

CANOPY BRIDGE

CATEGORY:

POLICY | RESEARCH | FIELD | CLIMATE | **BUSINESS**

LOCATION/SCALE:

Ecuador (National)

FOUNDER:

Marta Echavarría and colleagues

PERIOD:

2018 - now

IN A NUTSHELL

The Canopy Bridge on-line directory provides a free and easily accessible meeting place that allows buyers and sellers of sustainable crops and wild-harvested products to connect. By allowing users to create personalized profiles, highlighting their capabilities, stories and products, they are able to build relationships. Canopy Bridge works with a group of more than 25 chefs from Ecuador's best restaurants, indigenous communities and conservation NGOs. They provide a so far missing link in the value chain for fresh Amazon products and ingredients. The focus is on products grown by the Kichwa people in highly diversified *chakra* agroforestry production units and aquaculture *paiche*, an Amazon fish species produced by the Ai-Kofán people. Both production lines have substantial conservation benefits and culinary potential. In collaboration with their network, Canopy Bridge screens, identifies and incubates products and ingredients from the Amazon rainforest that were previously unknown. In addition, they

sensitize consumers and provide a way for producers to be able to sell their products in markets that value their effort and their cultural legacy. Canopy Bridge also provides customized sourcing services and information to clients, forming the personal link that spans the distances, both geographical and cultural, between local producers in the developing world and companies in global markets. By building the connections between local producers and chefs, they promote new products with culinary potential and are therefore driving revenues directly to communities, thus providing new incentives for conservation.

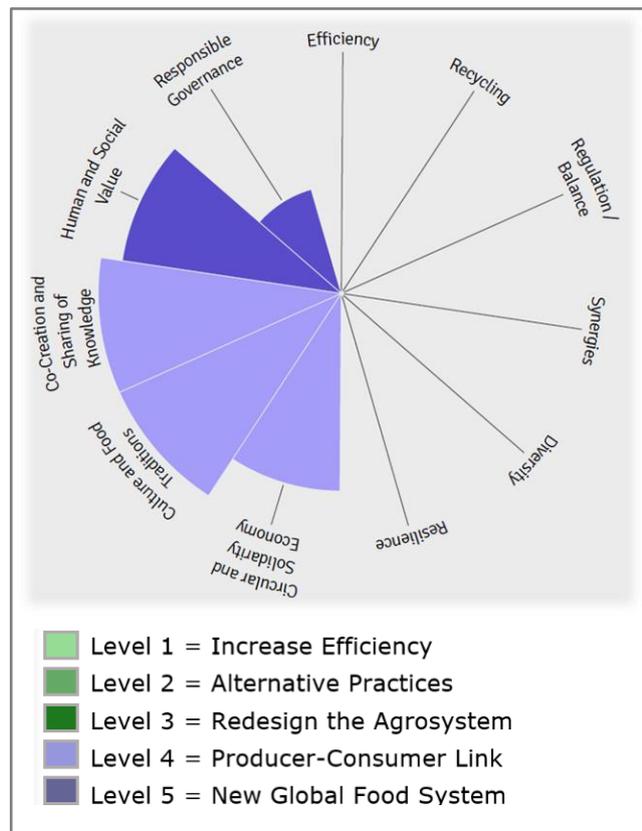


Figure: Assessment of Canopy Bridge on FAO Elements of Agroecology and Gliessman's five levels of food system change

CONTEXT

Covering just 0.2% of the Earth's surface, Ecuador is one of the most biologically diverse countries. Biodiversity in the Amazon lowlands is exceptionally rich, but also highly threatened. While the Amazon region comprises almost half of Ecuador's territory, its rich cultural and biological diversity is poorly known and undervalued in the country's centers of economic and political power. Indigenous peoples are stewards of 50% of the Ecuadorian Amazon, struggling

to maintain their territories, culture and livelihoods in the face of dramatic changes such as climate change and deforestation over the last 50 years.

OBJECTIVE

By connecting businesses, producer associations and community groups buying and selling food products, Canopy Bridge aims at contributing to improved livelihoods, social empowerment and a healthy ecosystem. Their main mission is to help these businesses and individuals thrive by bypassing unnecessary intermediaries and therefore making transactions and sourcing decisions as well as discovery and relationship building easy and transparent.

KEY INTERVENTIONS

FARM LEVEL:

- In contrast to extensive cattle ranches or oil palm plantations, the **fish farms of the Ai-Kofán community** provide significant revenues from relatively small areas, thus reducing pressure for deforestation
- By promoting a **variety of traditional chakra products**, Canopy Bridge does not only increase the social and environmental components but also give economic value to diversity rather than to single-crop solutions

REGIONAL/NATIONAL LEVEL:

- Contributed to new food movements by being part of gastronomic and cultural events and promoting targeted products on a national and international scale
- Founded the Cumari network in collaboration with other partners, in order to create a platform for shared learning, collaboration and promotion of Amazon products
- With seed grant funding by the Swift Foundation of USD 3'500, the implemented activities have already generated sales for USD 4'181 in 4 months of operation

LESSONS LEARNED/CHALLENGES

The mosaic of farms and forests of the Ai-Kofán and Kichwa as well as their landscape conservation are of global importance including multiple Amazonian protected areas. There is a clear potential to increase the volumes of sales and integrating additional producer groups living in or near the Amazon. Although these actions make sense from an economic perspective, it poses a major challenge not to sacrifice indigenous forests and farms including their biodiversity, food security and culture in order to meet an increasing demand and the need for additional income.

RELEVANT LINKS & REFERENCES

- Canopy Bridge Homepage
<https://canopybridge.com/>
- Ecuador: Feast à la Amazon
<https://bit.ly/31K6xTr>
- Forest Trends: Cumari Network
<https://bit.ly/2K0ZXlf>

