

**Rita Yumbo**  
**(Member of Kichwa indigenous community "Playas de Cuyabeno")**

**Lina:** Can you start with your name?

**Rita:** Rita Yumbo

**Lina:** That's a community surname, I guess...

**Rita:** Yes, it's a surname from my community

**Lina:** Is it a Kichwa surname (before starting the recording, Rita had already told me that she comes from a Kichwa community)? Do you know if it has any meaning?

**Rita:** No, I don't know. Our community here is quite populated, there are different families with different surnames, but they are all Kichwas, and also... For example, I am a Kichwa, but my husband is from the Andes and my children... they are no longer part of here (the community), because now they have almost only the habit of the people from the Andes.

**Lina:** Do you live in the Andes too?

**Rita:** No, I don't like it. What I like is my community and the jungle. We call the jungle "Pachamama". I like being here.

**Lina:** Can you tell me about the difference between the Kichwa from here and the one from the Andes?

**Rita:** The Kichwa here is not so closed. For me, the Kichwa from the Sierra is very closed, with a double "r" (rr), and the one from here does not have a double "r". For example, the one here is almost like speaking in Spanish, for example, I can tell you in Spanish "Bienvenidos (Welcome)", and I say "*Alli Shamushka*" which means welcome in kichwa. Another way of saying welcome, for example when receiving people at Waita Lodge is "*Alli shamushka caimashi wasima*"

**Lina:** What is the meaning of the word "waita"?

**Rita:** Waita is like swimming, sort of. "When you come to this place, you come to swim", that's what it means in my language. But in Spanish Diego told me that it meant something else.

**Lina:** But then you know how to speak Kichwa very well?

**Rita:** I do speak Kichwa. I like it because I welcome passengers in Kichwa. My boss likes that too.

**Lina:** How can a person introduce themselves in Kichwa?

**Rita:** "Ñuka shuti mikan (the name of the person)"

**Lina:** Have you taught your children to speak Kichwa? Or is it something that is no longer taught?

**Rita:** Not really. They no longer speak Kichwa. One of my sons lives in Quito, a daughter lives in Loja, another got engaged to a man from here and lives here in Playas de Cuyabeno, and the other lives in Tarapoa.

*(At this moment I cut the interview short, because she wanted to say something without it being recorded)*

*At this time I was asking her about why the language is not being taught anymore, and I asked about the "cocha" and "kucha" suffixes. Rita explained to me that in the Kichwa of the Amazon they do speak with the "O", it is the Kichwa of the Andes in which the "O" is not present, and instead is written with the "U". She was also talking to me about something called "unified Kichwa" (or something like that), she told me that when she sent her children to school, they told them that they "did not know how to speak kichwa", because apparently the "unified Kichwa" takes on more aspects of the Kichwa of the Andes than that of the Amazon, which is why there is an underrepresentation of the Kichwa spoken in the Amazon.*

**Lina:** During the morning when we were on the boat with Diego, he was telling us about the name of the river (Cuyabeno), but he said that he had another name before. Do you know what that name is?

**Rita:** I think I heard something about that. Cuyabeno is the name that comes from a fruit, but it is not a fruit for eating. It has a seed ("pepa") that we call "cuya" and that is why it was given the name "Cuyabeno". "Cuya" is a seed and "beno" is good... something like that.

**Lina:** Before you were telling us that there are many medicinal plants here and plants for other uses as well. Can you tell us about the plants here and what are their uses?

**Rita:** Here, for example, with the medicinal plants... the one that we are using since always is the "Chuchubacho" which is a very large tree that dispose its roots, the tree bark is very large, thick, and red. The liquid spitted by the tree is also red. This medicinal plant is very important, even for the covid, here the people of the community were not affected that much, because the people here began to take those medicinal plants, so here it did not attack us, thank God. Well, that plant was like a hand of God too. None of the people in the community have died with covid.

**Lina:** So you've never had covid?

**Rita:** No, I have never had one and I was afraid that the tourists would come and spread the virus. People from my community told me "you who work with tourists, you are the first that is gonna die"

**Bianca:** So during the pandemic, tourists kept coming here?

**Rita:** At first they (people in charge of the lodge) tried to close it so that there would be no tourists. Then they closed for a while, almost three months, but then the tourists started to come back. So the people who like the exploration (he is referring to the tour guides), they started to make their tours with the tourists. At the beginning, it even scared me, but I mean, there weren't the amount of people we have now (by the time we were at Waita Lodge, another 2 large groups of foreigners were staying right there), but still. There were times that we said "no, because they are foreigners and they are going to bring us the covid", because we were terrified.

Then our employer told us "no, no, no, in order to work here with tourists everyone has to be vaccinated". So we got vaccinated, and well, we already felt safer. But other people also said "no, no, no, no, no, no, we have the medicinal plant, and we are going to abide by the medicinal plant"

**Bianca:** Do you think that the people here believe more in (conventional) medicine or use traditional plants more?

**Rita:** Traditional plants. Traditional plants are the best here, only in case of an operation they use conventional medicine. The people here have dedicated themselves to taking medicinal plants such as the "Chuchubacho", the "Uña de gato" (*Uncaria tomentosa*), the "Tangarana" (*Triplaris?*), the "Casarilla" (*Cinchona officinalis*), people prepared their proportions of medicines and they stuck with that.

**Lina:** Is knowledge about medicinal plants something that is passed down in families? Or is there a specific person that people turn to when they are sick?

**Rita:** No, no. In each family, we have our knowledge. For example, I can tell you, the grandmothers... They knew how to teach so that knowledge stays in the family. The people who are with me, I treat to teach them too, because otherwise, imagine that I die tomorrow and then, who will know? how will they know?

So all those things we transmit to other people. When I came here, for example, I already knew about medicinal plants so here, sometimes I prepare local medicine (people coming to the lodge) and give it to the passengers when they come sick, so I try to cure them. Here, I am the only woman who likes to work in tourism (being a guide).

**Lina:** As a person who belongs to the community, how important would you say the human-nature relationship is? Let's say, how close are they to nature, to the jungle?

**Rita:** Well, the jungle for me is very good. As you can tell, we hardly go out to town, of course we do go out, but not every day. We, on the other hand, spend more here in the jungle, because in the jungle you have the best time, we don't have noise or anything, so for me this is very excellent. Just listening to the sounds of the monkeys, the sounds of birds, of frogs, of so many things...

**Lina:** In this community, some ancestral habits are still preserved regarding customs or rituals that are not Catholic/Christian? For example, gods of nature or something like that?

**Rita:** To nature... hardly, I don't think so. What you say about Catholics, that exists. For example, I am Catholic, I am not an evangelist or anything.

**Lina:** Is Catholicism the strongest religion here?

**Rita:** Yes, Catholicism is the most popular here. Now, for example, the evangelicals are arriving to "change" the people, but the people don't want to, because once they enter evangelism, they can't drink anymore and they can't go dancing, and the people here like to drink, they like to dance and all that, and so that's why people don't want to. We only believe in one God, people are very Catholic here.

**Lina:** Since there is a lot of biodiversity here, do you know of certain legends that include certain plants or animals that are special?

**Rita:** There are legends of the plants and animals too. We tell the stories at home, but sometimes we don't have time to be there just talking. Sometimes I tell the legends to the passengers, some pay attention, others don't.

**Lina:** Can you tell me one of the ones you know?

**Rita:** Well yes, I'm going to tell you about the Anaconda.

There was one boy living in the river (as I understood, the boy is the anaconda?) that fell in love with a very pretty girl. So, every time the girl went down to the river, the boy would put some fish for her to eat.

Over time the girl also fell in love with him, but she was annoyed, because she wanted him to be on land (on dry land), but instead he was in the water. And the boy wanted to have her in the water, but she didn't want to. So she wondered "how can I bring him up?", but the guy wanted HER to go live underwater with him. The girl was so in love that on one occasion she tried to use an "aji" plant that was near the river to try to "rub" the boy, so that he would become "gentle (mansito)", since he was very "wild". Well, in the end, since the girl didn't want to live in the water, he decided to be with the girl (on land). Then it turns out that the girl got pregnant, but the boy only came out of the water at night to sleep with the girl, during the day he was in the water. The girl had a child.

Usually the boy went hunting to have something to eat. On one occasion the boy tells the girl to accompany him to the jungle to see if they can find an animal to eat, so they decided to leave the boy with the grandmother while they went hunting. Being with his grandmother, the child begins to cry and cry, the desperate grandmother wondered what to do to distract him. In the end, the grandmother ends up nursing the kid from her breast, but since the child knew that she was not his mother's breast, then bit her very hard, it caused the grandmother so much pain that she died. Upon returning from the hunt, both parents find the child with the dead grandmother and the girl begins to claim the boy... "Why did you make me go with you? I could have stayed here taking care of the child and grandmother. The discussion was so bad, that the boy decided to return to live in the water, abandoning his family.

The months passed and the girl began to feel very sorry, she cried and cried ( she was sad because the boy returned to the water), and the boy worried about her son. Then on one occasion the boy met the girl again and she wanted to be with him, so the boy told her that now she was going to have to go with him to the water, but that they would never be able to return to land again, so the girl decided to go to the water to be able to always be with the boy.

**Lina:** I guess legends are an easy way to pass on knowledge, right?

**Rita:** Yes, it is how knowledge was transmitted before. When I was a child, I felt afraid hearing so many things that my grandparents told me. They told us about the dolphins and all that, and it scared us. And when the dolphin came out of the water, they scared me!

**Lina:** Do you have anything else you want to share about your community or something?

**Rita:** My community is "Playas de Cuyabeno"

**Lina:** Does the community have a name in Kichwa? or do they only use the name in Spanish?

**Rita:** No, just the name in spanish. "Playas" is because of the sand that dries up (in the river) during the summer, so when it's dry you can go play or swim there. Before, it did have another name, but from generation to generation, people changed its name, and started to organise themselves in a different way, setting up leaders, and so on... Before, everyone lived in their homes cultivating corn, plantains, cassava... now not so much, because now they work in other things like industry, oil companies, all that.

**Lina:** Is there oil extraction in your community?

**Rita:** Yes, we have oil extraction in our community. At the beginning they told us that they were going to give us jobs (the people from the community), but it was not the truth, they did not give work to all the people , because they asked for "qualified people". So there are no jobs, there is nothing, sometimes they tell us that they will help the community. So, according to them, they help us with the purchase of corn. Sometimes they also give us crops of cacao, tilapia, cachamas, all that. According to them, they support

us with that, but what they give us is minimal amounts, the problem is also that later we have a lot of harvest and we don't have anyone to sell to, because we all plant the same thing, so we have to eat all of them, that's why people here don't has resources.