# Shuar Sustainable Income Initiative

The Sierra Nevada Deep Ecology Institute is now supporting two initiatives in the Amazon Rainforest of Ecuador with the Shuar tribe. The Shuar live on the edge of a vast territory in the Amazon that is slated for oil exploration and development by the multinational oil industry. The Shuar are determined to protect their ancestral lands and way of life from the destruction that would be caused by oil exploration and extraction. Over the years traditional societies like the Shuar have needed to adopt and integrate new practices and ideas to help them cope and survive in these rapidly changing times including the use of money as method of exchange with the outside world. A reliable source of income to help pay for their children's education and to supplement their traditional subsistence lifestyle has been identified by the Shuar as an important element in the efforts to preserve their rainforest and resist the mounting pressure to allow oil development in their territory. The goal of this new initiative is to assist the Shuar meet the challenge of finding economic alternatives in their remote rainforest home, avoid the temptation to succumb to the oil threat, and maintain their traditional way of life. To achieve this goal SNDEI will help the Shuar develop sustainable income generating projects compatible with their desire to preserve both land and culture.

The first phase of this project will be to conduct an assessment of the current social, environmental and economic conditions in the Shuar community. It is important to begin with what the Shuar identify as their priority needs and to understand community interest and commitment in working together to create sustainable sources of income. Once this is clarified existing forest products such as fruits and nuts, medicinal plants, and resources used for making handicrafts will be evaluated for their economic potential. Income generating strategies that are being implemented in other parts of Ecuador and the Amazon will also be evaluated to determine if they are socially and environmentally compatible with Shuar priorities. Each option will be assessed to determine its viability. They will be ranked by criteria such as income generating potential, ease of production, market potential and accessibility, environmental impact, logistical considerations, social acceptability and if the option will achieve their objectives, allowing the Shuar to select those income generating projects with the greatest potential for success.

Prospective options that could be considered include revitalizing the previously successful ecotourism project, growing high quality Criollo cocoa for chocolate production, harvesting non-timber forest products like Camucamu berry (high vitamin C), Guayuasa (herbal tea), Chuchuhuasi (pain relief, muscle relaxant) and other rainforest products marketed around the world, and producing handcrafted bags, baskets and other items made from local materials. Once the appropriate income generating projects are selected the Shuar, with assistance from SNDEI, can begin work on implementing project activities such as organizing efficient production methods, developing management practices to ensure product quality and sustainability, monitoring the ecological and social impacts of the

project and establishing links with appropriate international and domestic markets.

This project will be coordinated by Ed Mayer and his wife Susan who have lived in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea for much of the past 15 years working with tribal communities in conservation and sustainable development. They bring a holistic and integrated approach to this collaboration with the Shuar.

A reading from the book 365 Tao by Deng Ming-Dao states that "Followers of Tao place great value on ancient traditions. A living and valid tradition is like a river with a long course: it brings freshness, richness, and fertility. What makes a tradition alive? The adherents must be fully capable of manifesting the greatness of their tradition in contemporary settings." This project would use an approach that builds on the cultural and traditional strengths of the Shuar to address the issues they now face in the most effective and sustainable manner.

You can help make this project a reality by sending your tax-deductible donation to: SNDEI, P.O. Box 1433, Nevada City, CA 95959. Make your check payable to SNDEI and also place on the memo line: Shuar Sustainable Income Project.