



“For Ecuador, a small country with different ethnic groups, it is still a challenge to implement interculturality and to understand and accept each other”

My name is **Maribel Jarrín**. I am a geographer and I work at VVOB in Ecuador as a monitoring and evaluation advisor. I speak Spanish, English and a little bit of Kichwa which is an indigenous language and the second official language in my country. During my career, I have had the opportunity to work with different ethnic groups which have shown me their needs. Also, I have learnt that there is a lot that needs to be done to accomplish what is written in the Ecuadorian Constitution about interculturality and multilingualism.

The most impressive experience was my work with the Achuar, an indigenous group living in the Ecuadorian jungle. I had to train eight local technicians in different topics: field information acquisition, biodiversity conservation and ecological zoning. I must admit that it was a real professional challenge, not only physically because of the climate conditions in the area, but also personally, as I did not know the language and culture of this group. I facilitated the workshops in Spanish with the help of an Achuar translator. I strongly had the impression that in this process there was a loss of information and that the message I wanted to bring over was not getting through. This meant that several workshops had to be repeated in order to meet the objectives of the project. The challenge of the intervention was to find common ground between the programme and the Achuar people, the imperative to conserve the rainforest, for us as one of the main carbon sinks of the world and for them to conserve their livelihood.

Personally, I believe that the programme could avoid the repetition of the workshops, if it had considered the characteristics of the Achuar. A pre-training for the translators would have generated better learning indicators and better resources for teaching. Since we did not understand their language and culture, we organised courses that were too technical and difficult to follow.

For Ecuador, a small country with different ethnic groups, it is still a challenge to implement interculturality and to understand and accept each other. Personally, the time I spend with the Achuar was a great learning experience. I can remember many of their words. One of is *yotsuro*, which means brother/sister, the term to describe each other.