

Bianca

Hi sir, nice to meet you, my name is Bianca and I and Lina are taking part in a project to learn more about the local voices, because if we come here we know a lot about nature, but we need to know more about the experience of the people who are here. So, can I ask you more questions? First of all, what is your full name?

Edwin Tanguila

My name is Edwin Darío Tanguila Alvarado. I am the president of the Amarun Pakcha foundation.

Bianca

And where were you born? Are you from here in this region?

Edwin Tanguila

I am from the Napo province, but I am from Cotundo. Twenty years ago I came here looking for land because there was no work. We bought a piece of land here and I started working on it, but that was not enough for me. Those here who work accompanied by politics have jobs, but for us, even if you study you don't get any job.

So I came here and made this foundation and other ventures. Here we see young people who are going to study, who are going to come back to work here. So it was my idea to do this not only for myself but for the collective.

Bianca

You are of the Quichua ethnic group?

Edwin Tanguila

Yes, Amazonic. Quichua, Quichua amazonico.

Bianca

You are working with tourism, do you keep your traditions?

Edwin Tanguila

For example, we are losing our culture here, I want to maintain it. I want to at least maintain our culture.

Bianca

And do you think it is difficult to maintain your culture?

Edwin Tanguila

Yes, it is a little difficult. So what do I have to do? It is to try to motivate the people. As an example, I can give a small job to them, like in the dance, and they feel better about themselves. And I also admire myself because according to me, no, they think they are maintaining the culture, although no, of course, this is not what we were, that our ancestral ancestors have left behind. But right now, since the Spanish arrived, our grandparents have already made us wear this clothing 1, but this, this is from our ancestors, we do keep that 2.

Transcriber's Note- 1: Here he refers to the part of the garment made of cloth.

Transcriber's Note- 2: Here it refers to the part of the clothing made of seeds, which is like a rope in the shape of an "X" that crosses the belly.

Bianca

What is the meaning of this?

Transcriber's Note: She refers to the clothing

Edwin Tanguila

This is a type of clothing that was used by our ancestors, this is simply a type of clothing. It is also a chumbilina, that you can make very easily. So, we are maintaining something at least, it is not 100%.

Bianca

Do you believe in God?

Edwin Tanguila

I believe that since the Spanish arrived they have taught our grandparents (to believe in God). So I have faith in God because God is guiding my person. Of course, our ancestors may have worshiped other gods. In the Andes region, they worshiped the Sun and in the Amazon region, they worshiped the Boa (snake), nature, and the stone. But since the Spanish arrived, we have

changed. God Almighty also revealed himself to me. So I believe in only one God who is the Almighty God.

Bianca

Do you also have traditional beliefs?

Edwin Tanguila

So I also believe, but not 100%, 50%.

Bianca

What do you think about the situation of the indigenous peoples here in Ecuador? Do they have indigenous peoples' lands? The governments respect them, how do you see that?

Edwin Tanguila

The government says that it is supporting the indigenous groups, but it is a lie. For example, we are in a Sumaco Napo-Galeras protective forest, we are within a buffer zone (of the Sumaco Napo-Galeras National Park). Money arrives at the Ministry of the Environment but for the communities only the crumbs arrive. So people no longer believe in the National Government, because they say they are supporting more for conservation, but what happens now?

I believe that only the crumbs will arrive, so we no longer believe in this and in this cultural question, if we leave it for the National Government, what will happen? Everything is going to change. But with our conscience, if we want to conserve, we can do it ourselves. With the support of other instances of NGOS we can move forward.

Bianca

Do you think it is easier to receive help from foreigners than from your own country?

Edwin Tanguila

That too, that anyone can (help) but not through intermediaries, such as the Ministry. No, if there is support, send it directly to our communities. In this way, the community can be stronger, have a source of work, and preserve the environment.

Bianca

Yes, of course.

Edwin Tanguila

That's how it is.

Bianca

And you see the impact of the oil exploration, the oil palm plantations, what is the negative impact that this has for you here?

Edwin Tanguila

For example, the oil companies are doing great damage, not only them, but also mining companies, and this is terrible for us. That's why we are buying land here. National authorities may be doing business with the community leaders. If we don't buy this, they talk with local authorities and they can sell to each other. They also told me that in this area there are Petroglyphs and it's also for sale. I don't want them to touch anything.

But simply when I die I also have to leave this to my children so that they also continue like me. That is my hope.

Bianca

Do you think that the people of your community have this awareness of preserving, like you?

Edwin Tanguila

No. Only those of us who are here, we are in eight people. I want to support, and motivate the educational units, and the children, give a talk, and give environmental training. Because giving a talk to an adult is difficult, we can teach children. The idea is to agree with education, not only my community but also with another school there, so the school can come here and we can give training to them, so they get motivated. Right now, for example, we can teach about birds, about plants, there is a lot we can teach, so they will be very happy and we can gain space.

Bianca

Yes, it is interesting because I talked to many guides, and they all told me the same thing, trying to educate the elderly is very difficult, and it is very difficult to change the mentality of older people. It is important to educate children, so they can have environmental awareness. Would you know about legends that exist here in the community?

Edwin Tanguila

What we were saying about Amarun Pakcha, which is the name of the foundation. It means the Boa waterfall. Cascade is "Pakcha" and "Amarun" is Boa or Anaconda. Well, in the past, there were no people here, this was a wasteland.

At that time, We come here from Contundo. We have been walking for eight days, sleeping in parts. During this time also other communities started to settle here. We are talking about the year 1980/1982. Some people had seized some lands in the Wawa Sumaco area and my comrade, despite being a good friend, could also be tough. He had to stop everything fighting, and that is why I did not leave the comrade, he is a great leader to this community.

During that time, it was difficult to get to the big waterfall. There was a power of nature here, as soon as people reached that hill, strong winds blew up, and thunder blew. And when the dogs persecuted the animals, all the animals hid in the cascade. So they began to drink ayahuasca and they determined that there is an owner of this waterfall here and they communicated with this owner through the ayahuasca drink. The waterfall leader talked to them and asked for five bundles of tobacco and coins so that people could enter the waterfall.

So they had already paid that amount because they had the stone and it had disappeared. So right now people can enter the waterfall, they can bathe and also that waterfall is healing for people, sometimes they come stressed and the waterfall cleans them.

Formerly there was also a petrified Boa stone (a Boa-format stone). Up there there was a big tree that would scream with a monkey voice. They said that when the monkey screamed you should not pass there, because there would be another Anaconda. But the people drank Ayahuasca and those giant anacondas became friends and then they turned into a stone. And that is what we have here and what the guide told you.

Bianca

Yes, yes, that is what they told us.

Edwin Tanguila

So that's how it was. Now we can bathe in the waterfall, now he's everyone's friend, that is how we live here.

Bianca

Is this a traditional house, how people lived in the past?

Transcriber's Note: Here she is referring to the house they are inside.

Edwin Tanguila

No, not this one, it's from the Waorani culture. The idea that I have, I want to do differently here, Waorani, Quecha, Shuar culture, I thought so, but I did not succeed as I did not have resources. So I'm just going, step by step.

Bianca

And how are the relations of the different indigenous nationalities, is it a peaceful thing?

Edwin Tanguila

It's quiet, right now, like each one of us, we have our own area, our plot or defined area, so we respect each one and we all live in peace.

Bianca

But isn't it made of bird beaks?

Transcriber's Note: Now it refers to the part of the clothing made of seeds, which is like a rope in the shape of an "X" that goes through the belly, again.

Edwin Tanguila

This is only (made of) the seed. We use it for our ancestors. We don't want to forget the clothing of our ancestors, that's why we use this.

Lina

Do you also use the palm of the chambira to make the threads (of clothing)?

Edwin Tanguila

Yes, this one is called pita.