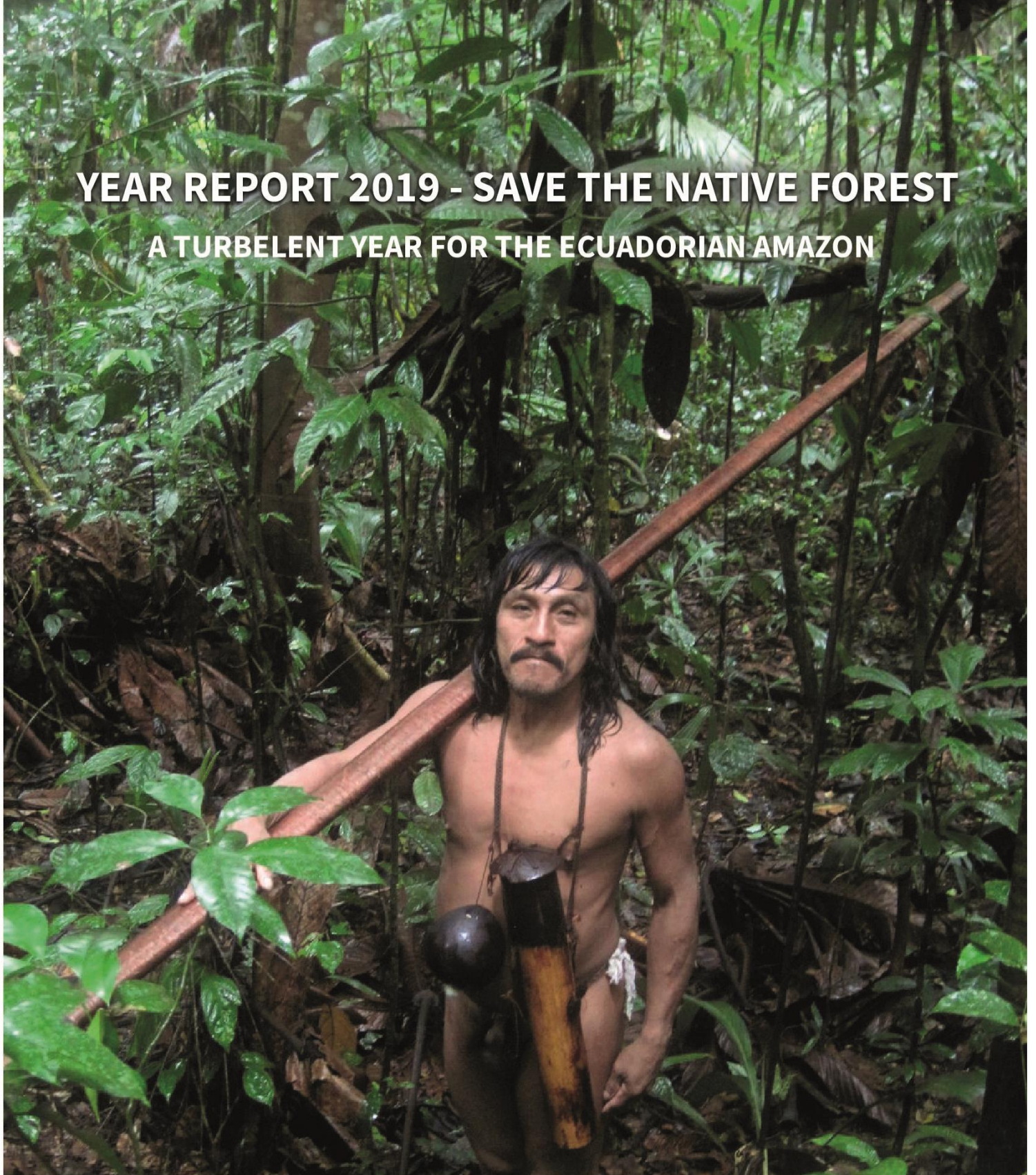


YEAR REPORT 2019 - SAVE THE NATIVE FOREST

A TURBELENT YEAR FOR THE ECUADORIAN AMAZON



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A general introduction into Ecuador's turbulent year, which has both directly and indirectly impacted STNF and CNBN.

For Ecuador, 2019 was a critical year for court decisions regarding environmental and social issues.

At the end of 2018, the courts set precedent by ruling in favor of the Cofán indigenous people of Sinangoe, who were opposed to illegal mining activities in their ancestral territory. In July 2019, the courts ruled again in favor of another indigenous people, **the Huaorani**, who opposed the exploitation of an oil exploration concession, Block 22, on their land. Two months later, the Ecuadoran courts stopped a hydroelectric project on the Piatúa River in indigenous Kichwa territory, as it did not comply with the requirement of prior consultation and it was shown there had been corruption by a judge.

Despite these advances, compliance with a popular referendum from February 2018 regarding **resource exploitation in Yasuní National Park has not materialized**. Reports indicate that deforestation exceeded the maximum allowed in the park. In addition, the order expanding the intangible area where isolated indigenous peoples are located created controversy, as the expansion would eat into indigenous Huaorani territory.

Then a national strike took place in October, and President Lenín Moreno's government declared a state of emergency for several days. The strike demonstrated that on top of the economic crisis, there are serious issues pending with regard to the environment. One of them is the criminalization of the country's social and environmental leaders, a practice that continues to be used to repress social protest. **So what were the main environmental issues still pending in Ecuador at the end of 2019?**

Contested: The Yasuní park controversy

The popular referendum of February 2018 asked Ecuadorans if they agreed **to increase the intangible area for isolated indigenous peoples in Yasuní National Park by at least 50,000 hectares** (approximately 123,600 acres) and reduce the area of oil exploitation authorized by the National Assembly from 1,030 ha to 300 ha (approximately 2,550 to 740 acres). **The citizens answered "yes,"** but almost two years later, compliance with the decision remains uncertain.

President Moreno issued a decree in which he claimed to comply with the referendum, but its contents surprised social, environmental and indigenous leaders. Article 3 of the decree states that "inside the buffer zone [of the intangible area] it is prohibited to carry out new infrastructure works such as highways, hydroelectric power stations, petroleum facilities centers, and other works that technical or environmental impact studies find to be incompatible with the objective of the intangible area. An exception to the prohibition in Article 3 is made for oil drilling and production platforms."

Ecuador's minister of the environment at that time, Marcelo Mata, said that although oil platforms and well drilling are allowed in the buffer zone — including inside the contentious ITT oil block — the government will not do so and "future governments will decide if they allow it or not."

The controversy goes beyond the blocks and oil wells. **For the Huaorani people, Decree 751 would take part of their territory, since the expansion of the intangible area and its buffer zone would take their land. "This was done without any protocol for prior consultation,"** said Benito Bonilla of Fundación Pachamama.

Esperanza Martínez, leader of the Acción Ecológica organization, says the government's response is unconstitutional. "Instead of expanding the isolated peoples' protected area into where the **Yasuní oil is located and which we want to leave in the ground, they are expanding it into the land of the Huaorani people.**" A lawsuit challenging the decree's constitutionality is currently in progress.

The Huaorani people are not the only critics. According to a report from the Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project (MAAP), an initiative of the Amazon Conservation Association and ACCA Conservación Amazónica, **more than 300 ha have already been deforested with authorization. The report records a deforested area of more than 400 ha (approximately 990 acres) related to oil activities across Yasuní National Park.**

"Of this total, we calculate a direct deforestation of 57.3 hectares [142 acres] for platforms and roads in the controversial ITT Block and Block 31," said Matt Finer, the MAAP director. "Further, incorporating the edge effects caused by deforestation" — impacts that extend into the surrounding forest beyond the deforestation's limit — "the impacted area increases to at least 655 hectares [1,618 acres], which is above the 300 hectare limit established by 2018's popular referendum."

What is most worrying is the tight secrecy with which the government has handled the matter. No Ecuadoran may travel freely in these blocks in Yasuní. Carrying out verification is difficult, even for monitoring agencies like the Ombudsperson's Office. One of the most complete reports is from the end of 2018, carried out by the organization Geografía Crítica and the Ombudsperson's Office, but obtaining the permits was quite a process.

Information access is another obstacle. Organizations like Geografía Crítica, Acción Ecológica and EcoCiencia have gone through formal channels to request official information from the Ecuadoran government about what is happening in Yasuní, but have received no answers.

Urgent: Protecting the territories of isolated indigenous peoples

Related to the developments in Yasuní National Park last year **were the policy changes affecting indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation in Ecuador: the Tagaeri and the Taromenane.**

President Moreno's decree creates a buffer zone for the isolated peoples' intangible area but also allows oil exploration and exploitation within it. This was one of the greatest worries of indigenous and social leaders in Ecuador. In addition, as Martínez from Acción Ecológica says, the expansion of the isolated peoples' territory is into the territory of the Huaorani people, who have had confrontations with the "uncontacted" peoples in the past.

Recent statements from the new minister of the environment, Raúl Ledesma, have raised concern. In a televised appearance, Ledesma said, "I have reviewed the decree in depth, the Constitution, and what has been done historically in Ecuador. In fact, previously there was not even a buffer zone. [The uncontacted peoples] have general assemblies, they have their means of communication. I have not been able to contact them but we are going to have a way to communicate, perhaps through the Huaorani people's assemblies."

In response, Andrés Tapia, the leader of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadoran Amazon (CONFENIAE), said, **"This is not only concerning but demonstrates the minister's profound ignorance regarding the matters that involve the Ministry of the Environment."** The oil blocks that put the intangible area at risk are not only inside

Yasuní National Park, but also at the park's southern border. The government decided to accept an oil company's withdrawal from oil exploration activities in Block 79, in the province of Pastaza. However, controversy ensued because the very same company has exploration and exploitation rights in Block 83, where the isolated indigenous peoples are located. The government did not make a statement in response.

Leaders from the indigenous associations CONFENIAE and CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) demanded that the government desist from oil exploration in Block 83, since it also affects part of the territory of the Sapara people, a community of just 580 individuals. Furthermore, according to Bonilla from Fundación Pachamama, the Sapara people's stories tell of a time when some ancestors also decided to isolate themselves from society and live in isolation in the jungle. "Although only the Tagaeri and Taromenane peoples are officially recognized, other isolated groups probably also exist," he said.

Good: The court rulings protecting rights

When extractive projects are proposed within indigenous territory, the developers are required to seek prior consultation and consent from the indigenous residents. Yet this principle was widely flouted in 2018 and continued to be flouted in 2019.

Communities complain that the consultations in which the extractive companies are required to inform them about the project and its potential impacts are scant and incomplete. At worst, they never even take place. The companies, on the other hand, say the consultations end up being co-opted by people opposed to progress who seek to delay the projects.

Nevertheless, in 2019 the courts shifted the balance in favor of the indigenous communities. Rulings in two cases found that the affected indigenous communities had not been properly consulted. The first case centered on the construction of the hydroelectric plant on Kichwa land, and the other on the exploitation of an oil block in the Amazon.

In that latter case, the Huaorani community of Pastaza shut the door on oil activities in their territory after an appellate ruling on July 11, 2019. The ruling recognized again that the community had not been consulted in 2012 regarding the requests for bids for oil block 22, which affected some of their ancestral territory. The Ministry of Energy and Non-renewable Natural Resources and the Office of the Attorney General appealed the decision, but the Constitutional Court refused to consider it in a ruling on Nov. 27, 2019.

The other case is that of the Kichwa people of Santa Clara. The provincial court in Pastaza decided to suspend the hydroelectric project on the Piatúa River, withdrew authorization for the use and exploitation of the water flow, and revoked the environmental license issued by the Ministry of the Environment to the company responsible for building the plant. "We want authorities who work for the people, not ones that sell the people's land and resources," said Aguinda, the Kichwa leader.

But even though these two rulings have gone in favor of the communities, the challenge is compliance. "In the courts there is some progress in the recognition of rights, but when it comes to execution, for example by the executive branch or the electoral body, the state continues to align with extractive interests," Manuel Bayón, a founding member of the collective Geografía Crítica, told Mongabay Latam.

The Kichwa community of Sarayaku recently lodged a complaint of non-compliance with the Constitutional Court. They say that since 2012 there has been no progress on the removal of 1,500 kilograms (3,300 pounds) of pentolite explosives that an oil company had left buried in its territory more than 15 years ago. The explosives remain underground despite an order from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to remove them.

Source: Mongabay Latam, Januari 8 2020

<https://es.mongabay.com/2020/01/ecuador-deudas-ambientales-2019/>

STNF and CNBN, what happened in 2019?

The information above describes how difficult and urgent the current situation in Ecuador is. We applaud our fellow charitable organisations and activists that are fighting, and winning, for the rights of the Ecuadorian Amazon and the land rights of isolated and uncontacted communities. **Sadly in reality we see that in the areas of the Ecuadorian rainforest that are inhabited by isolated communities, like areas bordering the Yasuni National Park, only few NGO's are active on the ground to locally protect, secure and monitor these highly biodiverse regions and there are even less NGO's that have a strong connection on the ground with these isolated communities.** This shows the importance of small, local foundation like CNBN that know this region by heart and that have the trust of the communities that inhabit it, but it also comes with a large responsibility.

A few years ago STNF has raised funds for CNBN **to purchase 450 hectares of rainforest that borders indigenous Huaorani lands.** Together with them we protect and monitor this large area of highly biodiverse rainforest, which is not an easy job. Nevertheless throughout 2019 we have successfully managed to protect the area, without any incidents.

To succeed in actively monitoring and managing the area **STNF has raised around 2.000 dollars in 2019 in additional cash for equipment, travelling and food expenses for volunteers and also for the first steps in the legal preparations for the Bosque Protector status.**

In collaboration with 247Design STNF has designed **a beautiful flyer** for both our Dutch and our International target audience. The international variant can be seen on the next pages (8, 9).

2019 has also been a year in which STNF has put effort into **exploring potential partnerships in the field of research**, especially considering the incredible source of ancient knowledge on plants and medicine that the isolated indigenous communities hold and that they like to share, if there is someone who is willing to listen and learn from them. Then there is the unique opportunity for research to study the anatomy and microbiome of these communities. **For now there has been contact with a few institutions and organisations, but nothing concrete yet. This is something we hope to have more news on going into 2020 – 2022.**

In short, 2019 has been a turbulent year for Ecuador and indigenous communities, and a relatively stable year for STNF and CNBN in the management of our large area of native forest. Going into 2020 we hope on more good developments and partnerships.

Thanks for your support and sincerely yours,

Jordy Muus



Save the Native Forest Foundation (STNF)

What does STNF do?

STNF contributes to conserving the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest and its great biodiversity and helps protect the authentic ways of life of its inhabitants – the indigenous Huaorani – who live there.

Why is this important?

Everything is connected. Conservation of the rainforest has a direct impact on our existence.

Due to deforestation

- The authentically living Huaorani are **threatened in their territory**,
- The earth is warming up causing **disasterous weather effects** like drought and floods,
- A lot less **oxygen** is produced,
- **Biodiversity will be lost** and therefore we will lose the chance to discover **life-saving medicine**, materials and techniques, the fundamentals of which can be found in the rainforest.

Where do we protect the rainforest?

In the **Amazon in Ecuador**: the border area between the inhabited world and the Huaorani territory. Exactly this region is very important, so that the border does not move further into the rainforest and the Huaorani region can stay livable and pristine.

How does the Foundation work?

The **Huaorani** have asked for our help to protect this specific area. The close connections with the Huaorani, the local Ecuadorians and institutions are crucial. The STNF foundation has founded the sister-organization CNBN in Ecuador to officially work on site. The distribution of tasks is as follows:

In The Netherlands:

- Creating awareness,
- Fundraising,
- Financial resource management.

In Ecuador:

- The concrete implementation on-site,
- The collaboration with the Huaorani,
- Collaboration with the other local communities and institutions.



Much has been achieved!

We have obtained and protected 450 hectares of rainforest already.

Did you know the Huaorani asked for our help? Answer their call and assist us!

Did you know that due to the large biodiversity many of our medicine originates from the rainforest? And only 1% has been researched! At the moment research is being done on already proven active ingredients in rainforest plants against diabetes type 2 and several forms of cancer.



What do we need now?

- The formalisation of the purchased 450 hectares of rainforest,
- The organisation of patrols against illegal poaching and logging,
- The obtainment of the "Bosque Protector" status with which the purchased 450 hectares rainforest gets a protected status and more governmental support,
- The purchase of more rainforest to expand our impact.

Ambassador



Frederique van der Wal, top model and entrepreneur has met and lived with the Huaoranis. She has personally felt and seen the importance of our cause. That is why she is passionately supporting us as STNF ambassador.



Did you know the conservation of rainforest helps prevent global warming? So that means less climate change and therefore less drought and floods.

Did you know that a plastic consuming fungus has been discovered in the Ecuadorian rainforest, which can even survive in an environment devoid of oxygen like under water?

Did you know that in science much is derived from nature? Because nature has, thanks to evolution, developed the best designs already! NASA developed adhesive materials inspired by the feet of Gekkos. Vehicles are being designed based on the shapes of animals and insects. The United States' army tries to copy spiderweb, which has proven to be stronger than kevlar in bulletproof vests.



Support STNF

Become part of the solution and support us!
www.stnf.org/support-us/donate-now

Contribute to Stichting STNF

IBAN (EUR) : NL41ABNA0572389256

IBAN (USD) : NL19ABNA0572697627

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STNF has an ANBI status: so donations are exempted from taxes (Europe only). Thanks to being a small organization, short lines and a direct approach, all the funds will directly and completely be assigned to our goals.

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