UN Youth Volunteer Marta Gutiérrez (left) with Manuela Omari Ima, Community Coordinator of the Association of Waorani Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon (AMWAE), during the volunteer’s interview of AMWAE members for the production of a documentary film. (UNV, 2014)

**Recognizing and advancing local sustainable development**

**Quito, Ecuador:** As a UN Youth Volunteer in Gender Analysis, assigned to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Office of the Resident Coordinator in Quito, Ecuador, I support and advise the Resident Coordinator and the United Nations Country Team on gender-related advocacy, communications and resource mobilization.

UNDP supports efforts to enable citizens to meet local and global development challenges and increase resilience at the individual, community, and national level. In collaboration with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme, I was deployed to Waorani communities of Amazonian provinces to assist the video producer Andrew Hein, from UNDP New York, in developing a documentary film under the activities of the "Equator
Initiative”. My mission was to provide translation and interpretation services, interview Waorani women community leaders and support the “Asociación de Mujeres Waorani de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana” (Association of Waorani Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon) (AMWAE) community meetings by spreading the word on the “Equator Prize” in the area and its impact in the region.

The "Equator Prize" brings together the United Nations, governments, civil society, businesses and grassroots organizations to recognize and advance local sustainable development solutions for people, nature and resilient communities that inspire the whole world.

AMWAE was awarded the "Equator Prize 2014" for its project developed in response to the uncontrolled poaching of wildlife in the Yasuní Biosphere Reserve. The poaching is driven by heavy local pressure to supply up to ten tons of bush meat every year to Ecuador’s largest bush meat market in Pompeya.

The demand had led to the rapid depletion of all large animal populations found in the Yasuní Biosphere Reserve and put the food security and livelihoods of the Waorani at risk. The Waorani decided to stop the commercial hunting of wild animals and, supported by the TRAFFIC NGO, AMWAE is promoting organic cocoa cultivation as a wildlife protection measure and a pathway to local sustainable development. The association has been so successful at reorienting the local economy that the bush meat market has been closed down.

During our stay at the communities, we had the opportunity to interview AMWAE members and several Waorani women leaders for the documentary.

Manuela Omari Ima, AMWAE’s Community Coordinator, explained the very important role that women play in food production, noting that increasing women’s participation in the rural economy is a powerful tool for poverty reduction and economic growth, as female farmers tend to spend more money on nutritious foods, healthcare, education, and housing when their income increases.

The association has created a land management plan and women-led organic farming and business management activities that emphasize zero deforestation and use organic cocoa certification as a primary economic driver. At the same time, subsistence hunting activities are closely managed in order to protect threatened and vulnerable wildlife species.

Community cocoa is processed into organic-certified chocolate, creating local access to new markets and more lucrative revenue streams. Organic cocoa cultivation is complemented by activities in fish farming, handcrafted products, and tree nurseries, all of which support both food security and reforestation needs.

**Bio:** Ms. Marta Gutiérrez Fernández has been working as a lawyer and project manager
specialized in gender and gender-based violence since 2009. She is currently deployed as a UN Youth Volunteer at the UNDP Office of the Resident Coordinator in Quito, Ecuador.

Latin America and the Caribbean

- Ecuador • Waorani • wildlife protection

Sustainable Development Goal: