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**Gaining Ground:  
People's Participation in the Tropical Forestry Action Plan  
for Ecuador**

Bruce Cabarle

Center for International Development and Environment  
World Resources Institute  
1709 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20006

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WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE

1709 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006, Telephone: 202-638-6300  
Facsimile: 202-638-0036 Telex: 64414 WRIWASH Direct Dial: (202) 662-

## **GAINING GROUND: People's Participation in the Tropical Forestry Action Plan for Ecuador**

*Final Report*

on the

**Activities of WRI's Center for International  
Development and Environment in Ecuador<sup>1</sup>**

**Project Manager: Bruce Cabarle, Forestry & Land Use Program**

*November 1989 to January 1991*

### **1. Context: Voices from the Margin**

Forests are often the single most important resource to rural communities, providing food, shelter and spiritual needs. However, resource users often lack legal rights to local forests or are able to influence national laws that dictate their fate. As the national Tropical Forestry Action Plan for Ecuador (TFAP/Ecuador) has progressed towards completion of its formulation phase, WRI has continued to support popular participation -- both of disenfranchised groups dependent on forest resources, and of the conservation nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Our approach calls for supporting forest resource users to promote alternatives to Ecuador's deforestation crisis. This work has stressed the underlying need for a national TFAP to address: (1) development policies of various economic

sectors such as agriculture, energy, etc. and (2) structural problems such as tenure over forest lands and trees, agricultural land distribution, and how these issues influence local forest use patterns.

### **2. General Objective: NGO Participation in the TFAP for Ecuador**

Focusing on grassroots organizations representing forest-dependent communities and urban-based NGOs concerned with forest conservation issues, the general objective of this project was to facilitate NGO participation in the formulation of the TFAP/Ecuador. WRI played a dual role in this process. First, WRI served as a liaison between organizations -- both governmental and non-governmental -- involved in policy issues related to TFAP/Ecuador.

Second, we provided technical assistance and support to grassroots organizations for formulating community forestry management plans.

### **3. Overview of WRI's Activities: Providing the Tools for Popular Participation**

This project called for a series of workshops for village leaders and grassroots organizations involved in management of local forest resources, and fora with national NGOs on forest land use policies regarding the TFAP/Ecuador. The purpose of the workshops was to: 1) ascertain local perspectives on issues the TFAP must address; 2) provide a mechanism for local participation in the TFAP process; 3) give local groups the technical assistance and support necessary for developing community forestry management plans; and 4) keep these groups apprised of developments related to the TFAP. It is important to note that management plans are important instruments for local communities to secure enhanced tenure to traditional forest lands, currently claimed by the State as "Forest Patrimony" – i.e. forest lands within the public domain but outside of officially declared parks or reserves.

Two Ecuadorean NGOs received small grants from WRI to implement most of the grassroots and NGO contributions to the TFAP. The first grant was to a rural development NGO, COMUNIDEC, to coordinate the work with grassroots organizations. The second was to a well regarded conservation NGO, Tierra Viva-Quito, to analyze the TFAP/Ecuador concerning its treatment of forest conservation concerns.

A grant to COMUNIDEC supported a number of activities: their collaboration with an indigenous federation, FCUNAE to convene a

village-level workshop in the Amazon basin; three planning workshops with leaders from nine grassroots associations representing over 190 communities to design four community forestry management proposals as part of the TFAP/Ecuador investment profile; and one training workshop in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methodology for project design. In order to ensure the linkage between this work at the grassroots level and the national TFAP exercise, a memorandum of understanding was negotiated by WRI staff between the Ministry of Agriculture's Subsecretariat for Forestry and Natural Resources (SUFOREN), COMUNIDEC, and WRI (see trip report by Bruce Cabarle, February 1990).

Another grant supported Tierra Viva's independent analysis of the TFAP/Ecuador strategy. This was presented at the national roundtable (type II) and another forum with government officials and forest industry representatives to discuss their concerns regarding forest conservation priorities and the TFAP/Ecuador's development strategy.

### **4. Activities to Date: Proposing People's Alternatives for Forest Management**

Through introductory workshops, it became apparent that the most significant contribution WRI and our partner organizations could make to the communities we were working with, was to provide comprehensive assistance to develop community forest management plans based on the workshops already conducted (see progress report, "Grassroots forest conservation: Local communities take charge," by WRI, August 1990). In consultations with several grassroots organizations, COMUNIDEC and SUFOREN, we amended our workplan to focus on developing alternative community forestry proposals with the

groups who had already participated in previous workshops. Our decision to amend our original workplan was further strengthened by several personnel changes within the government, which shifted TFAP/Ecuador's priorities and provided a significant opportunity for grassroots organizations to propose projects for inclusion in the official investment profile.

The major components of this revised project focus included:

- \* A community workshop on forest resources with an indigenous federation, FCUNAE, of the Amazon Basin;
- \* Three planning workshops to design four community forestry proposals for the TFAP/Ecuador with leaders from nine grassroots associations, representing farmer cooperatives in the Andean highlands (AOCACH, FURNOSAL, OCASAH, UOCHACI, and UCIF); fishermen, women and indigenous groups in the northwest coastal region (ACCEA, Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas, and Federación Chachi); and FCUNAE; and
- \* A Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) training workshop with the Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas, ACCEA and COMUNIDEC. The results were used to design a management plan for the Comuna's 64,000 ha forest reserve.

All activities were carried out on-site in the provinces of Bolivar, Chimborazo, Esmeraldas and Sucumbios, except for one final planning workshop convened in Quito for all grassroots organizations. WRI staff, together with COMUNIDEC, provided direct technical assistance in planning and conducting the workshops. COMUNIDEC staff, with support from a small grant from WRI, provided the

necessary follow-up with grassroots leaders. Financial assistance was also provided to support COMUNIDEC's work to design a community forestry program to provide grassroots organizations with technical support in TFAP project implementation. Additional funds were leveraged to support training activities with COMUNIDEC in PRA techniques and grantsmanship.

The following is a brief description of the project's key activities. These are described in greater detail in final reports submitted by COMUNIDEC and Tierra Viva on these small grants.

***Phase One Workshops:  
Communities Articulate their Needs***

In November 1989, a workshop was held in the Amazon basin with 35 community leaders from the Quichua Indian federation, FCUNAE, along with assistance from COMUNIDEC, and SUFOREN. The workshop recommendations provided concrete data and analysis to substantiate FCUNAE's proposal to create an Ethnic Forest Reserve bordering one of the Amazon Basin's largest national park, Yasuni National Park (see workshop publication). The FCUNAE workshop was the third, and last, event in the preliminary series of workshops. This activity was partially supported by WRI funds and a matching grant to FCUNAE from the World Wildlife Fund. The first two events were held in the Andean highlands (November 1988) and in the Pacific coastal region (May 1989).

***Phase Two Workshops:  
Local People Propose Solutions***

Throughout early 1990, WRI staff worked closely with COMUNIDEC and community leaders to form project design teams. Using their workshop recommendations, four proposals emerged from several subsequent workshops

(phase II) with community leaders. This work was carried out in close coordination with the SUFOREN, with specific terms being agreed to in a memorandum of understanding between SUFOREN, COMUNIDEC, WRI (see February 1990 trip report for details).

In May 1990, a workshop was convened with leaders from the grassroots organizations which hosted the phase I workshops to peer review the proposals and prepare their presentation to SUFOREN. Participants included FCUNAE from the Amazon Basin; AOCACH, FURNOSAL, OCASAH, UOCHACI, and UCIF from the Andean highlands; and ACCEA, Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas and the indigenous Federación Chachi from the coastal region. An area of common concern was how to design an effective mechanism for outreach to, and input from, local communities concerning project design and implementation. The application of the PRA methodology to address these issues, based upon a recommendation by WRI staff, was endorsed by the groups.

In August 1990, a PRA training workshop was conducted by WRI staff for COMUNIDEC and the Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas and ACCEA in the province of Esmeraldas. The results identified problems and opportunities within their land management system – largely an agroforestry system based on plantains, cacao, timber harvesting, and collection of taguay palm seeds which are sold for making buttons by US-based clothes manufacturers. The results were incorporated into the Comuna's proposal for conserving its 64,000 ha. forest reserve in northwest coastal Ecuador (see presentation by Aaron Zazueta and Bruce Cabarle, "Diagnostico Rural Participativo para el Manejo de Recursos Naturales: El caso de la Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas," (November 8, 1990).

In October 1990, the four community forestry proposals were submitted to the SUFOREN as part of the emerging TFAP/Ecuador. WRI staff played a key role in facilitating negotiations between local leaders, COMUNIDEC and the SUFOREN about grassroots participation at the type III roundtable (January 1991) with interested donor agencies to discuss the Forestry Action Plan for Ecuador. Benefiting from the postponement of the international roundtable, during November and December 1990 several follow-up site visits were conducted by COMUNIDEC staff to develop operational workplans with community leaders for their respective community forestry proposals. Also, WRI staff successfully negotiated with SUFOREN to allow the presentation of the grassroots proposals within the official TFAP/Ecuador investment profile. Invitations for grassroots leaders to participate in the international roundtable were also secured.

At the international TFAP roundtable meeting held in January 1991, grassroots leaders attended from ACCEA, the Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas, FURNOSAL and AOCACH, as well as representatives from COMUNIDEC and Tierra Viva. The community forestry proposals, designed by grassroots associations with assistance from COMUNIDEC and WRI, were favorably reviewed by the Netherlands, Germany and the InterAmerican Development Bank. Other national NGOs who participated in the roundtable, CORDAVI and Fundación Maquicupuna, made presentations to the international community that emphasized the results from the Tierra Viva analysis of the TFAP/Ecuador.

#### ***COMUNIDEC's Community Forestry Program***

WRI staff have conducted various strategic planning exercises with COMUNIDEC to define objectives and focus activities for its community forestry program. WRI arranged for

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COMUNIDEC staff to visit an NGO in Costa Rica, CIDESA, which has a successful community forestry program. As designed, the COMUNIDEC program will provide technical and administrative support to grassroots organizations to implement the community forestry projects. Lastly, training was provided to COMUNIDEC and grassroots leaders in developing proposals (grantsmanship).

#### *Tierra Viva's Public Awareness Campaign*

Corresponding support for the conservation NGO, Tierra Viva, resulted in a study and recommendations to the TFAP concerning the socio-economic considerations of forest areas declared as "national patrimony," national parks and reserves. The study was published locally together with COMUNIDEC's work (the Andean workshop) and disseminated widely among the NGO community and government agencies.

Tierra Viva provided analysis of the emerging TFAP/Ecuador strategy and the convened several briefings with local NGOs on the TFAP, both before and after the national TFAP roundtable. Tierra Viva also conducted an aggressive outreach program which resulted in several editorials in a major daily newspaper, Hoy, and meetings with government officials and forest industry representatives. As a result, the final version of the TFAP/Ecuador presented to the international community placed a greater emphasis on forest conservation concerns and less emphasis on industrial forestry development (compared to what was presented at the national roundtable). However, Tierra Viva and several other national NGOs concerned with forest conservation felt that these changes were still not in line with sustainable development. As a result, these groups unconditionally withdrew their support for the TFAP/Ecuador. A synthesis of these efforts was included in our recent report on the TFAP, Taking Stock: The TFAP After Five

Years by Robert Winterbottom (see appendix 4 entitled "Confronting the Cycle of Destruction?: the TFAP/Ecuador").

## **5. Self-assessment of WRI's Work in Ecuador**

### *Goal 1: Improve TFAP and facilitate NGO participation*

#### Successes

WRI's efforts resulted in several significant accomplishments, including:

- \* The participation of NGOs on the national TFAP steering committee;
- \* The briefings for several NGOs, indigenous federations, grassroots leaders and government officials on WRI-supported research and information regarding the TFAP/Ecuador prior to their participation the national roundtable (type II);
- \* The submission of written comments, and convening of public fora, by COMUNIDEC and Tierra Viva on the emerging TFAP/Ecuador resulted in a more balanced analysis of forest land use policy, increased attention to forest conservation concerns and less emphasis on forest industries in the final TFAP/Ecuador documents.

The public outreach conducted by Tierra Viva sparked general public awareness of forest land use conflicts in Ecuador. It also provided an independent analysis of the TFAP/Ecuador's heavy focus on industrial forest development. The information and analysis generated by the Tierra Viva and COMUNIDEC workshop reports

prior to both the national and international roundtables were critical for informing other NGOs about the status of the TFAP/Ecuador. This information also enabled NGOs to strike a balance between industrial and conservation concerns within the TFAP/Ecuador framework in subsequent negotiations with government officials. The publication of the phase I workshop results and their targeted distribution to key government officials provided the justification for grassroots associations' proposals to be included in the TFAP/Ecuador investment profile.

#### Disappointments

While several NGOs participated on the national steering committee, a significant number resigned in protest following the national roundtable (type II). Several are now actively lobbying the international community to boycott the TFAP in Ecuador. This is attributable to the major obstacles hindering NGO-State relations; such as policy shifts resulting from continued turmoil within the lead agency (two changes in Ministers and eight changes in Forestry Directors since the TFAP's inception); the general unresponsiveness of government agencies to NGO concerns regarding the underlying causes of deforestation; and balancing forest conservation priorities with forest industry interests. Several of these NGOs rally around an ideological hard-line, which -- when coupled with the corresponding inflexibility of the government and private industry -- leaves no room for negotiation. However, WRI's support for NGOs certainly helped to flesh out the key issues to be addressed and to catalyze a dialogue between different stakeholders over the future of Ecuador's forest resources.

Lastly, it was difficult to encourage the government to confront the structural roots of the deforestation crisis, reassess the inadequate policy framework governing the use of forest

lands, and propose a corresponding, coherent TFAP strategy to address these issues. It was also impossible to instill a framework for determining investment priorities for the TFAP/Ecuador, as entrenched interests rejected the streamlining of project profiles into a tight, well organized investment strategy. They opposed this because they feared that it would lessen the probability of capturing international financial support (the common conception is that more is better -- the more projects offered, the better the chances are that the donors will find one they will finance).

#### *Goal 2: Provide technical assistance and support to grassroots organizations*

#### Successes

- \* The signing of a memorandum of understanding between the SUFOREN, COMUNIDEC and WRI, which will provide a mechanism for grassroots participation and inputs to the TFAP/Ecuador;
- \* Training workshops in PRA techniques and grantsmanship;
- \* The development of four community forestry proposals by grassroots associations to conserve significant areas of remaining tropical forest lands in Ecuador (e.g. the 64,000 ha. reserve of the Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas in the northwest Pacific region, known as one of the world's top ten biological "hotspots");
- \* Government endorsement of the community forestry projects as part of the TFAP/Ecuador, substantially strengthening a decentralized, "bottom-up" approach to addressing forest

resource management issues on the ground.

This project has proved to be an effective mechanism for grassroots organizations such as FURNOSAL, ACCEA and FCUNAE to articulate and document their contributions for improving management and conservation of forest resources within the context of a national TFAP. We see this as an exciting indication that popular participation (especially of disenfranchised groups) is possible within a national TFAP, granted that the process is open and that the provision of technical assistance is timely and well targeted. National NGOs, such as COMUNIDEC, can play a critical role in providing this support and maintaining the linkages between local groups and the national government. We feel that this experience may provide a model for local participation, which can be applied in other countries embarking on the TFAP process.

In the case of community forestry proposals prepared with the Andean organizations, they fit well with the objectives of the FAO/Holland project, Participatory Forestry Development in the Andes (PFDA). These proposals offer the PFDA project an opportunity to promote activities which truly manifest the goals of participatory forestry through direct support of local initiatives in forest resource management. Furthermore, the level of detail and planning of these grassroots proposals make them ideal "pilot projects" for the FAO/Holland PFDA program.

Grassroots organizations see their participation in the TFAP/Ecuador as a positive first step towards self-determination. For many, this is the first time that they have been able to influence policy decisions and participate in a national planning exercise concerning the fate of their traditional forest lands. Their project proposals will serve as important legal

instruments for obtaining greater administrative control over these areas, currently controlled by the State as public domain.

Technical assistance in PRA training has substantially enhanced the capabilities of grassroots organizations in Ecuador to implement community forestry projects. For example, using PRA techniques, community leaders, rural development specialists and forest technicians have merged their knowledge to develop a viable proposal for the Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas. This proposal addresses local needs, is technically feasible and fulfills the legal requirements enforced by SUFOREN. In terms of PRA's replicability, the Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas and the indigenous Federación Chachi are planning a subsequent PRA workshop under their own auspices. This workshop will include indigenous communities in the project's design phase. SUFOREN and COMUNIDEC have also been invited.

WRI's efforts in grantsmanship with COMUNIDEC and grassroots leaders resulted in the presentation of perhaps the best-prepared proposals within the TFAP/Ecuador investment profile. Several international development agency officials commented on the detailed level of the community forestry project documents, and that they could be financed fairly quickly with the addition of operational annual workplans. Several associations have since developed additional proposals in other areas such as health and education, and are soliciting assistance from both national and international entities.

#### Disappointments

Not all of the workshops envisioned were conducted. Follow-up to the previous workshops and the development of proposals with grassroots organizations consumed more time, effort and resources than anticipated. We

hoped to conduct additional workshops with the national confederation of indigenous organizations of the Amazon Basin, CONFENIAE, which originally expressed interest. CONFENIAE resigned from the national steering committee, however, in the above mentioned dispute between NGOs and SUFOREN following the national roundtable in February 1990.

Although the grassroots organizations remain active participants in the TFAP process, a confrontation is brewing with government agencies over the administration of the community forestry proposals. While the principle of decentralized project administration with local participation was agreed to by the government, as indicated by their acceptance of the memorandum of understanding mentioned earlier, good faith commitment to this remains questionable. SUFOREN and the national planning council (CONADE) are reluctant to endorse the direct channeling of project implementation funds to grassroots organizations now that the international community has pledged support for these projects.

## **6. WRI's Activities in Ecuador: Looking Ahead**

While this report represents the close of our assistance in the formal grant period, WRI's work is far from over. Following negotiations after the TFAP/Ecuador international roundtable, it was agreed that the community forestry proposal for the Andean Highlands should be incorporated into the FAO/Holland PFDA project. Furthermore, this requires that annual workplans be developed at the community level within each one of the five participating farmers' cooperatives. The two proposals designed mangrove and humid tropical forests in the Esmeraldas provinces must be reformulated into pilot projects covering a reduced area. The pilot

project with the Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas is also to include the activities undertaken with the Federation Chachi. The proposal development process with FCUNAE in the Amazon Basin remains incomplete, however it coincides nicely with the TFAP/Ecuador projects to be implemented in the Amazon Basin with SUFOREN, GTZ and IUCN.

Moreover, the policy framework under which these projects will be implemented still remains inadequate in that the current forestry law only recognizes commercial timber activities as a productive use of forest lands. Agroforestry and extractive reserve schemes as envisioned in the community forestry proposals are not legally recognized as productive. In order to overcome this obstacle, follow-up activities have been tentatively identified with the grassroots associations, COMUNIDEC, SUFOREN and the PFDA project. These activities are comprised of three key components:

*Conduct three PRA workshops to outline model operational workplans and train a critical mass of grassroots leaders, SUFOREN and COMUNIDEC staff in the PRA methodology.*

In collaboration with WRI's NGO Support Services Program, we will conduct training workshops in participatory planning and community diagnostic techniques with community leaders, local NGOs and SUFOREN. These workshops will be held on-site in areas identified within the TFAP/Ecuador community forestry proposals, and will be hosted by the local grassroots association. These workshops will serve to establish specific interventions on the role of trees in reforestation, improving agricultural productivity and soil conservation. The workshops will also establish model workplans at the village level and train community leaders who can then conduct similar

training workshops with other participating grassroots organizations.

Preparations are already underway to hold workshops with FCUNAE and the Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas and Federación Chachi. Discussions are being held with the PFDA project manager and COMUNIDEC to initiate similar exercises in the Andean highlands. SUFOREN has expressed interest in having its staff trained in these techniques. We hope to complete these activities during 1991.

*Strengthen grassroots organizations' management and administration systems. This will enable them to produce the required information for SUFOREN and international development assistance agencies regarding the implementation of the TFAP/Ecuador projects.*

Many of the participating grassroots organizations are characterized by a "crisis" management style. They were often born out of a situation which required immediate actions to defend their territorial rights and to maintain control over forest land. As a result, they often remain orientated towards short-term vision. Rarely do they have the time to do the long-range planning necessary to establish guidelines for administration, monitoring and evaluation of the community forestry projects proposed.

Working in close collaboration with these groups and COMUNIDEC, we propose to establish administrative systems and management structures which capitalize on the grassroots associations' ability to sustain their field-activities, to learn from doing and to maintain close ties with their constituencies. Several grassroots organizations, i.e. FURNOSAL and ACCEA, have far more experience with

project management and market interactions than do others, i.e. the Comuna Rio Santiago-Cayapas. We hope to facilitate a series of horizontal exchanges between the different grassroots associations to facilitate the sharing and development of sound "operating procedures." These include financial record keeping and accounting; report filing; and other matters that could contribute to the managerial expertise and soundness of these groups.

COMUNIDEC has already outlined and implemented a training course in popular accounting methods for grassroots associations managing projects with the support of the InterAmerican Foundation. We hope to expand and adapt this unique course to fit the needs of the TFAP/Ecuador community forestry projects. This will enable local groups to administer project funds at the local level according to systematized guidelines, and eliminate the need for strict, centralized control by SUFOREN. The above mentioned PRA workshops will also contribute to building grassroots capacity to carry out these projects.

*Convene policy fora to discuss possible reforms to the forestry law which will legally recognize community forestry strategies as a productive use of forest lands.*

As mentioned earlier, the current forestry law only recognizes commercial timber activities as a productive use of forest lands. Additionally, many rural communities living in forested areas have no legal rights to the surrounding forests of the public domain. Under the forestry law, local communities can solicit tenurial rights to traditional forest lands by submitting a management plan. However, since agroforestry and extractive reserve schemes are not legally recognized, plans are endorsed by ministerial decrees and are vulnerable to dissolution should

they come into conflict with opposing land use interests in the future. Revision of the forestry law to legally recognize agroforestry and extractive activities as legitimate land uses would put community forestry projects on more secure legal footing and make them less susceptible to ill-conceived land use schemes.

Discussions are currently underway within the Ecuadorean Congress regarding possible reforms in the forestry law that would

create a national forestry institute. Since legislators are considering adjustments in the current forestry law, this is an opportune time for NGOs and forest-dependent peoples to push for vital changes in this law. WRI has discussed with a number of NGOs and the PFDA project the possibility of convening policy fora to explore these issues with grassroots leaders from the TFAP/Ecuador community forestry project sites, members of the congressional committee on environment and SUFOREN.

### *List of reports and documents available from WRI on Ecuador:*

"Diagnostico Rural Participativo para el Manejo de Recursos Naturales: El caso de la Comuna Río Santiago-Cayapas," presentation to the Inter American Development Bank by Aaron Zazueta and Bruce Cabarle, November 8, 1990.

"Informe de Avance de los perfiles de los proyectos de desarrollo socio ambiental: Sierra, Costa y Oriente" by COMUNIDEC, September 7, 1990.

"Grassroots forest conservation: Local communities take charge," Periodic progress report on the Activities of WRI's Center for International Development and Environment in Ecuador, by Bruce Cabarle, August 1990.

"Programa de Acción Forestal Para el Ecuador: Análisis General" Tierra Viva-Quito, by José Vicente Troya Rodriguez, June 1990.

*Taking Stock: The Tropical Forestry Action Plan After Five Years* by Robert Winterbottom, World Resources Institute, June 1990.

"Plan de Acción Forestal del Ecuador (PAFE): Ecuador Trip Report" by Bruce Cabarle, February 5-14, 1990.

*Nucanchic Sacha: I encuentro comunitario para el uso y manejo racional de los recursos naturales renovables en el oriente Ecuatoriano* by FCUNAE and COMUNIDEC, November 1989.

*En Defensa de la Naturaleza: Dos casos de Participación Comunitaria* by Tierra Viva, COMUNIDEC and WRI, Quito, June 1989.

*I Encuentro Comunitario para la Preservación de los Bosques y Manglares en el Litoral Ecuatoriano*, Limones, 15-16 de Mayo 1989; by COMUNIDEC, Asociación de Cooperativas del Cantón Eloy Alfaro (ACCEA/Esmeraldas), WRI.

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