



Newsletter of the
Center for Amazon Community Ecology
Issue #10 (May 2015)

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Overview



Most of CACE's activities for 2015 are focused on two linked goals – building the capacity of our artisan partners to make more and higher quality handicrafts and increasing CACE's opportunities to sell these crafts. Last year we co-led a three-part series of workshops with the Field Museum to help artisans from the Ampiyacu region to improve their communication, cooperation and planning skills in making handicrafts from sustainably managed plants. This year we have organized two major workshops to teach artisans from five villages how to make some of the most popular models of crafts. We are also filming veteran artisans demonstrating how they make these crafts to share these techniques with artisans in all Ampiyacu communities.

For the past nine summers, I have done research and visited partner communities in Peru and focused on selling handicrafts in the U.S. in the months before Christmas. This year I visited Peru in February-March to visit our current community partners and explore a few new ones. Back in the U.S., we have begun an ambitious spring and summer tour selling crafts at 12 green, music and cultural festivals and street fairs from the mid-Atlantic to New England. We have also cooperated with a couple of dynamic school groups and other non-profit efforts to improve our programs, fundraising, product marketing, and overall effectiveness of our organization.

Artisan workshops in the Ampiyacu



Earlier this year, our project manager Yully Rojas organized two workshops to teach artisans from our partner villages in the Ampiyacu to make some of our most popular handicrafts. A three-day gathering held in the Bora village of Brillo Nuevo featured five veteran artisans showing sixty of their peers from six villages how to make five popular models of hot pads and belts woven with chambira palm fiber. The results were good in most cases with the exception of a last-minute substitute teacher who didn't know her model as well as hoped. At Puca Urquillo, thirty artisans from five villages worked with four teachers to make guitar straps, woven armadillo ornaments and calabash tree pod ornaments etched with figures of Amazon wildlife.

Most workshop participants were women, but a few men also joined to hone their talents as carvers. Each group expressed their appreciation for the training and project backers ([Rufford Small Grants Foundation](#), [New England Biolabs Foundation](#), and [GlobalGiving](#)). We were pleased that one artisan from Neuvo Peru joined the workshop for the first time showing that this Bora village may become an official project partner. It was disappointing that no artisans came from two nearby Yagua villages reminding us that initial enthusiasm to get involved doesn't always translate into long-term commitment. [See full story](#).



Adventures making artisan videos



To supplement our artisan workshops, CACE is also producing a DVD compilation of veteran artisans showing step-by-step how they make a variety of handicrafts for CACE. Videographer Tulio Davila has so far recorded more than 20 of demonstrations of Ampiyacu artisans making woven belts, guitar straps, hot pads, hair barrettes, hat bands and water bottle carriers. He accomplished a lot during his recent three week stint in the field, but a few factors slowed him down. He was not able to shoot some craft models with black because high floods prevented artisan access to the fruit normally used to dye chambira this dark color. A few artisans were understandably distracted when the husband of one failed to return from a hunting trip in the forest, and the husband of another was accused of killing him. Fortunately the missing fellow wandered back to the village three days later, very hungry, but otherwise in good shape. One artisan initially agreed to be filmed explaining how he weaves the popular "anaconda" model belts and guitar straps, but backed out when he was concerned that his creation might be shared with others outside the region.

One topic we regularly discuss with our partners is the need to produce larger numbers of crafts with consistent high quality. Since none of them could fill an order from a wholesale buyer by themselves, they need to be willing to share their skills with each other to increase their income from selling crafts. We respect their desire to keep their innovations “in the family,” however, and promise to only share detailed training materials with artisans from other communities in the Ampiyacu. Tulio is now editing instructional videos that are complete, but we need to raise more funds to finish documenting all of the most popular craft models. [See full story.](#)

Embryonic partnership with Maijuna native communities



Thanks to CACE board member Michael Gilmore who has long worked with the Maijuna people in the Napo Region, Yully Rojas and I first attended a congress of the Maijuna federation (FECONAMAI) in 2009 to learn more about their four villages, challenges and aspirations. We are now developing partnerships with several villages to make handicrafts and copal essential oil. Thanks to Maijuna leader Sebastian “Shebaco” Rios Ochoa, I am now called “Baiyiri” (the Maijuna word for copal) when I visit their communities. The Maijuna and their NGO allies have almost won national government endorsement for a regional protected area covering most of their traditional lands in Loreto. One sticking point is that they oppose building a

road that would go through this area to the Colombian border when alternative routes could avoid imposing intense social and environmental damages.

Since last summer I have visited both Sucusari and Nueva Vida where we did trial harvests and distillations of copal resin and commissioned artisans to make six models of small woven chambira palm fiber baskets and some unique animal Christmas tree ornaments. They were good adventures with promising results that CACE will follow-up on in the coming months. [See full story.](#)



Amazon handicrafts at summer festivals



For the past nine years, we have sold most of the crafts made by our partner artisans at presentations and holiday craft fairs in central Pennsylvania before Christmas. This summer we are offering these crafts in larger and more diverse venues. So far we’ve had booths at the [Green Festival](#) in the Jacob Javits Convention Center in New York City and the [Bodacious Bazaar](#) in Hampton, Virginia. Greeting thousands of people passing by and speaking with hundreds who ventured in, it was clear again that our core supporters and customers are mostly women. Many have traveled abroad, often to Latin America. Many also expressed interest in the environment, fair trade or other aspects of social justice. It was also good to see that other people were attracted enough by our unusual, colorful and well-made crafts (particularly the large smiling woven frog) to come in, browse, and sometimes buy something.

Lessons from the festivals - Almost every vendor had an online store to complement their sales at the festival. Even if people don’t buy something at their booth, they may shop later over the internet. We have been building our online Amazon Forest Store for some time, but it is clearly time to launch it as soon as possible. It is very important to be prepared for all kinds of weather doing outdoor shows. The heavy winds and rain coming off the ocean would have blown our tent away on our first night in Virginia if we hadn’t anchored it with a 5 gallon bucket of water at every corner. Finally - I need and greatly appreciate help doing these events. Four current and former students from the New School provided vital assistance with setting up, selling, and taking down our booth in NYC. A fellow Quaker from Virginia Beach, VA who I only met the day I arrived provided critical assistance setting up our tent and booth and offering hospitality for the next four days. We also had a lot of fun getting to know each other.



We plan to sell our Amazon crafts at ten summer events in PA, NY, NY, and Massachusetts including the [Green Festival in Washington, DC](#) (June 5-7), the [New Bedford Folk Festival](#) (July 4-5), and [Philadelphia Folk Festival](#) (Aug. 14-16). Visit www.AmazonEcology.org for details. Please come out to one of these events to buy a touch of the Amazon for your home or a special gift. Please [contact us](#) if you can help us set up or sell crafts for a couple of hours or a couple of days. Regular booth volunteers will be given free admission to several music festivals we will attend.

Awesome volunteers



Many people have helped CACE as volunteers in the past year. This fall we began working with the [Students Consulting for Non-profit Organizations \(SCNO\)](#), an undergraduate group from the [Smeal College of Business](#) at Penn State University. During the school year, I met regularly with the five member team who took on CACE as a client. Their first output was a Business Model Canvas that analyzed our key partners, resources, activities, finances, communication and marketing strategies. Other

valuable deliverables were a business plan for marketing our Amazon guitar straps and recommendations for ways we can improve our website and use of social media. We have already used some of their information and insights to plan our summer festival tour.



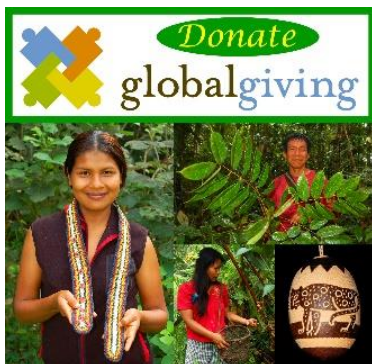
This spring we worked with graduate students in a Monitoring and Evaluation class taught by [Mark Johnson](#) in the [International Affairs program at The New School](#). CACE was a case study for one team to explore how we could set more specific goals for our projects, identify and then monitor appropriate indicators of our progress. They produced a Logical Framework that will help us engage with our artisan partners and their communities about questions like “how much income do you want to make?”, “how many crafts would you need to sell to do this?”, and “how many chambira trees would you need to have to supply your ideal level of craft production?” CACE would then be able to

tailor our programs to help artisans meet these goals, monitor the progress, and regularly seek ways to improve the effectiveness of our work. I also wish to thank Dr. Johnson, two members of team, and two former New School students who were very helpful with our CACE booth at the Green Festival in New York.

In March, CACE welcomed [Tracy Stayton](#) as an [Amazon Field Volunteer](#) for 10 days in Peru. Tracy is the middle of a year-long international service project called Thirty-fortunate (www.34tunate.com) when she is volunteering with 34 non-profit groups around the world as her way of giving back to the world that has given her life. Tracy helped me catalogue hundreds of handicrafts for several days in Iquitos and then went to Jenaro Herrera where she helped our field assistant Italo Melendez learn to use a new procedure for monitoring the recovery of resin lumps on copal trees that were harvested last summer. [See photos of her trip on Facebook.](#)



Support CACE on GlobalGiving Bonus Days



Please support CACE’s work with a tax-deductible donation to our project on GlobalGiving at: www.AmazonAlive.net. Donations made on Bonus Days receive up to a 50% match. Yearly or monthly recurring donations of only \$10 per month or more are especially appreciated to fund ongoing work with our partners.

Bonus Days in 2015

Wednesday - May 13 (Pro-rated Match)

Wednesday – July 15 (50% Match)

Wednesday – September 16 (30% Match)