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# Fostering Entrepreneurship in the Colombian Amazon Region

Feasibility Study



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### Imprint

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This study is the result of a master thesis cooperation between Yunus Environment Hub and the University of York.

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## Executive Summary

This study is the result of a master thesis cooperation between Yunus Environment Hub and the University of York. It contributes to a more robust understanding of entrepreneurship in the Colombian Amazon region, scrutinizing the status quo of entrepreneurship, and highlighting the challenges and opportunities that exist today. As such, it serves as a starting point to identify angles and recommendations by which future entrepreneurship and social business support interventions may best strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem to tackle pressing environmental and social needs. It investigates in particular how external factors and internal motivation factors influence entrepreneurial activity in the region.

### External Factors

- geographic location
- cultural behaviour
- education and training
- commercial infrastructure
- support programs

### Internal Factors

- family security
- recognition
- financial growth
- independence

Entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly important for the Colombian economy. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2018-2019 (Bosma and Kelley, 2019), Colombia has one of the highest growth projections in terms of employment created through entrepreneurship. As such, Colombia's National Development Plan 2018 – 2022 stipulates the government's interest in fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation to drive economic growth. The government has committed to strengthening public support for entrepreneurs, aiming to leverage it as a strategic axis to achieve equity in the country.

At the same time, Colombia faces a variety of social and environmental issues, with Colombian deforestation contributing 41% of total deforestation of the Amazon (Hettler, 2017), and poverty rates increasing to 42.5% in 2020 (up 6.8 points compared to 2019) as a result of the pandemic (DANE, 2021). Entrepreneurship, and social business in particular, has gained prominence as a lever to contribute to overcoming such challenges in a sustainable manner. A variety of actors are thus engaging in entrepreneurship support interventions, to strengthen entrepreneurial activity and support innovation, employment creation and income generation in communities. However, most of the support has historically focused on the urban centres, while regions such as the Colombian Amazon receive relatively little attention (iNNpulsa Colombia, 2016). While there are studies that investigate entrepreneurship in Colombia (Bosma and Donna, 2019), very limited research exists on entrepreneurship, and social business in the Colombian Amazon region and among indigenous people (e.g., Alvarez, 2010; Alvarez & Serrano, 2006; Alvaro, 2007).



## Key findings

Selected key results are summarized below.

The study finds that poor road infrastructure and high transport costs hinder market access and marketability of products and services for entrepreneurs in the Colombian Amazon region. Lacking communication infrastructure further limits access to market information. Currently, a high share of entrepreneurs in the Colombian Amazon region are engaged in fruit crop production and eco-tourism. However, in specifically these sectors certifications pose an administrative and financial barrier for business expansion to urban centres. The study finds a strong need for further trainings and entrepreneurial capacity building in the areas of business skills and personal savings practices. At the same time, many entrepreneurs are in dire need of cash, and some indicate hesitancy towards training programs that do not provide immediate income generating opportunities. In the Colombian Amazon, entrepreneurs are integrated into strong community networks. Involvement of family or community members in businesses and entrepreneurial decision making is common. Furthermore, internal entrepreneurial motivation is often linked to the achievement of a collective benefit. Thus, social acceptance of entrepreneurial projects is often dependent on the degree of collective benefit generated through the business.

While entrepreneurship support programs exist in the Colombian Amazon region, the study finds that from the entrepreneurs' perspective, the timeframe of interventions is often too short, opportunities for community engagement and participation in the program design should be expanded, and synergies with existing local entrepreneurship initiatives are not leveraged sufficiently.

## Recommendations

Based on the research, this study makes the following recommendations to consider in the future design and implementation of entrepreneurship support interventions.

### Community entrepreneurship and social business concept

- Interventions should support the development, financing, and scaling of social business solutions in the Colombian Amazon. Some social businesses already exist, and the social business concept aligns well with predominant values in the region.
- Due to the strong involvement of family and community members in entrepreneurial projects in the Colombian Amazon, entrepreneurship support interventions should also focus on supporting collectively led projects (see *Social Business Type 2*).

### Program approaches and trainings contents

- Support programs should apply a human- and ethnic-centered approach, taking into consideration contextual social particularities of the communities in the Colombian Amazon region.
- Support programs should focus on early gains and establish market connections for entrepreneurs in parallel to training services, as many *entrepreneurs by necessity* require revenue to cover basic needs of their families.
- Support programs should ideally plan for long-term engagement, which allows to build a stronger understanding of local contextualities and serves as a basis for more relevant program design that better addresses the needs and desires of communities, while at the

same time building trust.

- Project development should leverage community engagement and participatory approaches more extensively, while considering intra-community and gendered power dynamics.
- Support programs should consider varying levels of formal education and literacy and adopt, to some extent, suitable knowledge creation methods, such as experiential learning, as well as video and audio elements.
- Support programs must consider and be sensitive towards ancestral practices and the value of indigenous knowledge, and thus facilitate knowledge exchange.
- Project management skills should be supported, as for some entrepreneurs the administrative process acts as a barrier to accessing support opportunities.
- Support programs should address the lacking communication infrastructure through more flexibility in in-person meetings, adjusting project schedules to other activities of participants if possible.
- Support programs should address certification issues for entrepreneurs operating in fruit crop production and eco-tourism, as this poses a common challenge that remains unaddressed by existing interventions.
- To decrease high logistics costs for entrepreneurs, support programs could foster partnerships between producers, as well as with logistics service providers, and support the development of more value-added products. Furthermore, support programs should explore opportunities of digitalisation, and develop digital literacy among communities.



# 1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly important for the Colombian economy. The country has been committed to leverage entrepreneurship in its effort to strengthen the national economy, promote domestic production, battle unemployment and drive national innovation (DNP, 2018). While the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down entrepreneurial activity, entrepreneurship will play an important role for Colombia's economy and population on the way forward (Bosma and Donna, 2019). Today, government stakeholders, entrepreneurship support organisations, NGOs and development agencies are engaged in strengthening the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the country. However, most of the support has historically focused on the urban centres, with regions such as the Colombian Amazon receiving relatively little attention (iNNpulsa Colombia, 2016). At the same time, environmental and social issues have become increasingly pressing in the Colombian Amazon region, manifesting in deforestation, violent conflicts, and poverty.

How can entrepreneurship contribute to solving some of these issues? In this regard, the social business concept, created by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus (2007) has become an increasingly prominent approach. Conceptualized in seven core principles, the main objective of a social business is to solve a social or environmental challenge through economic practices (Yunus, 2007). While there are studies that investigate entrepreneurship in Colombia (Bosma and Donna, 2019), very limited research exists on entrepreneurship, and social business in the Colombian Amazon region and among indigenous people (e.g., Alvarez, 2010; Alvarez & Serrano, 2006; Alvaro, 2007). Thus, this study sets out to contribute a more robust understanding of entrepreneurship in the Colombian Amazon region. It investigates in particular how internal motivation factors (family security, recognition, financial growth and independence) and external factors (geographic location, cultural behaviour, education and training, commercial infrastructure and support programs) influence entrepreneurial activity in the region. As such, the study scrutinizes the status quo of entrepreneurship in the Colombian Amazon region and highlights the challenges and opportunities that exist today.

The study was carried out by Yunus Environment Hub and the University of York. It serves as a starting point to identify angles and recommendations by which future entrepreneurship support interventions may best strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem. It will proceed by first providing some background information on the Colombian Amazon region and outlining some of its current environmental and social issues. Consequently, the theoretical framework which forms the analytical base of the study will be presented and the applied methodology described. A discussion of the study's findings and a subsequent conclusion follows. Based on this, the study closes with recommendations for the planning and implementation of new entrepreneurship support interventions in the Colombian Amazon region.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. The Amazon Rainforest

The Amazon rainforest is the largest and most important rainforest in the world, long recognized as the only one left with such a size and biodiversity (WWF, 2020). The Amazon rainforest covers approximately 40% of the total land area of South America, serving as home of approximately 30 million people. This area also hosts 25% of the terrestrial biodiversity and the biggest fish diversity in the world, with an extraordinary variety of species, some endemic, others endangered and others still unknown (World Bank, 2019).



Fig. 1: Map of the Amazon, own illustration

The Amazon Rainforest expands across the territory of nine countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela (BBC, 2020). In terms of territory, 43% of Colombia's territory belongs to the Amazonas region, while Colombia has only a 7,94% of the whole Amazonas, occupying the third place behind Brazil and Peru (Charity et al., 2016). The Amazon region located in Colombia is considered one of the most diverse regions within the Amazon rainforest. The country has 10% of the world's terrestrial biological diversity and according to the *Herbario Amazonico Colombiano* (Sinchi, n.d.) there are approximately 100.000 vascular and non-vascular plants that represent 8.200 species, 1625 species of useful plants, 96 endangered and 198 endemic. It also hosts 1860 species of birds, 764 of amphibians, 469 of mammals and 586 of reptiles positioning Colombia in the top 4 countries with the highest biodiversity in the world (IAvH, MMA, DNP, 2012).



## 2.2 Environmental and Social Issues in the Colombian Amazon Region

Tropical forests are important to regulate the local and regional climate as tree biomass stores carbon through photosynthesis. Just the Amazon ecosystem contains 40% of the world's remaining tropical forest (Hubbell et al., 2006), which has been proven to function as an important carbon sink in the recent decades (Brienen et al. 2015; Hubau et al. 2020; Phillips et al. 2017e). However, climate change and increased deforestation have been shown to contribute promote to ecosystem stress, increased forest fire occurrence and higher carbon emissions, leading to the decline of the Amazons extractive and storing capacity (ibid.).

The Colombian Amazon region, similar to the rest of the Amazonas, is facing a tremendous deforestation threat. This problem is not only of interest to the countries that surround the rainforest, there has also been a global interest in preserving this area, shown throughout the different national and international organizations and initiatives supporting the protection of the area. However, it is estimated that deforestation in the Colombian Amazon region has contributed to 41% loss of the total loss of the Amazonas Forest from 2001-2017 (Hettler, 2017). In 2017, deforestation rates increased dramatically, despite decades of warnings and work towards protecting the Colombian Amazonas region. As such, the “Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project” (MAAP) reported an increase of deforestation by 71 percent between 2016 (71,700 hectares) and 2017 (122,800 hectares) (Finer and Mamani, 2020). From 2017 to 2020, at least 500,000 hectares, the size of almost 400,000 football fields, were lodged in the Colombian Amazon region (ibid.). However, some experts such as Rodrigo Botero, Director of the Foundation for Conservation and Sustainable Development (FCDS), are suggesting even higher figures, estimating 200,000 hectares of forest loss in 2018 alone (Semana, 2019). While extensive protected areas and indigenous reserves cover approximately 74% of the Colombian Amazon region, intensifying and sporadic deforestation is also moving towards those areas (ibid.).

While deforestation appears to be the main problem of the Colombian Amazon region, it is indeed a consequence of the social and environmental problems. There are several main drivers of deforestation in the area, such as the expansion of agriculture and livestock, illicit crops, migration, displacement and resettling of population, energy and roads infrastructure expansion, illegal mining, removal and extraction of timber, new oil exploration sites, and wildfires (Finer and Mamani, 2018). According to MAAP, cattle ranching is one of the primary drivers in the deforestation hotspots like Caquetá and Putumayo (ibid.). However, some organisations working in the area argue that this analysis is imprecise, not recognising that the main problem in fact is land grabbing (Semana, 2019):

*“This does not correspond to the drivers of deforestation that we have been pointing out for several years in the Amazon. Land grabbing is the main deforestation dynamic, not agriculture and cattle ranching. I insist that the analysis has no depth or real field data, and the only thing it generates is a noise in the country.” (ibid. (author’s translation)).*

### Illicit crops

*The World Drug Report 2017* of the United Nations Organisation against Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) mentions that the illicit cultivation of coca in Colombia and Peru continues to be the highest globally (UNODC, 2017). Colombia supplies approximately 80% of the cocaine internationally, making the country its largest exporter in the world. The cocaine economy has been discussed as profiting armed insurgents as well as government officials (Saab et al., 2009).

The coca crop and cocaine production were taken up in the farming economy as a survival

strategy for farmers and despite being judged as a criminal act, the income generated allows families to live under better conditions and develop their social and economic role (Shute, 2020). Farmers who are more distant from transportation networks and market centers started seeing higher returns with the coca production in comparison with any legal agricultural product. This phenomenon is characteristic of coca areas, where the further and more remote the farmers are located, the more financial returns they achieve, in comparison to farmers working in licit commercial agriculture located closer to the main roads and market centers (UNODC-SIMCI, 2020).

While coca growers have presented alternatives to illicit crops, the Colombian state has responded with little socio-economic investments, but large fumigation campaigns and militarization of the Amazonas territory. Although considerable progress has been made, the military treatment given to a large socio-economical problem is still far from dismantling the narco-agriculture in the region (Ruiz, 2020; UNODC, 2011).

### **Extensive livestock farming**

According to MAAP, cattle ranching is one of the primary drivers of deforestation (Finer and Mamani, 2018). Figures from the cattle inventory of the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA) show that cattle herds in the Amazonas region have increased by 60% between 2016 and 2019 (650.000 heads of cattle). In the very same regions, around 300.000 hectares of forest have been lodged (Botero, 2020).

The proliferation of cattle is rooted in illegality as cattle ranching is the best instrument for land grabbing. Money from drug trafficking and investments on roads construction (legal, illegal and informal) help the activity to be profitable. With the powerful financial capital behind livestock farming that move the economy in the region there is a huge risk of deforestation driven by financial interests of the more powerful actors who own the land (ibid.).

### **Illicit Mining**

Illegal gold mining has been responsible for several environmental catastrophes in the Amazon including large deforestation and contamination of rivers in areas such as Caquetá and Putumayo (Malamud, 2018). The mercury used in the extraction of gold contaminates the main aquifers mantles of the indigenous communities and people living nearby (Phillips, 2018). The export market related to illegal gold mining has in recent years even exceeded the value of the cocaine market in Colombia (GIATC, 2016).

### **Conflict Groups**

The situation of armed groups and organized crime (drug trafficking) is complex in the Colombian Amazon region. The main difference between the two groups is that organized crime groups are motivated by generating financial profits while armed groups are motivated by creating political change (Berdal and Serrano, 2002). Colombia is known for having one of the longest and oldest guerrilla group in all of Latin America, known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). At the same time, a particularly extensive network of organized crime exists in Colombia, as it is one of the biggest drug exporters around the world (Rochlin, 2011).

The recent spike in forest loss is also a result of the power vacuum created after the signing of the 2016 Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and armed groups. When the territories previously occupied by FARC and the parallel state they created became unoccupied, new spaces were open for developing illegal activities such as mining, logging, agriculture and cattle grazing which provoked forest clearing. While these activities were



already present in the area, they were intensified after the peace agreement as the FARC had a central role in the definition of usage, planning and management of land in many remote areas of the Colombian Amazon region. Additionally, as forests are cleared, new actors are occupying and claiming the territories in expectation of an agricultural reform that was included in the peace agreement (Costa, 2020). High presence of conflict groups as the FARC dissidents, paramilitary forces, other guerrillas, and powerful landowners combined with a low state presence render the protection and conservation work of external actors difficult, and potentially limit income opportunities for local populations (Interfaith Rain Forest Initiative, 2019).

While the severity of the different factors outlined above varies across the specific regions of the Colombian Amazon region, they are in sum marginalizing the conservation of the forest and the living conditions of communities living in and around it. Against this difficult context, the recognition of Colombia's Amazon Forest as an "entity subject of rights" which grants forests legal protection and set the government responsible to protect it from deforestation, was remarkable political development (ibid.).

To understand the deforestation problem, the political situation, historicity of the territory, the social inequality, and the economic opportunities available in the area need to be analysed for each context, as they affect the social well-being of people in and around the rainforest. It is important to mention and further analyse the main social and environmental problems in the Colombian Amazon region as they build the context in which entrepreneurship develops and influences its capacity to offer solutions. This study provides an analysis of the status quo regarding the challenges of entrepreneurship in the Colombian Amazonas region and the internal and external factors that influence it. Finally, from the findings, some recommendations will be drawn on how to design and support programs that can help entrepreneurship to further develop in the region.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1. Amazon rainforest or amazon region?

Before talking about the Colombian Amazon, we need to understand how people in Colombia relate to the *Amazon* in their territory. This part is emphasized because the Amazonian territory is varied in terms of culture, biodiversity, productive systems, and beliefs (Pitre-Redondo et al., 2017). In Colombia one may refer to the Amazon as three different areas. The *Amazon Rainforest* refers to the whole ecosystem that involves the nine countries in South America: Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guyana (Ruiz and Valencia, 2007). The *Colombian Amazon region* politically covers the south part of Vichada, southeast of Meta and all the departments of Amazonas, Caquetá, Guainía, Guaviare, Putumayo y Vaupés (Salazar y Riaño, 2016). Finally, *Amazon* or *Amazonas* refers to the largest district in Colombia located in the southern part of the country (Colombian Government, 2020). For the geographical scope of this study, the political *Colombian Amazon region* was selected.

#### 3.2. Colonos, Indigenous Groups and Afrocolombians

It is necessary to know what kind of ethnic groups coexist in the habitat to understand their cultural practices, challenges, their relationship with the territory and their entrepreneurial practices (Chavez, 2002). It is possible to distinguish between three ethnic groups or populations that live in the Amazon region. These are the peasants or *colonos*, Afro-Colombians and indigenous groups (García et al., 2007). The ethnic groups that inhabit the Colombian Amazon region have cultural differences and traditions that may influence their entrepreneurial motivation as it will be further explored (Pitre-Redondo et al., 2017). The study “Diversidad cultural del sur de la Amazonia colombiana” by Humboldt Institute (García et al., 2007) describes these groups as:

- **Colonos:** The *colonos* are part of the peasant population who have migrated to Amazonian lands in search of a better life and resources. Previously, the arrival of the settlers was caused by the search for rubber, timber and skins. But in the mid-twentieth century this same ethnic group increased in the Amazon area since many peasants were expelled from the lands within the metropolitan areas given the political and economic conflicts within the country.
- **Afro-Colombians:** Afro-Colombians located in the Colombian Amazon region are mainly concentrated in the department of Putumayo, due to an oil installation project in the 1960s that caused a massive migration of this ethnic group from the department of Nariño in Colombia.
- **Indigenous groups:** Although official figures on the presence of indigenous groups recognized in the Colombian Amazon region exist, these may not be accurate since displacements have occurred in different areas of the Amazon rainforest or outside of it.

In Colombia the total population of the Amazon region is calculated to be around 968.000 inhabitants in 2005, which corresponds to 2.3% of the Colombian population. Caquetá and Putumayo comprise 75% of this population. However, there is expected to be a great difference between the census and the people actually living in the territory as many of them have never been registered (Banco de la República – Sucursal Cartagena, 2013).



Of the total population living in the Colombian Amazon region there are around 47.000 members of indigenous communities, who live in 183 self-governing reserves, the most numerous being *de Huitoto, Tukano, Arawak, Tikuna* and *Tupí* groups (SINIC, 2020). More than half of the Colombian Amazon region is legally managed by indigenous communities. The indigenous inhabitants have the right to use and manage the forests, benefit from its resources, and exclude outsiders, although commercial use of forest products requires government approval and the land remains state-owned (Salazar Cardona and Riaño Umbarila, 2016).

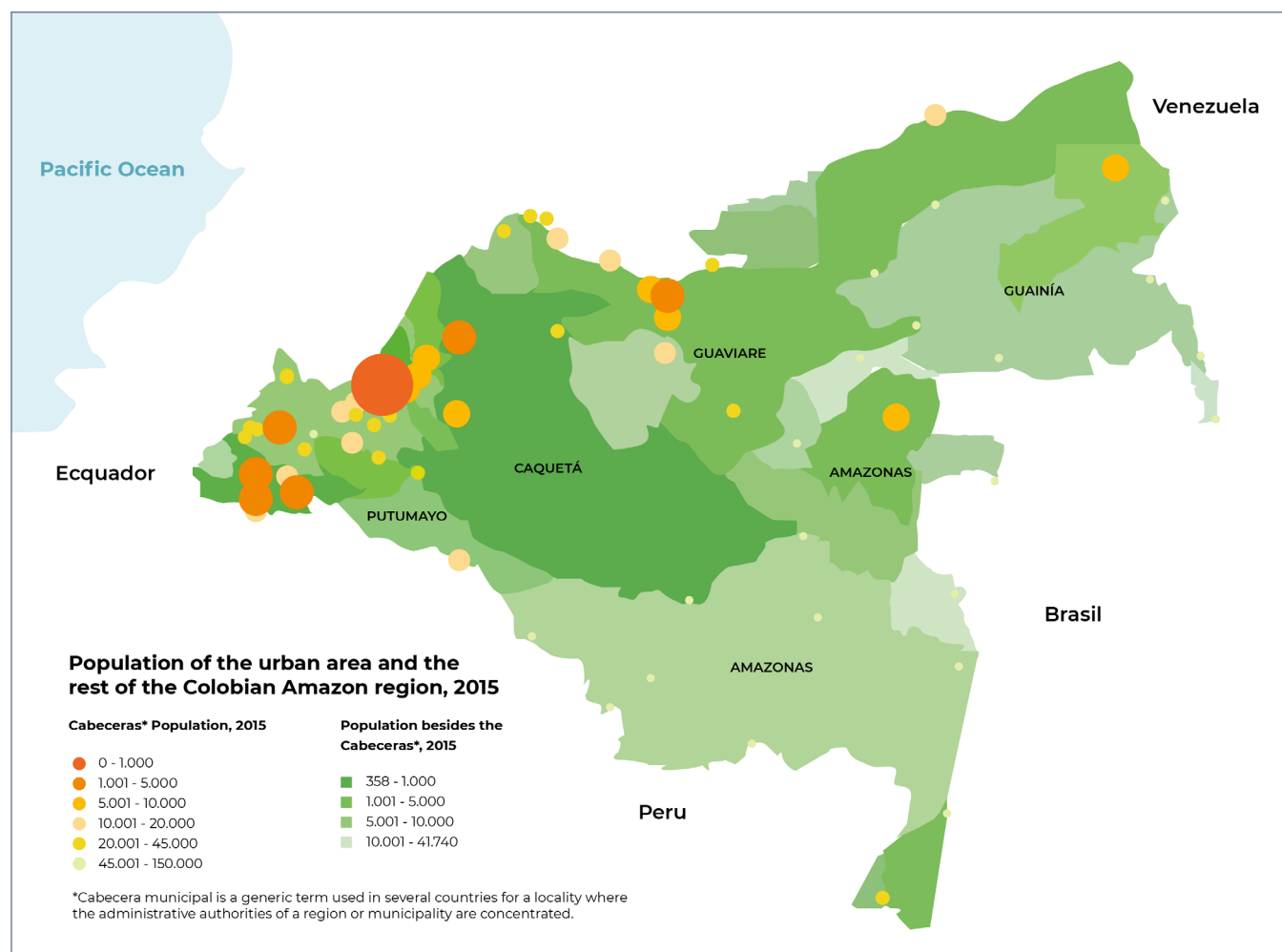


Figure 2. Population in the Colombian Amazon region, own illustration (source: Salazar Cardona and Riaño Umbarila, 2016)

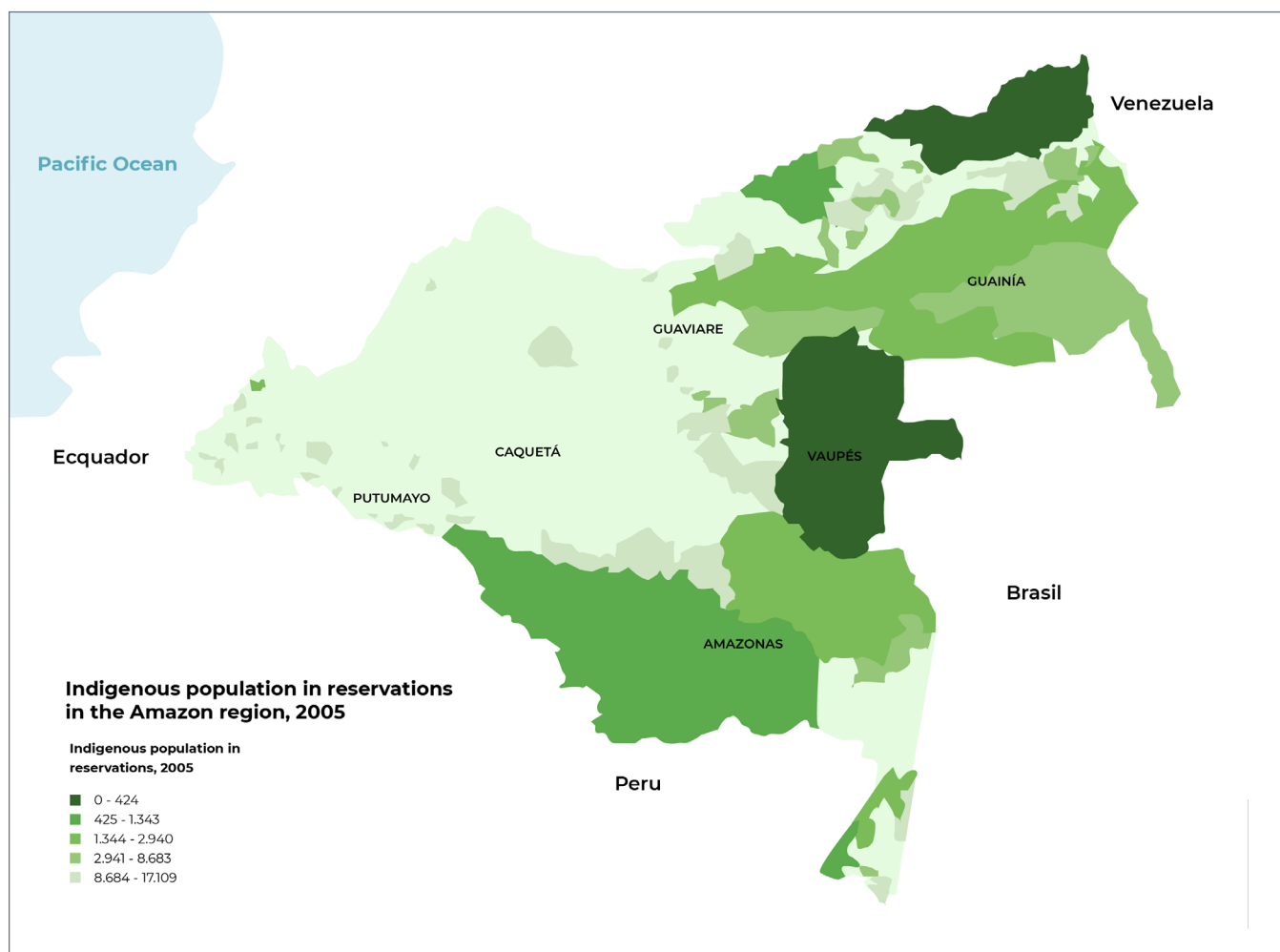


Figure 3. Indigenous population in the Colombian Amazon region, own illustration (source: Salazar Cardona and Riaño Umbarila, 2016)

### 3.3. Entrepreneurship in Colombia

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (Bosma and Donna, 2019), Colombia is an efficiency-driven economy, where economies of scale must be leveraged to drive development. Factors such as higher education, efficiency in goods and labour markets and sophisticated banking are required elements in this type of economy to boost new and established companies (ibid.). Entrepreneurship has been supported and encouraged by the Colombian government as a way of generating employment opportunities through small and medium-sized companies in the country (García, 2008).

In the study “The effect of commercial regulations in nascent and young entrepreneurship” Van Stel et al. (2007) mentions a categorization of entrepreneurs born out of necessity or due to opportunity. *Entrepreneurs by necessity* are engaged in entrepreneurship for simply gaining means of subsistence, while *opportunity entrepreneurs* are considered as people who have income and employment options, but deliberately decide to start a new enterprise. Another predominant difference between the two groups is that the *entrepreneur by opportunity* may be more open to take on risks in their business and they can be more willing to pivot and change if required, in contrast to the *entrepreneur by necessity* whose main motivation is to generate income and find economic alternatives to survive (García, 2008).

Data on entrepreneurship in Colombia based on the 2019 GEM report (Bosma and Donna, 2019) shows that Colombia is one of the two countries with the highest expectations of

growth based in entrepreneurial activity. The study also indicates that one of every five entrepreneurs is a family-based entrepreneur, meaning that they started and/or are managed by family members. The GEM Colombia 2017-2018 mentions that the entrepreneurial institutional context in Colombia is improving, and that society is perceiving entrepreneurship as a desirable career path as the supporting environment develops further. However, while many Colombians assure to possess the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to start their business, a perception of little opportunities in the environment remains. Furthermore, entrepreneurial activities remain focused on income generation instead of job creation goals (Bosma and Donna, 2019). Finally, in 2020, a law to promote entrepreneurship in Colombia was launched as a government effort to regulate the birth and growth of new businesses aimed at the consolidation and sustainability of small, medium enterprises (iNNpulsa Colombia, n.d.). The law aims to facilitate job creation and economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic through simplified processes, differential taxes, financial and investment assistance, education and support of the entrepreneurial skills (ibid.).

Regarding the entrepreneurial activity in the Amazonas region, there is little information available. The report “Mapping and Characterization of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem” by iNNpulsa Colombia (2016) shows some first results based on seven interviews with entrepreneurs in the Colombian southeast area, including the Amazonas department, Caquetá, Guaviare, Putumayo, and Vaupes. All these regions belong to the Colombian Amazon region, but exclude Guainía, the south part of Vichada and the southeast of Meta which are also included in the political definition of the Colombian Amazonas region. The demographic results show a lower participation of women in entrepreneurial activities and an age-range between 45-50 years. The start-ups in the area are mostly focused on product and service development and focused less on processes improvement. At a general level there is an adverse opinion regarding the sufficiency and accessibility of public resources in the area that support innovation and technical development. However, more than 50% of the interviews have a positive perception regarding the support specifically provided by the Colombian government for new and growing businesses (iNNpulsa Colombia, 2016).

### **3.4. Constraints of Entrepreneurship in Colombia**

In the study of “Constraints of Entrepreneurship in Colombia” García (2008) comments that the presence of economic, political, and sociocultural factors directly influences the development of any business. Some criteria such as start-up financing, governmental public policies or programs for entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial education, R&D transfer, business and professional infrastructure, domestic market opening, physical infrastructure, services, cultural and social norms are used by the GEM to evaluate the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the challenges and opportunities for each country (Higuera Ojito et al., 2019).

Particularly in Colombia García (2008) finds barriers relating to the time it takes to start a business, the market dominance of the large industries, the high costs of licences or certifications, lack of education related to business, lack of entrepreneurship networks, lack of advice and technical assistance, difficulty in acquiring the minimum capital to start a business and difficulty in accessing loans.



### 3.5. Framework of Analysis

After considering the causes that influence entrepreneurial activity, this study utilizes a framework of nine factors to analyse entrepreneurial activities in the Colombian Amazon region. The nine factors are divided in five external factors: geographic location, cultural behaviour, commercial infrastructure, support programs and education and training; and four internal factors: family security, financial growth, autonomy/independence and recognition.

The external factors are those factors that do not depend directly on the entrepreneur but could directly influence their motivation to develop new businesses (Tseng, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2002). The five factors that belong to this category were defined based on the entrepreneurial activity across the globe and Latin America (Bosma and Donna, 2019):

- **Geographic Location.** This factor gives a wide perspective of the social, economic, and environmental difficulties of being located in the Colombian Amazon region. From preliminary information obtained, the geographic location is an important factor to consider when designing a business model as the physical infrastructure, access, costs, availability of roads, water, electricity, communication and available space can play in favor or against the business.
- **Cultural Behavior.** It involves the vision towards entrepreneurial activities, as well as the social perception towards businessmen/businesswomen and the people involved in the business such as women or youth. The influence of social and cultural beliefs in the region are key to understanding how each culture present in the Amazonas region in Colombia relates with it and how the entrepreneurial activities are perceived differently between cultures.
- **Commercial Infrastructure.** This factor refers to the accessibility of professional services that the entrepreneurial activity requires such as consultants, accountants, lawyers, and the institutions that are part of the business and entrepreneurial support network. This factor is also related to the ways in which entrepreneurs can promote their products or services, to the characteristics of the market, the competitors and the barriers or support offered to enter the market.
- **Education and Training.** This factor refers to the training and education available to starting or managing small, or growing businesses. This factor also includes the type of programs available for entrepreneurs in the Colombian Amazon region. We will expect to know the quality, relevance, and depth of such education and training.
- **Support Programs.** Is related to the support offered by the government, private institutions, or international cooperation to assist new and growing ventures. This factor also includes the availability of financial resources including subsidies, public grants, investment market, traditional bank, credits, and micro-credits as risk capital to support new and growing businesses in the Colombian Amazon region.

Concerning internal factors, there are four factors linked to the personal motivation of entrepreneurs that largely influence the entrepreneurial activity (Shane et al., 2003). The internal factors were defined based on existing research by Shane et al. (2003), while taking into consideration the Locke version of self- set goal and self- efficacy (Locke & Latham, 1990) and the paper “Identifying Motivational Factors Impacting Entrepreneurship” (Javalgi et al., 2018), where it is stated that the drivers of an entrepreneur may vary depending on their goals, achievements and ambitions which are also directly related to the focus of the business, the level of complexity or formality of the business and the efficiency of the operations (Bandura, 1997). These factors are: family security, financial growth, autonomy/independence and recognition.

- **Family Security.** As mentioned previously, Colombia has a large portion of entrepreneurs that conduct family-business. The family can play an important role in the business decisions the entrepreneur takes, but family can also be actively involved in the business as labor or business partners.
- **Financial Growth.** This factor is related to the financial needs of the entrepreneurs but also to their personal and business financial goals. The financial security and the level of risk the entrepreneur is willing to take could be decisive when making decisions for the business.
- **Recognition.** It is linked to the self-realisation of the entrepreneur and the need for achievement. This factor is one of the main influences on the entrepreneur's decision-making when working on their business. Internal motivation can be linked to the personal achievements and recognition of each entrepreneur.
- **Autonomy/Independence.** This factor is related to the desire for independence that comes with the idea of being an entrepreneur. This point refers to the freedom that the entrepreneurs feel when managing their time and activities in comparison to being an employee, as well as the entrepreneur's ability to act on their own and make decisions based on their personal and work life.

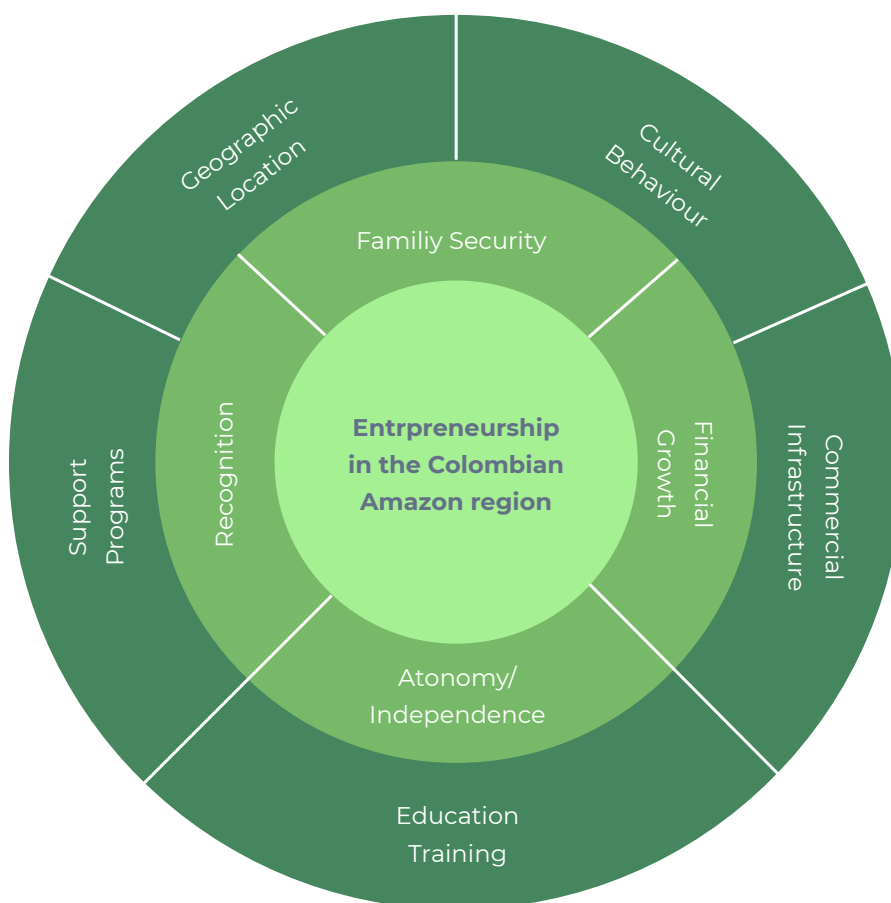


Figure 4. Internal and External Factors, Theoretical Framework Graph, own illustration

## 4. Methodology

To answer the research question of this study, primary data was obtained through semi-structured qualitative interviews. Secondary data on entrepreneurship in developing countries was collected to support, analyse, and compare primary data. The semi-structured interview method provides a structure of the topics to discuss during the interview but gives the interviewer freedom to express him/herself freely during the interview and helps the researcher to develop a more systematic understanding of the topic (Cohen, 2006). In this analysis, 13 interviews were conducted with an average duration of one hour. The interviews were conducted via online meetings and via phone calls due to the large geographical scope of the study and the global pandemic outbreak of COVID-19. While all the interviews were conducted successfully, the communication was challenging as some of the entrepreneurs and the organizations are in low connectivity areas. Additionally, due to the COVID-19 health contingency many of the indigenous communities underwent isolation for their own protection. As a result of lacking communication infrastructure in the location of these communities, opportunities for interviews were limited.

The interviewees were comprised of two different groups: Local entrepreneurs and organizations supporting the entrepreneurship ecosystem building in the Amazonas region.

1. The local entrepreneurs provided primary data from their perceptions and experiences regarding challenges faced when implementing a business in the Colombian Amazon region. The entrepreneurs selected as part of the study are from different ethnic groups and come from different parts of the country, but their entrepreneurial activity is developed in the Colombian Amazon region and involves its inhabitants.
2. The organizations interviewed were private and public organizations with social and environmental projects in the Colombian Amazonas region. This group provided a broader perspective regarding the ecosystem and the programs of support for the entrepreneurs. They also outlined challenges that the entrepreneurs are facing, and the cultural traits and customs that influence entrepreneurial activities in the region.

This section describes the businesses and the organizations that were interviewed. This helps us to have a general context and understand better the entrepreneurial field in the Colombian Amazon region. The interviewees were selected based on their experience and the impact of their businesses.

### **Julio Rozo, Amazonía Emprende**

The main objective of Amazonía Emprende is to stop deforestation in the Colombian Amazon region through training methodologies, business incubation and generation of commercial chains to strengthen local green business entrepreneurship. The social business is located a few minutes from Florencia-Caquetá within the Colombian Amazon region. Apart from strengthening local businesses with their methodologies, they believe in a model of „tourism with purpose” to strengthen businesses and combat deforestation. This organization has strategic allies from the public, private and academic sectors of national and international level that help to potentiate a green marketing model to make visible the entrepreneurial projects in the territory and the conservation of the area (Amazonía Emprende, 2020).

### **Diana Mejia, UNDP Colombia**

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is a global network that promotes



collaboration, resources and technical knowledge between key organizations and nations to eradicate poverty while protecting the environment. UNDP's focus is set on three main challenges to address the development in countries: 1. eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, 2. accelerating structural transformations for sustainable development, and 3. building resilience to crises and shocks (UNDP, 2020). Diana is a specialist in biodiversity production chains at UNDP Colombia and works in the sustainable development area, which conduct the entire portfolio of environmental projects. One emblematic project of UNDP Colombia is "Amazonia Sostenible para la Paz", which seeks to improve connectivity and biodiversity conservation by strengthening local institutions and organizations. The project is working in the Colombian Amazon region districts of Caquetá, Putumayo and Amazonas (Corpoamazonia, 2018).

### **Alejandro Calderon, Mutual Empathy**

Alejandro is the co-founder of Mutual Empathy; this organization designs strategic collaborations to create alliances and bring ideas into impact projects around climate change and circular economy. "Looking for the Master" is one of the projects focused in empowering and improving lives of indigenous communities through a sustainable and ethical fashion line collaborating with an established Colombian fashion designer during the last four years (Carmen Busquets, 2019). In 2019, Mutual Empatahy developed a fashion line with the Wayuú community, that was launched in the Latin-America Fashion Summit in Cartagena, Colombia. All the projects of the organization are based on a blended finance strategy, this means that public sector financing like non-reimbursable grants or small grants from the Green Economy Financing Facility (GEFF) is used to stimulate additional investment to generate economic growth and create jobs in the Colombian indigenous communities (Lars, 2019). The next step for Looking for the Master project is to work with the indigenous communities of Ocaina and Cubeo located in the Colombian Amazon rainforest for the next "Small Grant Program" of GEFF and UNDP.

### **Cecilia Duque, Colombian Craftwork Consultant**

Cecilia Duque is the founder of the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions and former president of the Colombian Museums Association. She led the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions for more than 16 years, that same number of years she worked in Artesanías de Colombia. She has a very broad knowledge in indigenous product development, organization and culture of indigenous communities in Colombia, from their ancestral wisdom to the way they coexist in community. She has focused on research projects that have led to publishing two books: *Maestros del Arte Popular Colombiano*, and *Lenguaje Creativo de Etnias indígenas de Colombia* published by Grupo Sura. She has also led the projects "Memoria y Creatividad: la Empresa Indígena", and "Sabiduría Ancestral Indígena", both sponsored by Fundación Sura (Concordia, 2020). In that respect Cecilia has worked with many indigenous groups in the Colombian Amazonas region.

### **Diana Lozano, OPIAC**

Diana works with indigenous communities in the Amazon through the National Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon (OPIAC). They have a political training school, through which they seek to preserve indigenous traditions and strengthen the skills and knowledge of young people to become leaders of the Colombian Amazon region. She is also involved in a project to strengthen women entrepreneurship in the Colombian Amazon region through the National Meeting of Indigenous Women. For this event, indigenous

women from different areas of Colombia come together in Bogotá to show their enterprises and sell their crafts. The last event was held in November 2018 and they hope to organize a new one once the world health contingency has passed.

### **Felipe Barney, WWF**

Felipe is part of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Colombia. WWF offices are located in Mocoa, Putumayo within the Colombian Amazon region. They have worked for more than 10 years in conservation and restoration work with indigenous communities and peasant communities, as well as in the creation of sustainable production systems. Currently WWF is also working on four projects to increase income of small agricultural producers. One of the projects is located about two hours from Leticia (capital of the Amazonas department in Colombia) in the Lagos de Tarapoto wetland complex contemplated within the Ramsar declaration<sup>1</sup>. The WWF was part of the process for the conservation of pink dolphins in the area that has become a tourist attraction in Leticia. WWF trains indigenous communities in the control of entrances and exits of this natural complex as well as its adequate protection for sustainability.

### **Antonio Loboguerrero, Fundación Etnollano**

Fundación Etnollano is a non-profit organization which mission is to support indigenous people to undertake initiatives based on their own identity and territory, promoting decision-making and access to information, with a focus on gender and linguistic strengthening. Fundación Etnollano's work is coordinated with local and national institutions, seeking to generate sustainable processes (Fundacion Etnollano, 2020). Antonio is the current executive director of the organization and during his tenure he seeks to promote the sustainability of the Colombian Amazon region through social welfare of indigenous communities. Fundación Etnollano works mainly in the indigenous reservations of the Orinoquía and eastern Colombian Amazon region. The work area covers 4,843,900 hectares, and an estimated population of 55,000 indigenous people of about 20 ethnic groups.

### **Adriana Bueno, Fundación Habitat Sur**

Adriana is the founder of Habitat Sur, a non-profit organization that seeks to preserve the enormous social, cultural and ecological capital of the Colombian Amazon region through the creation of cultural spaces where traditional, academic and empirical knowledge are exchanged as well as the promotion of more sustainable practices for life in the jungle (Habitat Sur, 2020). Habitat Sur focuses on cultural, environmental and community development initiatives. As part of their activities in the organization, they promote sustainable tourism through access to quality resources and cultural spaces for residents and visitors of the Amazon.

### **Julian Burgos, Expedición Roots**

Julian is a Colombian entrepreneur from Bogotá and holds a degree in industrial engineering from Javeriana University. His organization is dedicated to the creation of nature tourism programs in areas of difficult access such as the Colombian Amazon region. The project started in Leticia city 12 years ago; the capital of the Amazon district in Colombia. He works with local and indigenous communities around Colombia. In all the expeditions that his business

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<sup>1</sup> The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

carries out, both locals and tourists are made aware of ecological issues, environmental conservation and sustainable development. One of the main objectives of the business is the protection and safeguarding of local cultures and their traditions, either: indigenous, *colons* or Afro descendants. During the tours, Expedición Roots carries out activities that have an economic and social benefit over local communities as well as to support new local enterprises.

### **Jhon Guerrero, Amazonia Vital (AMAVIT)**

Jhon is a Colombian social business entrepreneur from Puerto Asís, his business was founded five years ago in the district of Putumayo. The business is focused on the development and innovation of natural products based on Amazonian fruits and non-timber forest crops. The business works through a direct compensation scheme between his business and local producers in the Colombian Amazon region. This scheme guarantees fair payment of each harvest and 50% of the profits derived from the sales of the final product going to the producers. The local producers are indigenous communities, peasants' organizations, women heads of households and social organizations in general. The main objectives of this business are to generate and improve economic income for the communities that are in the Colombian Amazon region and to promote the exotic edible crops from the region that are not widely known. The business currently has two productive areas in Puerto Asís and Calamar, where pulps, energy bars and dehydrated fruits are produced. The medium-term plan is to create another production line for natural oils and build three new production plants in Puerto Inírida, Macarena and Llanos de Yari.

### **Diogenes “Hibuña”, Ají & Sacha Inchi Project.**

Diogenes is a local entrepreneur from the *Huitoto* indigenous community located inside the Colombian Amazon rainforest in the Putumayo district. His business focuses on the creation of natural products such as chili and *sacha inchi*. These products are fruits of the Amazon rainforest and are used as condiments in the culinary sector. Diogenes transforms the Chili into powder and the *sacha inchi* into oil to later pack them and sell them. His productive area is based in the Amazon jungle in the Putumayo district, a short distance from the community where he is from. The business has been producing this type of organic food condiments for over three years and is run by him and his family. The production capacity in both of his products is between 14-15 kilograms every 15 days.

### **Lorena Gomez, IN-Spire**

The objective of IN-Spire is to recover and maintain ancestral knowledge and wisdom through sustainable tourism. This business also aims to work with mental health and spiritual growth through the trips organized by IN-Spire. Lorena has worked with different indigenous communities around the Colombian Amazon on governance, traditional medicine, and education specifically in the Amazon regions of Caquetá, Vaupes, Putumayo (Mocoa specifically), Leticia and around San Jose de Guaviare. She also worked in the Organization of Amazonian Communities. With all the aforementioned, she has experience and knowledge of the behavior of the Amazonian indigenous communities from an internal but also external vision of the communities.

### **Eneido Fuentes, Sport Fishing Project**

Eneido is an entrepreneur from the Piaroa ethnic group, located in the municipality of Cu-



maribo in the department of Vichada in the Mataven jungle. Through sport fishing and sustainable tourism the organization seeks to foster exchange with visitors and tourists, as well as to improve the organization and sustainability of the community. With this business, he and his community want to become a well-known indigenous tour operators that transfers indigenous knowledge to the new generation.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. External Factors

#### Geographic Location

Logistics play a very important role when it comes to realising business in the Colombian Amazon region. One of the issues to highlight is the logistical difficulties due to the lack or precarious conditions of roads and infrastructure and the high transportation costs. As such, around 22% of the final price of an agricultural product in Colombia is destined to the logistic and transportation cost in areas that are well connected to the markets. **The logistics cost of transferring a product from the Amazon rainforest to the consumer's table is about 35-40%**, which means that the cost of an Amazonian product is at least 15% more expensive than any other agricultural product in Colombia.

In the Colombian Amazonas region, multimodal transport alternatives are available and further development of alternative connections between cities and regions have been developed. The development of the infrastructure and alternative transport means have been partially propelled by the illegal economies, that have found alternatives to transport motivated by the great profits.

To address the logistics issue, the government aims to promote infrastructure development in the Colombian Amazon region. As such, the construction and improvement of roads is planned, but comes at an environmental cost as forest needs to be cleared, contributing to deforestation.

While river-based transportation could avoid deforestation, it depends highly on the weather conditions which makes it less reliable than roads. Air transportation does exist, however due to high prices of flights, it poses only a limited option for entrepreneurs in the Colombian Amazon region.

**Drug trafficking groups and armed groups are another factor that hinder access to the Colombian Amazon region, as they control productive territories.** It was found that some people cannot access certain areas as armed groups are in the territory and the situation can be volatile and represent a danger for those legally working in the territory.

Finally, the communication infrastructure within the Colombian Amazon region is a very latent problem that all interviewees commented on. The poor telephone and internet networks negatively affect the efficiency of many business processes, and entrepreneurs, depending on their location, regularly travel to nearby cities to reach connectivity. Thus, **there is a clear need for improved communication infrastructure to allow entrepreneurs better access to market information and coordination with suppliers and staff among other things.**

#### Cultural Behavior

As mentioned above, there are different cultures who inhabit the Amazonas region in Colombia. The distinction is made as they relate differently with the natural resources and the place, they live in. While it is known that most of the indigenous communities keep a sustainable and balanced relationship with the environment and its natural resources, the *colonos* who came from other districts and regions to the Colombian Amazon region, have brought a more extractive concept of the natural resources. The *colonos* arrived in the Amazon rainforest at the beginning of the 1920's, but in the 70's the migration wave intensified. This popu-

lation brought political, productive, and religious differences into the Colombian Amazon region. The exotic mix of western and indigenous cultures in the same area has prevented a homogeneous identity from being created and maintained in the territory, mainly in the Amazonian foothills, where the main center of urban development and population settlements of the Colombian Amazon region are located.

During the interviews, several references to the idea of “living the moment” were mentioned specially when referring to the lack of saving culture that might affect the continuity of businesses. An example of this is that after a significant sale is made, certain communities in the region hold parties for the entire community to celebrate together and as such spend the profits from that sale.

When working with people inhabiting the Colombian Amazon region, the distinctions about the different indigenous cultures and the *colonos* should be understood and put into consideration, especially when referring to their culture, behaviour and cosmological beliefs. The perception of time as life itself could be understood as a cyclical or linear path, which creates different perceptions of how to treat time. While this might sound irrelevant to the development programs that support entrepreneurial activities in the communities, in fact, it affects the way communities work and get involved, as well as their progress within the projects. These differences on the understanding of life and time may not match the intervention timelines planned by the organizations.

Another example is related specifically to the definition of “entrepreneur” which in many indigenous communities is not a widely known word. While the concept of establishing a commercial activity for personal benefits is known, it is not positively perceived by the community. *Their self-recognition as a community also influences the indigenous communities’ definition of businesses, which is more aligned with the definition of social businesses (Yunus and Weber, 2010) than traditional for-profit ones.* The indigenous enterprise is seen as a commercial activity carried out with externals as a way to obtain benefits for the community. The activities carried out are also often environmentally sustainable, due to a strong awareness of the risks of the extraction of natural resources prevails.

While there are families or communities engaging in productive activities that, with the support of organisations such as Artesanías de Colombia, have managed to find a market for their products, it is important to remember that for many of the indigenous communities what in the cities is called *arts and craft* is an occupation or *oficio* in Spanish that allow the social group to develop economically and culturally as part of their community. These differences are key to understanding how indigenous people work and the concepts under which they do it, what motivates them and why. The western concepts of *extraction* as an unbalanced relationship with the nature and *efficiency* as creating greater outputs to maximize personal wealth clashes with the indigenous beliefs or cultural practices. These differences should be considered when choosing the language and narrative to present new projects to be worked with the indigenous communities, as what in the western world is seen as positive, can be negative and rejected by the community.

Within this factor we can highlight the prevalence of gender inequality among indigenous and *colonos* in the region. As the differences between indigenous people and *colonos* are quite pronounced, the gender roles and the position of women roles also vary from group to group. The women role in the indigenous community is highly influenced by the cosmogony, the equilibrium and complementary relationships of the world conception indigenous people have. Historically, the participation of women including indigenous women has been overshadowed, especially when referring to decisions about community development. The indigenous women’s role has been mostly related with the traditional activities as *givers of*

*life and cares* for which their work has been associated with the protection of tradition and culture within the household. Activities such as caring for *la chagra*<sup>2</sup>, the community co-oking space, the medicine and knitting (arts and crafts) have been delegated to the women. In the last years the indigenous women have fought for higher participation in the political, economic and educational domain, which has led them to organize themselves, become community leaders that defend the territory as well as to occupy higher positions within the organizations. Finally, while a shift of traditional gender roles has commenced, there is still a great path to follow to avoid retaliation when taking important roles within the community and the sexual violence, which was not recognised as a problem before.

As indigenous people have been historically neglected, there are high levels of mistrust on different cultures and the way they are perceived by others. As will be further explained in the following factor, the over-intervention and lack of tangible and present results, in addition to the cultural differences and the threat over their territory explains partially the skepticism to work with outsiders.

As technology and infrastructure increases connectivity of remote places, the representation of the western world has put a toll on indigenous people, especially youth who cannot afford buy goods and reach the social status that comes with it. This situation has led to many youths leaving the territory in search of new opportunities creating a big generational gap within the communities in the Colombian Amazon region and risking the loss of ancestral knowledge passed from generation to generation. This has also unleashed a problem of high suicide rates among young people that needs to be further explored and put into consideration when designing support programs for young indigenous people.

## Education and Training

During the interview process, most of the interviewees agreed that increasing the capacities of local entrepreneurs is essential to achieve disruptive change in the generation of new businesses in the Colombian Amazon region. *There is a need for financial education focused on personal savings practices, which most of the communities within the Colombian Amazon region do not employ. Furthermore, a need to strengthen business skills in general was emphasised in the interviews.*

Today the reality of the situation is that entrepreneurs and the communities where sustainable development projects are carried out are over-saturated with training instruments. What fails in these training instruments is that they are not accompanied by networking or marketing exercises that allows the entrepreneur to generate more income while learning. This point was highlighted several times since the entrepreneurs are not motivated to learn when there is a latent concern to generate income to survive.

Another important factor to consider is that older adults of remote communities had little or no access to formal education, compared to the youth of these communities. That is why when a project is implemented within communities the understanding may vary according to the knowledge of the people and the previous experiences in other support programs. As mentioned before, *many communities have received support that has been insufficient, and the impacts or benefits have rapidly vanished or never arrived.* This sort of experiences causes a loss of trust in already vulnerable communities that have become more careful and sceptical to support offered. In contrast, some other players in the territory, have learned how to leverage these opportunities and have become experts on taking upon projects for their

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<sup>2</sup> Source of food, integral system and foundation of life. Although the *chagra* is a space provided by the indigenous communities for cultivation, its value is not limited to its function of providing food, but also to its function as a source of food (Gaia Amazonas, 2019).



territory and receiving support from different entities, hoarding the few support that arrives to the territory to benefit the communities and sometimes even themselves.

## Commercial Infrastructure

The main productive systems in the Colombian Amazon region such as tourism and the commercial cultivation of Amazonian fruits require certifications to operate and to be commercialized (MINCIT, 2020). These processes are quite complex, expensive, and bureaucratic. Due to the lack of knowledge about certification processes as well as budgetary constraints, many entrepreneurs work informally which limits their access to bigger markets.

The exotic crops of the Amazonas, such as *acai*, *sacha inchi*, *copoazú*, *camu camu* and *arazá* are not commonly consumed or known by Colombians living in the urban areas. This means that the current market size for these products is small and reduced to a niche of usually high-class end-consumers that are willing to pay the high price for the product or the natural properties and health benefits attributed to them. The Amazonian gastronomy is not broadly known. There are very few places that make this type of gastronomy known, among them are Mini-Mal and Wok in Bogotá. As there is not a high demand and logistic costs are high, exotic Amazonian products are not available broadly.

With the incoming influence of social media and online shopping online, there are some of the products that have found their way through digital channels with great emphasis on the concepts *from crop to table*. However, as mentioned before, due to the lack of infrastructure for communication and low levels of education and technology penetration in the area, these options are limited for people that have the means at reach. This situation usually brings new actors into the value chain that are interested in commercializing the products in the urban areas or who are even exporting them to different countries.

In many cases the customer demand is variable and cannot guarantee a stable income for the producers. The unstable demand, low levels of production, high transportation costs, low cargo volumes, and long transport duration place producers at a disadvantage. Peer-to-peer references and exposition to the market are key to strengthen the links with the national market, as well as increasing the efficiency and quality to not limit the producers to niche or luxury markets.

The second line of work that is growing in the area is the tourism industry. Tourism in the Colombian Amazon region is mostly concentrated in Leticia where the large hotel and tourism chains are located. However, as claimed by people working in this sector, many of the tours organized by the big players perpetuate a fake story around the Colombian forest and the indigenous people who inhabit the region as a cheap way of entertaining and amusing tourists. The large tourism industries offer tours to the Colombian Amazon region at a lower cost, but their practices are not sustainable as they modify cultural traditions, do not provide job opportunities to the community, and damage the environment. As a response to this, new smaller organizations have been doing a great job on promoting sustainable tourism in the region. However, the demand for this type of tourism comes mostly from foreigners with a different view of tourism and greater purchasing power. This has created the perception that natural and sustainable tourism is costly for nationals, shifting Colombians to choose cheaper ways of tourism or losing interest on visiting the Colombian Amazon region. Finally, some of the interviewees believe that strengthening the sustainable tourism in the region is a way of bringing the market to the producer and enhancing the links with the urban areas by creating experiences and knowledge about the Amazon and its people.

## Support Programs

Since 2014, green and sustainable businesses are a specific category of entrepreneurship framed in a public policy of the national green business plan of the Colombian Ministry of Environment. According to the Ministry of Environment in 2019 there were 1.414 green businesses contributing to the conservation of natural resources and while having a positive impact on the communities, most of which run by family organisations, peasants, and ethnic groups .

When interviewing the entrepreneurs about the support programs they knew or had received, they were not aware of many available support programs for their businesses. Most of their businesses have been promoted and supported by themselves without the support of any institution. As part of the study, some institutions that support entrepreneurs through grants and mentorship were interviewed.

Some of the organizations have received the GEFF “Small Grants Program” and have worked with specific local communities in the Colombian Amazon region. From the interviews it was found that the support provided is limited to certain areas or communities and that due to the limited resources, the training programs are sometimes limited in time. *Short interventions do not allow the entrepreneurs to learn and develop further their business with the offered support. As mentioned before, the entrepreneurs also struggle with training programs as they have little time to learn and their priority is to generate income.* As many entrepreneurs do not have a strong financial support, they bear all responsibility for the continuity of the business operations, as to generate income for them and their families.

*Additionally, there is evidence of low participation of communities, and especially women, in the formulation of productive projects that reach the region.* When the businesses arrive with technological package and methodology already designed and established, little room is left to participate in the common construction of the project and the use of the resources. These projects arrive with big budgets, but do not address building management and organisational skills on the local level. As such, already existing community projects often are not supported which, in turn, may compromise the long-term sustainability of interventions.

Finally, when the programs are organized on site, long distances between the places where the activities are held and the places where people live require an enormous effort to travel and participate in conversations and benefit from learnings. The limited accessibility of such programs is perceived by interviewees as a driving factor for low or inconsistent community participation. Additionally, with the disruption of COVID-19, many programs have been shifted to an online format. However, as the internet and phone infrastructure is precarious in many regions, people also need to travel to the regions where they have access to those services which limits the connectivity and development of the programs.

## External Factors: Key Findings

### Geographic Location

- Logistical challenges (high transport costs)
- Armed conflict may hinder accessibility
- Poor communication infrastructure

### Cultural Behaviour

- Lack of saving culture

- Self-perception as collective rather than an individualistic entrepreneur
- Gender inequality / traditional gender roles

### Education and Training

- Capacity building in business skills required
- Finance and sales trainings required

### Commercial Infrastructure

- Fruit crops and tourism as most promising sectors
- Communication and marketing of Amazonian products in urban centers limited
- Certifications for fruit markets as a barrier
- High product prices (due to high logistic costs) may limit demand
- Ecotourism perceived as a product for foreigners

### Support Programs

- Limited timeframe and geographical scope
- Lacking awareness of support programs
- Lack of immediate financial benefits limiting engagement in capacity building programs
- Lacking participatory methods in program design
- Lacking synergy between existing community efforts and new external interventions
- Limited accessibility of programs due to communication and mobility infrastructure

## 5.2. Internal Factors

### Family Security

The family perception and motivation to undertake a business is a factor that stood out in the interviews. This factor is very decisive not only within the region but in general in Colombia as many entrepreneurs tend to involve their families in their business. **The entrepreneurs tend to feel motivated to offer better quality of life not only for themselves but for their families and communities.** As mentioned before, the community support is clearly relevant within the indigenous communities, where the value brought needs to be spread among its members. Some of the entrepreneurs who were interviewed felt proud when mentioning the involvement of their community and their families in the business, but also expressed a commitment to share the value obtained through generating revenues with them. Living as a community may also cause inconveniences, as community members not benefiting from the created value may pressure entrepreneurs.

### Recognition

The sense of belonging is mentioned by interviewees when talking about recognition. Most of them develop these ventures within the Colombian Amazon region because they want to create awareness about the situation they live in, their communities and the need for them

to be recognized and accepted like any other citizen outside the Colombian Amazon region. It is also relevant to highlight a high sense of identity that is deeply intertwined with coming from the Colombian Amazon region. **Many of the entrepreneurs want the world to know about their communities, their cultures, their projects, their history, their origins, and their value.** In some of the interviews the motivation to develop the venture is to transfer community knowledge beyond the Colombian Amazon region, showing their knowledge of their territory, their good practices to manage resources sustainably and to show the new generations the value they have to offer.

## Financial Growth

The unemployment rate of the national total for the month of August 2020 was 16.8% (DANE, 2020). Populations outside the metropolitan area of Colombia resent the issue of unemployment more, so their concern for financial stability is one of the motivating factors to give continuity to businesses. More important than engaging in new sustainable techniques for their business, is their interest in generating enough income to survive. **Based on the interviews conducted, communities within the Colombian Amazon region claim to not require high purchasing power, but just basic financial security for themselves and their communities.** As such, financial sustainability is one of the biggest motivational factors in the entrepreneur's decision making.

## Autonomy / Independence

In this factor, entrepreneurs refer to the quality of time they invest in the business. When developing a business, all the interviewees agree that the amount of leisure time they have now is much less than before when they worked as an employee. On the other hand, the freedom to manage their time as they prefer weighs in as a benefit. This factor is linked to the internal factors of financial growth and recognition, since, as these increase, the „time availability“ factor decreases.

The conversations around this factor also centered around the aspect of how and by whom entrepreneurial decision making in indigenous communities is driven. **Many indigenous communities have a governance system based on leading figures in the community, on whom many decisions and activities depend.** As a result, some decisions or activities may be slowed down or performed at a different pace than external project planners may expect. In this regard it is essential to consider internal power dynamics of communities and gaining a prior understanding of main community stakeholders.

## Internal Factors - Key Findings

### Family Security

- Entrepreneurship as a collective effort
- Generated value to be shared within community

### Recognition

- Sense of belonging as a key factor in all decision making
- Positive recognition of indigenous identity as motivation



## Financial Growth

- Lack of employment opportunities driving *entrepreneurs by necessity*
- Financial stability

## Autonomy / Independence

- Personal freedom of time allocation
- Relevance of internal power dynamics of communities

## 5.3. Other Results

### Commercial activities

As part of the first results, three sectors were identified as options to generate income among the inhabitants of the Colombian Amazon region. As mentioned before, it is recognized that there are some additional legal income generation opportunities in the region such as cattle ranching and some illegal ones related to gold mining, cocaine crops and production and lodging, however, we would like to highlight the sustainable activities that were identified through the interviews:

- **Sustainable Tourism:** It is one of the most common commercial activities in the area and markets of the Colombian Amazon region through the creation of experiences and relationships. This sector helps to encourage visitors to try and learn about new products they could become consumers of when returning to their homes.
- **Handcrafts:** As mentioned by several interviewees, the production of crafts serves to reinforce ancestral practices and knowledge, but most of the time it is not handled as a main productive activity but rather a complementary activity to the activities of the daily communities.
- **Non-timber forest products (NTFPs):** NTFPs such as Amazonian fruits or *sacha inchi* are produced by many entrepreneurs in the Colombian Amazon region, posing a common source of income. In order to scale, transportation to urban areas and marketing, could enable increased income and employment generation for communities. At the same time, these products are often produced by applying ecological agro-forestry practices created with indigenous knowledge, which should be further supported.

### Indigenous territories in need of protection

Securing tenure for indigenous people has been linked to lower rates of forest loss, and to the sustainable use of timber and other forest products. Deforestation rates in *Resguardos Indígenas*, for example, were a remarkable ten times lower than in other areas of the Colombian Amazon region between 2000 and 2012 and without secure tenure on indigenous peoples' lands and forests, Colombia's CO2 emissions would have been 3 percent higher per year (Interfaith Rain Forest Initiative, 2019).

Although Colombia's laws recognize indigenous peoples' land rights, many indigenous territories remain unmapped and unregistered, and legal protections are not sufficient to prevent indigenous rights from being violated (ibid.). Even within recognized *Resguardos Indígenas*, pressures on forests are high. This situation is partially attributed to the high number

of armed actors and commercial groups that have entered the rainforest after the signing of the peace agreement. In addition, in many places such as Putumayo and Caquetá, oil drilling concessions overlap with established *Resguardos*, inviting conflict. As a result of such tensions, violence against indigenous forest peoples has increased. Between 2016 and October 2020, 840 male and 131 female social leaders and human rights defenders have been murdered of which 342 were farmers and 250 indigenous people. Around 70% (680 people) were killed as a result of land conflicts and protection of natural resources (Martínez, 2020). The guardians of Colombia's forests, those most competent at protecting this precious resource, are themselves in urgent need of protection.

## 6. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis contributes an improved understanding of entrepreneurship in the Colombian Amazon region. Through the application of a theoretical framework that captures a set of external and internal factors, the status quo as well as challenges and opportunities of entrepreneurship in the region have been scrutinized.

Entrepreneurship in Colombia poses a strong vehicle to drive economic growth, employment creation and poverty alleviation (Bosma and Kelley, 2019). At the same time, this study confirms that entrepreneurship support programs are critical to amplifying this process. A variety of actors, such as the government, NGOs, international aid agencies and private entrepreneurship support organizations (incubators, accelerators, etc.), are already engaged in entrepreneurship support activities. However, these efforts have historically focused on urban centers, with rural areas only receiving minimal support. One of these areas is the Colombian Amazon region, in which an abundance of entrepreneurs exists, but operate under a unique set of challenges.

Poor road and communication infrastructure put entrepreneurs from the Colombian Amazon region at a disadvantage. High logistic costs driving up product prices, limited opportunities to advertise to urban customers and lacking market information limit the marketability of products and services. As a result, the demand for Amazonian products and services is low due to limited accessibility or affordability for the average Colombian citizen.

In terms of commercial infrastructure, entrepreneurs who engage in fruit crop production and eco-tourism face complex issues of regulations (certifications), while bureaucracy in procedures and financing support further impinge on the expansion of Amazonian businesses to urban centers.

In respect to education and training the study found a general need for further capacity building among entrepreneurs from the Colombian Amazon region. While levels of education and entrepreneurial skills vary between groups and demographics, further trainings on business skills and personal saving practices are generally required. At the same time however, this research underscores a need for training programs to be accompanied by commercial strategies to generate economic and social well-being for the entrepreneur, as entrepreneurs from financially precarious backgrounds have been discouraged by trainings not yielding immediate economic benefits, or simply cannot afford to spend time on activities that do not immediately generate income.

Regarding the cultural and internal factors, the study found that entrepreneurs from the Colombian Amazon region often attribute higher importance to collective well-being than individual well-being. The self-perception as part of a collective rather than an individual in the western-capitalist sense is reflected in the strong involvement of family and the community in many businesses and entrepreneurial decision making. The findings also underscore the need for businesses to benefit the collective in order to be socially accepted in many communities in the Colombian Amazon region. Due to the lack of available data, the results cannot confirm that cultural beliefs could significantly affect the development of business in the Colombian Amazon region. However, the study recognizes the importance of a gaining a deep contextual understanding and considering the particularities of different groups in the area when designing and implementing entrepreneurship interventions.

Entrepreneurship support programs exist in the Colombian Amazon region. In fact, in some areas the study found an over-saturation of training instruments. However, based on this

research, such interventions often provide support for too short a timeframe, lack marketing and networking services, are perceived by entrepreneurs as lacking sufficient opportunities for community engagement and participation in the program design, and do not leverage potential synergies with already existing locally owned efforts. Furthermore, the study found a generally limited awareness among entrepreneurs regarding existing support opportunities.

It should be pointed out that the general representativeness of the results is limited by the small sample of interviewees. Thus, this study provides a broad overview of the challenges faced by entrepreneurs in Colombian Amazon region but does not explore at depth the particularities of cultural behavior and beliefs of specific groups within the territory. Future studies should also consider the gender gap that exists in entrepreneurship in the Colombian Amazon region. Despite the engagement of international institutions such as the UNDP promoting the participation of women in social entrepreneurship projects, the gender gap is still large.



## 7. Recommendations

Below are some recommendations that would facilitate working with and supporting entrepreneurs in the Colombian Amazon region, based on the findings outlined above.

### Community entrepreneurship / entrepreneurship concept

There is an opportunity to support indigenous communities through social business. While individualistic entrepreneurship or business activities are not always well-known or socially accepted, the social business concept appears to align better with the predominant values of some of the communities in the Colombian Amazon region. Existing indigenous entrepreneurship (*empresa indigena*) aligns with the *Social Business Type 2* definition in particular in terms of environmental sustainability and the practice of sharing benefits among the community. As most of the projects analysed in this study meet the criteria to be classified as social businesses, there is a great potential to develop and scale these solutions further.

### The Social Business Concept

Defined by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus, a social business is a business with a social mission at its core (Yunus et al., 2010). Thus, social businesses are dedicated to solving social and environmental challenges, while following a no loss, no dividend approach. A social business is following seven core principles:

1. The business objective will be to overcome poverty, or one or more problems (such as education, health, technology access, and environment) which threaten people and society; not profit maximization.
2. Financial and economic sustainability.
3. Investors get back their investment amount only. No dividend is given beyond investment money.
4. When investment is paid back, the company profit stays with the company for expansion and improvement.
5. Gender-sensitive and environmentally conscious.
6. Workforce receives market wages with better working conditions.
7. Do it with joy.

From its conceptualization, the *Social Business Type 2* has evolved. This type encompasses for-profit businesses that are owned by communities, and solve socio-environmental challenges through joint effort and shared profit (Yunus and Weber, 2010).

As mentioned throughout this study, support programs designed to support the development of the social business concept, require a human- and ethnic-centered approach that takes into consideration more elements outside the business model. These elements may include community dynamics and structures, the cosmogony in the case of the indigenous people, the role of the women as a social business leader, etc. As such, when working with indigenous communities, entrepreneurship programs should also consider a focus on collectively led businesses, rather than just individual entrepreneurs, as the collective is often the more common unit of self-identification than the individual.

In line with this, extensive community engagement is indispensable for the development

of long-term sustainable solutions as well as to guarantee the progress of the businesses without further external support. The facilitation of participation spaces in which the community takes decisions, and where the members are organized and heard when elaborating the organization guidelines could help to strengthen community linkages. A structured, organised and empowered community would constitute a good ground to strengthen local ownership, develop new social business ideas from the community and for the community, and support the progress of already existing entrepreneurial activities.

## Education and culture

When designing programs targeting communities in the Colombian Amazon, the levels of formal education and literacy need to be considered as they vary between communities and demographics in the area. As many people in the region have low levels of formal education, mentorship/training programs should adopt knowledge creation methods accordingly. Potential methods may include, for example, experiential learning as well as video and audio elements over writing and reading activities. Additionally, it is important to recognize the value of indigenous knowledge. As such, programs should be sensitive towards ancestral practices, engage in peer-to-peer approaches to foster knowledge exchange between western, indigenous and *colonos* groups and avoid neo-colonial tendencies.

Some entrepreneurs have already learned how to participate in project calls and have benefited from grants and government support through Territorially Focused Development Programmes (PDETs)<sup>3</sup> and international support to build sustainable businesses. However, accessing these opportunities often requires prior knowledge and experience. The entrepreneur must develop a managerial vision to navigate through the administrative process, while bearing in mind their business plan, their context their resources, objectives, and goals, to develop the business successfully. In this regard project management and business administration skills are elements that need to be built and taught through the supporting programs.

## Timing and length of programs

The time frame in which previous and current interventions offer support is often too short. Thus, this study recommends a more long-term engagement for future interventions, which will allow for a stronger understanding of local contextualities and can serve as a basis for more relevant program design that better addresses the needs and desires of communities. A longer-term engagement, besides early gains which will be discussed in the next section, is also critical for building trust of communities in programs. In that regard, for both, improved accountability of intervening organisations, and long-term program evaluation processes, a longer presence in the ecosystem would be beneficial. While these elements, have, based on the findings of this study, been sometimes neglected, they could improve the sustainability of interventions in the future.

Finally, as the low levels of infrastructure in communications and technology have made the connectivity with the territories more difficult, it is important for programs or projects to be flexible around the timing to meet and connect with the ones in the territory. As mentioned before, reaching connectivity in the area implies sometimes many hours of travelling and as going to the main centre is a common practice to buy things or meet peers, the meeting hours could be agreed to match their schedule. In this regard, strengthening digital skills and support to increase the connectivity is key to use these tools to offer long-term support throughout the program.

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<sup>3</sup> PDETs are a tool for planning and managing a broad rural development process that aims to transform the 170 municipalities (covering 16 subregions) most affected by the armed conflict.

## **Financial support through market connections**

People in these communities are interested in the economic security of their families first. The ones who have started commercial or economical activities see these activities as a way to generate income for basic consumption (food, health, water, etc.). Once those expenses are covered people may be more receptive to training and support to scale their business, as well as connecting with other markets. However, currently existing programs often cannot provide basic income for the entrepreneurs. Thus, programs should facilitate market connections for entrepreneurs, allowing them to obtain an income through the activities conducted as part of the program. At the same time, programs that generate such financial benefits early on would gain trust among beneficiaries, building a stronger basis for further implementation.

When it comes to financial education, not only for entrepreneurship, organisations should also provide training in personal finance, since education and cultural beliefs make it difficult for people in communities to have a saving culture in both, the personal and business domain. A need for this training was mentioned in several interviews and experiences, also emphasizing a need for trainings on financial planning for profit-generating businesses. For this point it would be important to delve on what people value most and tailor a financial savings education program that can help them to plan their lives forward and build towards it by the practice of saving money. Entrepreneurs recommend that it would be a good idea to implement personal finance training as part of entrepreneurship trainings.

## **Support on legal process and certifications**

Another very present issue in income generating activities within the Colombian Amazon region is the implementation of federal and national certifications such as Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) for businesses in the agriculture sector or the tourism service certification for those operating in the tourism sector. These businesses need national certifications to be able to operate as a company. Based on the findings of this study, there are currently no training programs which address certification issues. According to the entrepreneurs this is a process they would need to receive support to be able to scale their businesses. Additionally, to prove sustainability or social or environmental impact there are additional international certifications such as Carbon Trust Standard, B CORP and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). However, these are often costly and less relevant for many early-stage businesses.

## **Marketing**

The communication and narrative of the products and services in the Colombian Amazon should be linked to the recognition and preservation of their rich culture and environment. As described before, the Colombian Amazon region is not only rich in biodiversity but also rich in indigenous culture and ancestral knowledge, all of which are in need of conservation. By raising awareness and showing the value and importance of this territory, potential consumers can connect with the social and environmental value behind a brand or activity undertaken in the territory.

One example of an already utilized vehicle to market the Colombian Amazon region to people, is through sustainable tourism. This business model can help small producers, local entrepreneurs, and communities, to become recognized for and associated with their products and services by Colombian and international customers. This could contribute to an increa-

sed awareness of the environmental and social value of these communities, while creating a demand for their products and services.

### **Products and logistics**

As the costs of transportation is a challenge to overcome to make products from the Amazonas more affordable for Colombians, there are two different ways of tackling these challenges without considering the sustainable improvement of the road infrastructure. The first is to reduce the costs of transport by forming partnerships with producers of different products in the area, as well as with the business or the operators of the means of transport. The second option is to work on developing more value-added products within the Colombian Amazon region, so the share of transportation cost is reduced.

As part of the COVID-19 pandemic the virtualization and the e-commerce channels have gained even more importance. However, it represents a new challenge for the Colombian Amazon region, where the communication infrastructure is precarious. Today there is the possibility to reduce the intermediaries in the distribution channels by being part of different apps working on connecting producers with consumers directly. This opportunity creates a need to develop digital literacy in the most remote areas of the Colombian Amazon region, that connects people with the urban centres and new markets directly.

### **Substitution of illegal crops**

As difficult as this topic can be as it involves powerful illegal groups in the area, it is required to transform the whole economy of the sector to protect the territory and its inhabitants. In respect to entrepreneurship support interventions, a contribution could be made by fostering productivity in legal agricultural sectors, offering viable alternatives to local communities. However, security for the leaders of the protected areas and for people working on substituting illegal crops needs to be provided by the government to make the transformation possible.

Some proposals assure that it is necessary to promote a true rural reform and development in the region, this process being understood as a social, cultural, political, and economic progress accompanied by the transformation in the structure of land tenure located within the agricultural frontier (Ruiz, 2020).

The transformation of such a complicated territory also requires the support of companies and institutions operating in the area. Extended producer responsibility could be a good resource to map and understand which organizations are benefiting from the resources of the Amazonas so they can also take part in the solution to improve the conditions of people living in the area and ensure the sustainability of the forest. Finally, in this regard the community organization and their empowerment to demand good conditions and support from the different actors – private and public - in the territory is essential to keep accountability and build a sustainable economy in the territory.

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