

A Path Toward Peace: Mining and Sustainable Development in Intag, Ecuador  
Ecuador  
University of Virginia  
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## **Section I: Narrative**

### **b. A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project**

We aimed to strengthen sustainable economic alternatives to mining work, support local environmental education initiatives, and empower communities to make informed decisions about mining operations by generating data on ecological impacts and water quality in the Intag Valley. Given the social and environmental threats posed by the potential for large-scale open-pit mining, our goal was to buttress the infrastructure of peace by augmenting the viability of traditional lifeways and encouraging informed, fact-based conversations about the possibility of mining in the affected communities.

### **c. Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?**

Yes, our project received additional support from the UVA Center for Undergraduate Research and UVA Office of Global Internships.

### **d. How did you come up with the idea for your project?**

The idea for this project sprang from an independent study research project Patrick undertook in the region in the spring of 2018. That ethnographic study of the social and environmental impacts of mining and anti-mining resistance in the affected communities informed this project by identifying possible areas of future intervention.

### **e. Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?**

In our view, the Ecuadorian state's preference for a utilitarian development paradigm that subordinates the will of local communities to an amorphous "national interest," the growing global demand for copper and other valuable minerals that results from ever-increasing consumption in rich countries, and changing local conceptions of work and just remuneration resulting from economic globalization are all primary contributors to the problem of mining in Intag.

### **f. Why did you choose your host site to work in?**

We chose to work here because of the relationships and knowledge base Patrick had built during his previous stay, and because of the increased potential for project impact implied by these pre-existing relationships and knowledge.

### **g. What was it like to work in your host site?**

In turn and at once it was challenging, rewarding, stimulating, lonely, fun, stressful, beautiful, tragic, scenic, demanding, heartbreaking and awe-inspiring.

### **h. Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?**

Facing the far-superior economic and political power of the state agencies and multinational corporations behind the push for mining here, we often wondered whether our contribution could have real impact. We also grappled with determining the scope of our role, and whether we were doing enough.

**i. What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?**

Aside from some initial difficulty in adjusting to the local vernacular, we encountered some dilemmas in trying to communicate the nature and scope of our project. On the one hand, to be effective we had to distinguish ourselves from the other students and volunteers that live and work here without significant financial resources. On the other hand, we had to be careful not to advertise too widely that we carried thousands of dollars in cash with the intention of supporting community initiatives. This required some delicate maneuvering.

**j. How do you define peace?**

In this context, we understand peace to mean environmental preservation and regeneration, satisfaction of basic human needs, political decentralization, participatory democracy, local self-determination and respect for indigenous knowledge, culture and territory.

**k. How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?**

Our project contributes to this vision of peace by enhancing local understanding of the intrinsic value of the region's ecology and the means and power local people have to preserve it. Further, our efforts to strengthen sustainable economic alternatives demonstrate that the satisfaction of human needs is compatible with environmental conservation, and that these alternatives—rooted in traditional lifeways—are still viable in the age of global turbo-capitalism. Finally, the reams of data we have collected on water quality in several communities will empower local people to make informed decisions regarding large-scale mining and its impacts, thereby realizing our efforts to bolster participatory democracy and local self-determination.

**l. Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?**

Coming from a neoliberal university environment where the traditional focus on providing a critical liberal arts education has largely given way to an emphasis on hard skills and thinly-veiled job training programs that promise to prepare us for today's white-collar professions, we were relieved to learn, through this project, that the world offers a huge and dynamic range of opportunities for work and activism beyond those taking place in consulting firms, NGOs and law offices.

m. Please provide a 1-2 personal statement sentence, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result. Indicate the student's name (yours or your teammate's) for quote attribution.

"For me, the most valuable lesson offered by this project sprang from the hands-on experience we had with the hard work of intercultural activism. From gendered expectations to conceptions of environmentalism to ideas of work and play, the cloud forests of northern Ecuador could not be a more different social and cultural world from the lecture halls of UVA—and yet, through the hard work of finding common ground that cross-cultural collaboration always entails, we were able to accomplish, together, far more than we ever could have apart."

-Patrick Robinson

"I was surprised and heartened to learn that, despite the myriad cultural differences this collaboration presented, we and our community partners were able to connect at the level of shared values—and that, through the kinds of transnational solidarities that emerged from this work, university students from the US and *campesinos* from rural Ecuador can indeed work together towards a shared vision of what the world can be."

-India Brahm

Section II: Photographs

