

DM2009 Project Summary

Project Number: 3863 Booth Number: 44

Conserving the Andean Paramo Ecosystem with
Native Blueberry Cultivation

COUNTRY: Ecuador

ORGANIZATION: Conservacion y Desarrollo

FUNDING REQUEST: \$200,000

OBJECTIVE: To mitigate the effects of climate change and establish a pilot project for páramo conservation that can be easily replicated in other parts of the Andes. At the same time, the project's objective will be to create an additional source of income for 100 indigenous and mestizo rural households (approximately 500 people), to be accomplished through a combination of community-based conservation, reforestation, education, production, processing, and sales and marketing efforts with a specialty native crop.

RATIONALE: Since the Andes serves as the drainage basin for Ecuador, the combination of high humidity and low temperature limits evaporation and decomposition, effectively make the páramo, or high altitude grasslands, a gigantic sponge. The warming of the Ecuadoran highlands and expansion of the agriculture frontier to higher elevations are expected to affect one of the main sources of water for the entire country, the páramo. Currently, many of the peasant families in the Ecuadoran highlands are being asked to choose between conserving the páramo and their livelihoods. Mortino, or Andean blueberry, is a native wild crop with good commercial potential that helps to conserve the fragile páramo soils. This project will promote páramo conservation efforts through the (re)planting and preservation of this bush in deforested areas of the páramo, in conjunction with the establishment of a profitable domestic and export market.

INNOVATION: The principal innovation of this project is to combine both a conservation and market approach to alleviating poverty and climate change. The project will address these issues through the semi-domestication of a native wild plant for commercial fruit production, parallel with reforestation to preserve a threatened ecosystem. Conservation efforts often do not work because they fail to address native people's livelihoods. Likewise, commercially oriented projects often are environmentally destructive. Very rarely are both issues confronted in the same project.

CONTACT: Andrew Reitz
andrewreitz@gmail.com
www.ccd.org.ec