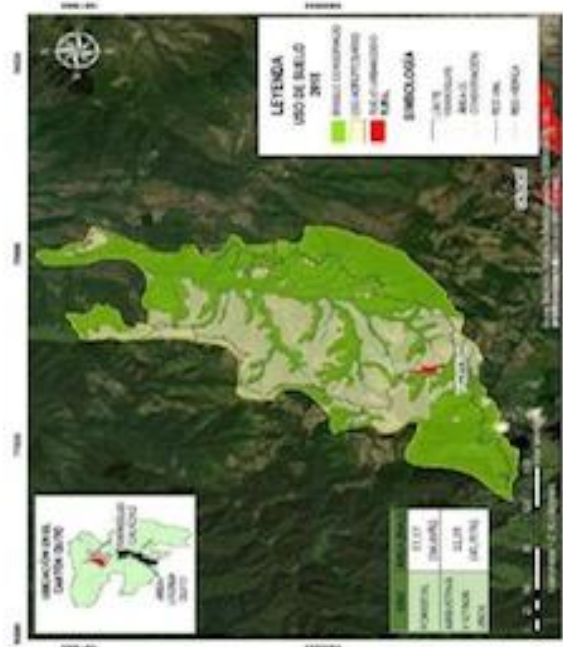
The "Parrocias" (parishes) of the Canton of Quito. Yunguilla belongs to the Parrocia Calacali
Source: <https://commons.wikipedia.org>



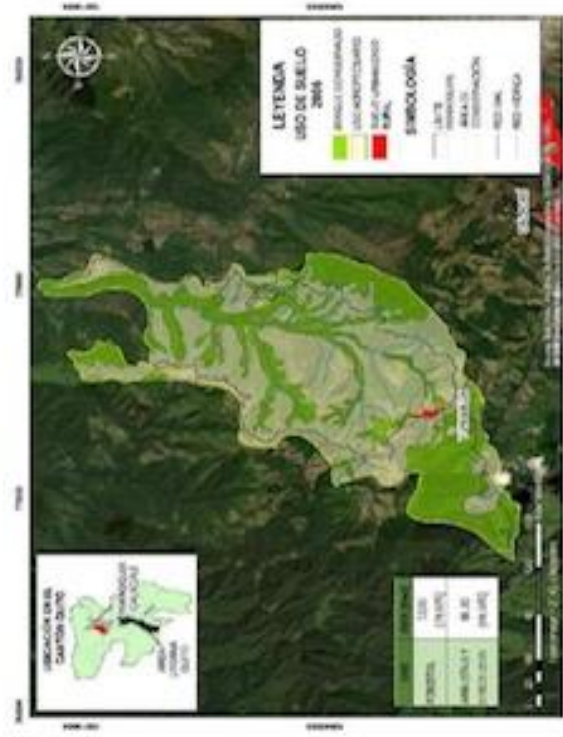
Reforestation in the territory of Yunguilla between 2006 and 2018.
 Source: Corporación Yunguilla

MAPA DE RECUPERACION DE COBERTURA VEGETAL ACUS YUNGUILLA YUNGUILLA

COBERTURA VEGETAL ACUS YUNGUILLA 2018



COBERTURA VEGETAL ACUS YUNGUILLA 2006



1 INTRODUCTION

The application for the TO DO Award 2024 was submitted by **CORPORACIÓN YUNGUILLA** for the project **COMMUNITY TOURISM YUNGUILLA / RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES** by the village community of Yunguilla in Ecuador and has been nominated by the TO DO Award jury. The assessor Klaus Betz was in Ecuador from November 28, 2023, to December 10, 2023, on behalf of the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e. V.), to verify the documents submitted by CORPORACION YUNGUILLA (www.yunguilla.org.ec) on-site.

Based on the insights and findings gained, the author recommends awarding the project **COMMUNITY TOURISM YUNGUILLA / RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES** with the TO DO Award 2024.

2 BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS

The contrast between the recently developed negative image of Ecuador and the reality of life in its rural areas – especially in an Andean mountain village like Yunguilla, visited by the author – could hardly be greater.

On one hand, in cities like Guayaquil and Esmeraldas, Ecuador suffers from alarming gang and drug crime. As a result, in early January 2024, the newly elected President Daniel Noboa, recently in office, declared a state of emergency over the country with a population of 18 million.

On the other hand, there exists an almost idyllic and peaceful state in the remote rural mountain regions. Far away from any crime, surrounded by warm hospitality, one can hardly perceive the potentially critical situation in which the Andean country finds itself.

It is a fact that "Ecuador is situated between Colombia and Peru, the world's two largest cocaine producers. For a long time, the small country (Ecuador is meant, ed.) was considered peaceful and stable. In recent years, however, the country has become a hub for international drug trafficking, especially to the United States and Europe. Since then, violence has also escalated. (...) President Noboa declared the state of emergency, stating that his country is in an "internal armed conflict". He ordered military operations against the criminal gangs in the country to 'neutralize' them."¹

According to IMF estimates, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Ecuador as of October 2023 is 6,462 US dollars in nominal terms. (South Africa: US\$6,684, Germany: US\$46,264). The minimum monthly income is 450 US\$, the average income is between 700 and 1200 US\$ (depending on the region and residence). In the HDI, the Human Development Index (UN prosperity indicator for 189 countries), Ecuador ranks 95th (Switzerland is first, Norway in second and Germany ninth).²

Of enormous importance for the country's economy (besides the export of oil, fruits and nuts, fish and crustaceans) are the so-called remittances (Spanish: remesas). These are the money transfers or home remittances from Ecuadorian migrants in countries like the USA or Spain. They recently reached a new record of nearly \$4.4 billion.³

¹ Peter Sonnenberg, ARD Mexico City v. 10.01.2024: The Federal Foreign Office foresees a normalization in important areas as of 23.01.24, but continues to advise against travel to Guayaquil and Esmeraldas.

² [www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Laender-Regionen/ International/Country Profiles/ecuador.pdf](http://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Laender-Regionen/International/Country_Profiles/ecuador.pdf)

<https://de.tradingeconomics.com/ecuador/minimum-wages>

www.gtai.de/de/trade/ecuador/recht/ecuador-erhoeht-mindestlohn

³ <https://latina-press.com/news/299749-remissen-ecuador-bricht-ueberweisungsrekord/>

“Ecuador generated approximately 898 million euros in the tourism sector alone in 2021”.⁴ As in many other countries, the Corona pandemic has led to a decline in tourist visitors from abroad (newer figures are still pending). However, as the waning Corona pandemic allowed a gradual increase in foreign visitors, the current situation (state of emergency) is causing significant uncertainty. Nevertheless, the most visited destinations in Ecuador are: The Galapagos Islands, followed by Quito and "La Mitad del Mundo"⁵ ("Middle of the World") and the Amazon region.

Regardless of this, Ecuador was the first country in the world (later followed by Bolivia) to grant a special value to both animate and inanimate nature in its newly adopted constitution of 2008, advocating an economy committed to social solidarity and sustainable development.⁶ These lofty ideals result from the guiding principles of indigenous culture, which are anchored in the terms "Pachamama" (Mother Earth) and Sumak kawsay (good life, in Spanish: buen vivir).

However, in Ecuador's political day-to-day, these ideals have not been truly implemented (due to changing governments with more neo-liberal ideas). This is in stark contrast to everyday life in rural regions inhabited by Indigenous people or Mestizos, as the following example of the village community of Yunguilla will clearly show.

3 COMMUNITY TOURISM YUNGUILLA and its importance

3.1 History and Goals

The turn towards a completely different future began around 1995 in the mountain village of Yunguilla, home to 250 inhabitants. Until then, the local population predominantly lived off subsistence farming. Cash was primarily earned through selling wood or producing charcoal. As a result, over the decades, more and more forests were destroyed (the tree line is around 3000 meters), with increasingly larger grazing areas. It became evident that continuing this way would ruin their own livelihoods.

Today, 30 years and only three generations later, it's hard to imagine. The village community of Yunguilla lives in a cloud forest region at the upper end of a panoramic high mountain valley (2600 - 3000 m); surrounded by 5000 hectares of primary forest (enormous biodiversity) and a secondary forest of around 3000 hectares with native tree species – with ongoing reforestation projects⁷. Yunguilla is part of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve "Chocó Andino de Pichincha", founded in 2018. Mornings in Yunguilla are often sunny and warm to hot, in the afternoon fog wafts up from the valleys and envelop the village in clouds (cooler and colder at night). Many houses, especially those of families participating in the homestay program, show signs of increasing prosperity and offer a nearly European standard, including clean drinking water.

This development is due to the founding generation of today's 70- and 80-year-old villagers (initially consisting of 18 families, out of a total of 50 at that time) who asked themselves the question: How can we generate income in the future without destroying our livelihoods? Or in other words: How can we sustainably use our natural resources?

⁴ <https://www.laenderdaten.info/Amerika/Ecuador/tourismus.ph>

⁵La Mitad del Mundo is an equatorial monument about 23 kilometers north of Quito and marks the place where Charles Marie de la Condamine was the first European to determine an exact position of the equator (to 240 m) with a French expedition in 1736.

⁶ Alberto Acosta: "Buen Vivir" - On the Right to a Good Life, Oekom Verlag, Munich 2015. At the time, Alberto Acosta was president of the Constituent Assembly and is considered one of South America's leading intellectuals.

⁷ In the past, they have also been supported by the UN Small Grant Programme GEF and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund.

With the support of the NGO "Fundación Maquipucuna" (TO DO award winner of 2018: https://www.todo-contest.org/site/assets/files/1784/preisbegrundung_maquipucuna.pdf), a training and seminar program began within the village community. Its goal was to promote awareness among as many families in the village (and also the youth) for responsible and sustainable management of natural resources.

Three years later, in 1998, the first community-funded ecotourism project (see 3.2. Concept and Program) was established on the site of a former farm around a hill called Tahuallullo. Surrounded by educational trails through the adjacent cloud forest, there is now also a tree nursery. In addition, the Corporación Yunguilla office is located on the site (near the road), next to the manufactories for producing "Yunguilla cheese" and "Yunguilla jams" (long since become a brand in demand even in Quito). Furthermore, there is a vegetable garden, a small campsite, and most importantly: the "El Mirador" lookout restaurant built and managed by the village community (daily meals with locally produced organic products).

Remarkably, the village community decided back then *not* to build a hotel there but to stick to the original idea: The possibility of staying overnight with families. In other words: Homestay as an encounter, exchange, and opportunity to experience everyday life; including meals with local dishes (vegetarian options available, determined at the beginning of a stay by the host).

In contrast to the founding generation, the second generation (today's 40 to 60-year-old Yunguilla residents) was finally able to attend secondary schools (some in adulthood), while the third generation of today's 25 to 30-year-olds naturally return to their home village with university degrees (in ecology, tourism, gastronomy, food sciences) – along with their knowledge of fundraising, marketing, USP, website design or the ability to work as an eco-guide. The Corporación Yunguilla offers them appropriate new jobs in self-management (with a high proportion of women) and, in addition, the prospect of a foreseeable "good life" – *buen vivir*, in other words.

3.2 Concept and program

While in 1998 Yunguilla could only welcome 40 guests, the number of visitors had risen to almost 7,000 guests by 2019. In addition to a considerable proportion of day visitors from Quito (a good hour's drive away) and other neighboring regions, travel groups from Europe, Canada and the USA had also been visiting Yunguilla until then.

However, with the onset of the Corona pandemic, there was a downturn, and it was a challenging period for the Corporación Yunguilla. They had to focus more on domestic guests, who less frequently booked the homestay program (except student groups on excursions).

It was not until 2023 that there were signs of a return to the previous levels. However, the goal in Yunguilla is not to attract more and more visitors but rather to convey their actual mission: the appreciation of a sustainable lifestyle, which is linked to knowledge about and respect for nature (see also 4.7). This is not immediately apparent because much of it is conveyed through bookable "packages," whether one opts for a one-day, two-day, or multi-day program.

The standard **program for day visitors** costs \$20 and includes a discussion about the goals and projects of the Yunguilla population, a guided tour through the cloud forest, visits to the tree nursery, the cheese factory, and the jam manufactory (with varieties from Chigualcan [mountain papaya], Uvilla [Physalis], blackberries, and strawberries), followed by lunch at the "El Mirador" lookout restaurant, a stroll through the village with an opportunity to purchase local products in the Tienda (village store), and finally – for acquaintance – a visit to a family that offers homestay (among a total of 23 families, each with one or more double rooms for larger groups or families with either private or shared, clean bathrooms or showers).

The **two-day program** costs \$80, resembling the one-day program but includes staying overnight with a family, participating in their daily life with shared meals. Additionally, there is a guided hike on the historical and through the cloud forest leading Inca trails "Culuncos" (for experienced hikers only) with wildlife and bird watching.

Furthermore, there's the opportunity to accompany a farmer to milk cows on a pasture at six in the morning (on foot, over narrow mountain paths) and participate in leisure activities. In Yunguilla, there's a covered sports hall where passionate Ecu-Volleyball tournaments⁸ (spoken "Ecu-Bolly") are held almost every weekend.

Those opting for a **multi-day program** can naturally relax, visit further viewpoints on up to 3000-meter-high mountain peaks (with views of a series of volcanoes), explore the local "Orchideario" (a type of orchid nursery), or increasingly understand and appreciate the lifestyle of Yunguilla's population.

Be it through the invitation of the host to spend a Sunday with them on a small finca secluded in the forest, be it through the (voluntary) work on a reforestation project or by helping out on one of the organic vegetable farms or gardens⁹.

4 Assessment according to the TO DO Award criteria

The comparison of the activities of **COMMUNITY TOURISM YUNGUILLA / RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES** with the TO DO Award competition criteria leads to the following assessment.

4.1. Participation

How were/are the interests and needs of the local population taken into account in the planning phase and in the course of the project?

As previously described, all considerations and activities regarding tourism development in Yunguilla have been self-determined initiatives of the village community from the outset, leading to a very high degree of participation.¹⁰

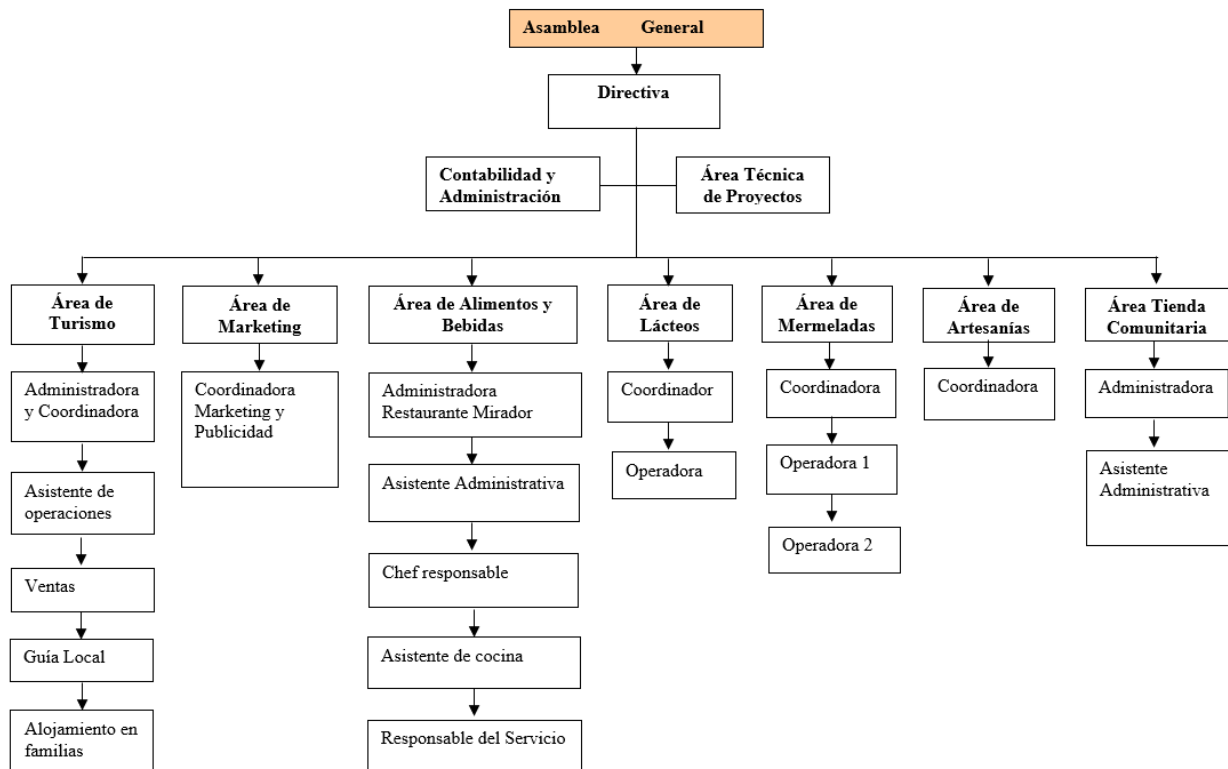
This is particularly evident in Yunguilla. through the local "Asamblea General de Socios" (see the following organizational chart) – a "General Assembly of Shareholders" (read: families) structured by fields of responsibility and tasks. It confirms or newly appoints qualified individuals from its own ranks through elections every two years for all roles, and thus manages both the commercial side of the officially registered micro-enterprise "Corporacion Yunguilla" and the social side or the public sector of the village (community work, construction measures, sports, festivals¹¹). By now, almost all families are involved or engaged in one way or another. In short, all the changes in Yunguilla, which have taken place over thirty years, come from within and from the grassroots.

⁸ Football is the number one national sport in Ecuador, but right after it comes "Ecu-Bolly." It is a unique form of volleyball and is much faster and more strenuous, as each team has only three players on the field instead of the usual six (mixed teams are also common).

⁹ With all familiar vegetables or crops – from broccoli to spinach, from beetroot to corn or potatoes or different types of lettuce.

¹⁰ In Yunguilla (predominantly Mestizos, partly Afro-Ecuadorians), a practice common in indigenous cultures is still followed to this day: It's not the majority decision that counts, but consensus. In other words, a proposal is discussed collectively until all participants agree. There is no mayor or council that can or could assert authority by virtue of a majority.

¹¹ In Yunguilla, the tradition of the "Minga" is still alive. The word comes from the indigenous Kichwa language and refers to community work / participation or mutual support (reciprocity).



4.2 Ensuring the economic participation of as broad a segment of the local population as possible in tourism activities

As all tourism activities are in the hands of the village community, the resulting income is distributed to the respective service providers in the village. This includes not only the employees of Corporación Yunguilla (areas such as guides, reforestation, marketing, fundraising, transport, accounting, restaurant, village store) or those families involved in the homestay program.

Income also goes to all the farmers who supply milk for cheese production, butter, and yogurt making (about 300 to 330 liters daily), and those who contribute berries and fruits for jam production or provide the restaurant with a rich selection of organic vegetables, eggs, chicken, or meat. This means that even those not directly active in tourism benefit from it. For example, dairy farmers receive 42 cents (US cents) per liter of milk, which is more than what German farmers have sometimes received.

And last but not least, a small fund was created years ago, from which the older generation of founders receives a small monthly contribution. As a bonus for their years of voluntary commitment. In other words, for the unpaid initial construction work.

4.3 Promoting an awareness of the opportunities and risks of tourism development for the economic, social and cultural everyday life of the local population

– summarised with –

4.4 Cultural Identity

Strengthening local culture and identity, avoiding/minimizing tourism-related social and cultural damage, supporting intercultural encounters and exchanges between hosts and guests

The tourism industry in Yunguilla has become a significant factor in the local economy. The appreciation received from visitors has greatly enhanced the self-esteem of the villagers. This has also given them the

strength to consciously showcase their culture, traditions, and customs, and the cohesion within the community; sharing these aspects with visitors (subtly influencing them).

There are not the usual risks associated with tourism here, such as being overwhelmed by external influences, potentially leading to cultural destruction. Instead, the focus is on passing on the lifestyle practiced (and experienced) in Yunguilla to the visitors, accompanied by authentic hospitality.

Moreover, as in other areas (see again 4.7), subtle voluntary "limitation strategies" are pursued (as a rejection of "unlimited growth"). This is partly due to topography, and partly influenced by the communal desire to continue steering the development and initiatives within the small village autonomously.

Specifically, this means: Since the village center of Yunguilla stretches along a sunlit slope for over a kilometer (with steep gradients to the surrounding valleys), there is little space to build additional houses. If a house does become available (due to the departure or death of older residents), it is only sold to "outsiders" if the individuals originally come from Yunguilla or are family-related and wish to return. (Mobile and internet connections via satellite make IT jobs from home offices possible).

4.5 Decent work

Creation of skilled jobs and/or improvement of working conditions in tourism in terms of social security, working hours, education and training and remuneration

Here too, the focus is initially on working for the communal goals of the village on one hand and the income of the family as a whole on the other. This can be in the form of self-employment as well as being an employee of Corporacion Yunguilla, or both at the same time. This is the case, for example, with dairy farmer Mathilde Sanchez (see cover photo), who also leads the lucrative jam production as the responsible "department head".

Others, depending on their education or university qualifications, work as employees – as a tourism coordinator, as a restaurant manager, as an environmental or technical coordinator, as a cheese producer, as an eco-guide, as a "school bus driver" (who also takes care of the transfer of guests), as an accountant, and still others work part-time in the village shop or handle administrative tasks, while at the same time many still grow vegetables or run vegetable farms.

There are official organizational hierarchies, but they are not to be classified as conventional employer and/or employee categories. The collaboration is rather characterized by mutual respect and the esteem one gains or has gained through commitment to the village community.

4.6. Gender equality

Equal participation of women and men in the planning and implementation process within the framework of their cultural foundations and values

In the mid-1990s, at the beginning of the **Community Tourism Yunguilla** project, men were initially the dominant voices. However, this has long since changed in Yunguilla, especially since a group of women began in 2000 to boost the sales of the (now sought-after) "Yunguilla jam". Since then, they have increasingly been able to contribute to the leadership of the project and are now involved in many key positions, not just participating but also making decisions (women currently hold the position of director of the corporation, lead in finance, administration, various departments, and manage the homestay program/family overnight stays).

Of the total of 56 families in Yunguilla (currently with 250 inhabitants), 72 people directly participate from tourism activities (39 women, 33 men), while another part benefits indirectly (as described above). And, by the way, the young and well-educated women are no longer married and mothers by the time they are twenty. Instead, they work in their home village and – self-confidently.

4.7 Environmental compatibility

Consideration of criteria of environmental and climate compatibility as well as the sustainable use of natural resources

This is one of Yunguilla's core competencies and (as described in the history under 3.1) the main motivation that led to the founding of **Community Tourism Yunguilla / Responsible Management of Natural Resources**.

For the people of Yunguilla, it's not just about "repair-based" environmental conservation that goes far beyond reforestation efforts. It's about a holistic approach that acknowledges the inherent value(s) of both animate and inanimate nature.

This starts with voluntary self-restrictions and ends with the willingness to always consider the (survival) necessities of animals and plants. Two examples of this include:

- The dairy farmers in Yunguilla now only keep between five and ten cows per farm (thanks also to the fair milk price), requiring only ten hectares of pasture for them¹² – as opposed to the past when they grazed more cows over 30 hectares. The 20 hectares not used for grazing today serve reforestation¹³ with native tree species (alongside flower-rich shrubs, for example, for the numerous hummingbirds).

In the forests around Yunguilla live spectacled bears (Spanish: Oso De Anteojos), who enjoy sweet bamboo shoots, as well as bromeliads, cacti (for hydration), and especially mangos. This is taken into account in reforestation efforts some distance from the village. Thus, trees and plants are not only planted for human use but also to provide food for these animals. The community is willing to share and not make the maximum possible yield the sole standard. The reasoning is that if the spectacled bears find enough food in *their* habitat, they won't need to come near the village in search of sustenance.

In addition, periodic continuing education seminars with external speakers take place (environment, climate, organic farming). The entire community area is now officially registered within Ecuador as an ACUS region – as an “Area of Conservation and Sustainable Use” (Spanish: Área de Conservación y Uso Sustentable).

4.8 Securing the future

Ensuring the economic and institutional sustainability of the project

The **Community Tourism Yunguilla** project has been continuously built up over almost thirty years; it is structured, well-organized, anchored in the local population and contributes to their prosperity (around 84 percent of the income remains in the village). Regardless of this, part of the profits is regularly reinvested.

It is also important to note that **Community Tourism Yunguilla** does not depend on individuals or investors. Economic and institutional sustainability is therefore a high priority.

¹² This corresponds quite precisely to the demands often discussed in Europe for "extensive livestock farming": working on extensive areas with low animal stock. In eco-agricultural terms: One piece of large livestock per hectare.

¹³ Currently supported by the Swedish NGO "Rädda Regnskog" (Save the Rainforest).

5 CONCLUSION

The appointed auditor, in many years of global research on environmental, social, and developmental issues, has rarely encountered a village community like Yunguilla, which has pulled together over three generations. This community has pursued and successfully implemented the goals of sustainable use of naturally available resources from within and from below, on their own initiative. Additionally, the author has been impressed by the extraordinary diligence of the inhabitants of Yunguilla.

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