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**Research Opportunity – Palo Santo Sustainable Livelihoods Project Impact Assessment**

**Summary**

Nature and Culture International seeks a social scientist or natural resource economist to assess the financial and social impacts of a sustainable livelihoods project (palo santo fruit harvesting) in La Ceiba conservation reserve in the Tumbesian dry forest of southern Ecuador.

**Description of organization**

Nature and Culture International (<www.natureandculture.org>) is a conservation NGO that protects biologically diverse ecosystems in Latin America by working in concert with local people. We were founded in the southern Ecuadorian city of Loja in 1997 and have since expanded into six countries: Ecuador, Perú, México, Colombia, Bolivia, and Brazil. In our twenty-plus years of existence, we have helped protect 5.6 million hectares of some of the world´s most biodiverse and endangered ecosystems.

**Local Context**

NCI has worked locally in the Tumbesian dry forest region in southern Ecuador since 2003. Since that time, the organization has purchased 20,000 hectares as private conservation reserves, which we co-manage with three community associations that we have helped to organize. We have developed an alternative livelihoods project with the 2 de Febrero Association in La Ceiba Reserve, based on the sustainable harvesting of fruit from the palo santo tree. Oils from this fruit are used in perfumes and other body care products, providing supplemental income to community members.

**Research objectives**

*Note: We expect to narrow and refine these research objectives and questions in collaboration with the researcher(s).*

* *Assess financial impact and improvement of livelihoods from palo santo project.* We are interested in evaluating the impacts of the palo santo project on community and household wellbeing, using financial metrics such as increased and diversified income but also assessing broader livelihood impacts such as improved standards of living, increased access to healthcare or education, creation of new household assets, reduced vulnerability to external shocks like extreme weather etc. We would also be interested in learning more about the project´s impacts on women and on poorer members of the community.
* *Assess potential changes in conservation attitudes.* We would be interested in assessing whether the project has affected local perceptions and attitudes toward forest conservation.
* *Assess project scalability, develop formal conservation element.*  Develop a sustainable business model to replicate and scale the project. Develop a more formal conservation element within the existing project.

**Location**

La Ceiba Reserve in Zapotillo Cantón, Loja Province, Ecuador.

**Requirements**

* Strong background in natural resource economics or other social science discipline
* Self-motivated and resourceful. Able to work with little supervision in a remote rural location.
* Advanced Spanish. Fluency is not required but must be able to collect information from key stakeholders in Spanish.

**Contact**

Contact Matt Clark (mclark@naturalezaycultura.org) with questions.