

Project Update: July 2014

Right now, I am in the Ecuadorian Amazon, conducting fieldwork for the PhD project (the project that is being financed by Rufford); the fieldwork took longer than planned to get started, since the analysing of secondary data were consuming more time than previously estimated, plus, contacting people in these remote areas for arranging visits throughout the communities was also a task that took extra time.

I spent a couple of weeks in Quito (Ecuador), studying Spanish and researching about the history of Ecuadorian indigenous movements and the current political context. It has been 4 days now that I arrived in Tena (a small town in the Ecuadorian Amazon). On Monday and Tuesday, I had several meeting with some local actors here, such as the Chief of the Sumaco Biosfere Reserve, member of the GIZ (German Cooperation) office in Tena, and members of the Ecuadorian Ministry of the Environment. I have also had the opportunity to talk to the researcher who was responsible for coordinating the PEN data collection (Poverty and Environment Network, the database that I am analysing) for the Ecuador site. During the past 2 days (Wednesday and Thursday), I went for a trip with the chief of the Sumaco Biosphere Reserve to make contact and to have conversations with leaders of some communities where I am going to conduct meetings and interviews (Kichwa indigenous groups and settlers across the municipalities of Napo and Orellana).

Just to recapitulate, my research is concerned with forest-based Amazonian livelihood strategies of forest peoples across a gradient of socio-cultural and political contexts in three countries: Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil. My research questions were refined to encompass: (1) the multifaceted importance of forests to local livelihoods (income, subsistence, for closing the poverty gap, serving as safety nets in times of hardships, reducing inequities, building identity and more); (2) how such forest relevance to forest peoples is linked to local incentives to conserve it; (3) the existence of a rich and wide diversity of locally develop strategies to using forests sustainably; and (4) the presence of institutional blockages (local people's lack of rights and autonomy to take decisions concerning resource use, incoherent laws, burdensome bureaucracy, elitist state policies that maintain the cycle of marginality, disempowerment and poverty, and more) that hinders local abilities and mechanisms to perform a sustainable use and consequently to reconcile conservation and wellbeing.

Within 2 days from now I will travel to some Kichwa communities and after that I could send you more pictures, and tell how the work in going.



