

**Feedback Report for Third Millennium Alliance:**

*Community Perceptions, Questions, and Ideas*

Prepared by Rebekah Dickens Environment &  
Community, M.A. in Social Science Humboldt State  
University

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## Executive Summary

It is clear that multiple factors propel deforestation and biodiversity loss, and that conservation efforts must be based on understanding the people behind these processes and what motivates their actions. Further, successful conservation efforts are increasingly based on the active participation of local communities (Fisher and Treg 2011; Perfecto and Vandermeer 2009).

Third Millennium Alliance is a non-profit conservation organization that seeks to protect a piece of the coastal Ecuadorian rainforest, and to encourage sustainable land management and development. The organization, based in the village of Camarones, seeks to understand local pressures on the forests and to involve local communities in its conservation efforts. Third Millennium Alliance works to protect the forest through their management of an ecological reserve, research station and biological corridors. Among other community development projects, the organization has constructed and manages a learning center, has established a coffee cooperative and a micro-forestry program, and holds educational workshops.

I worked with Third Millennium Alliance as an intern from late March to May of 2011 as part of my culminating experience in the Environment and Community M.A. program at Humboldt State University, where I am examining the political ecology of tropical rainforest conservation. My research explores the ongoing debate over the ethics and efficacy of tropical rainforest conservation strategies, with a focus on the value of small- scale agricultural approaches to conservation, and the potential of collaborative efforts between international nongovernmental organizations and farmers in this process.

At Third Millennium Alliance I carried out research intended to facilitate an exchange of communication between the organization and local residents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 residents of the rural town to: 1) better understand community perceptions of the organization, 2) provide feedback from locals regarding ongoing and potential conservation projects, and 3) answer or identify any questions that community members had regarding the organization and its ongoing projects. This qualitative research uses an action research methodology, depending on perceptions of and suggestions given by residents of Camarones, in order to articulate potential win- win projects that can come from these insights.

The interview questions focused on perceptions of Third Millennium Alliance, environmental changes over the last twenty and thirty years, residents aspirations for the future of Camarones, and ideas for specific projects. Nearly everyone interviewed expressed a positive opinion of the reserve, and many people considered the organization's role in the community as protecting the forest. The majority of residents reported changes in rainfall, water levels, and length of the winter over the last twenty or thirty years; several people talked about the increased difficulty of farming, saying there are more pests to contend with, and less rainfall. When asked what they thought caused environmental change, several responded that changes in rainfall were due to deforestation. Respondents also talked about a lack of employment opportunities, and some suggestions were made to increase tourism to the community in order to create jobs. Women expressed that they did not have outlets or opportunities to get together.

Nearly all residents had positive reactions to the idea of a learning center, and said they would like their children to learn English and have more opportunities. People

discussed the need for restoration activities, and ways to keep the river cleaner. Some in the lower community mentioned the need for educational programs about the negative impacts of defecating and using chemicals in the river. There was some confusion about the microforestry program, and many people did not understand the incentive structure. A community meeting on the subject may generate more interest in the program, as currently residents are not fully aware of the incentives.

This report provides insight into community perceptions of Third Millennium Alliance's role in the community, as well as insight into residents' aspirations for the community. While they receive input from, and work closely with some local residents, the organization falls somewhere between top-down models of conservation, and their participatory-based counterparts. The community does not have decision-making power in the organization, however they do have the power of influence and suggestion. Also, some residents benefit from employment, educational opportunities, and incentives given for participation in the microforestry program, while all residents benefit indirectly from ecosystem services provided by the protection of the forests. Drawing from the interviews, this report includes recommendations for achieving win-win solutions that foster community agency and support conservation goals. By recognizing common points of interest, the organization can better accommodate both community and ecological needs.

A number of residents expressed interest in being invited to the reserve, and emphasized a desire for more community cohesion. My opinion is that reunions could serve as a means to facilitate more awareness about Third Millennium Alliance's projects and goals, while simultaneously opening up areas for cooperation, and empowering community members to act toward their goals. The organization can maintain a focus on conservation, and facilitate increased agency among community members, by continuing to support efforts toward sustainable development and the creation of sustainable livelihoods. By viewing itself as a facilitator for grassroots activism, the organization can continue to focus on conservation, while supporting community endeavors for sustainable development, and fulfilling their mission of being, "but one arm of a larger movement that is in need of practitioners on the ground" (Third Millennium Alliance 2012). Support can come in the form of structured projects such as those currently underway, or providing access to facilities for community meetings.

This report includes an explanation of the context and setting of the community, a discussion of guiding philosophies and methods used in the research, and participants' responses to interview questions. Finally recommendations are provided based upon community input, relevant community-based conservation literature, and the stated goals of Third Millennium Alliance. In the recommendations section I have chosen to focus on the most common suggestions given by residents, and ideas for increasing participation in the micro-forestry program.

### *Acknowledgements*

I would like to express my gratitude to the Directors of Third Millennium Alliance –Isabel Davila, Jerry Toth, and Bryan Criswell, for providing the opportunity to be a small part of their work in Camarones. Thank you for your encouragement, and for taking the time and energy that was required in the creation of this feedback report. Many thanks are due as well to Betsy Vaca, for sharing your time, friendship and assistance, which proved to be a critical component of gathering community feedback. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to the community members of Camarones, who shared their thoughts and opinions openly, giving me a deeper understanding of the dynamics of conservation and development.

## ***An Introduction:***

### ***Third Millennium Alliance, Camarones, and Doing Action Research***

In an essay titled *Poverty and Biodiversity: Measuring the Overlap of Human Poverty and the Biodiversity Hotspots*, Christopher Treg and Brendan Fisher explained that the majority of lands labeled by conservationists as biodiversity hotspots occur in countries with high levels of poverty (2011). They write that, “the success of conservation efforts depends upon the recognition that poverty can be a significant constraint on conservation, and at the same time conservation is an important component to the alleviation of long-term poverty” (Treg and Fisher 2011: 99). Fisher and Treg speak to the importance of an approach to conservation which transcends disciplinary boundaries, arguing that because of the connection between socio-economic and ecological systems, “issues such as development, poverty eradication, and biodiversity conservation need to be addressed not as individual phenomena but rather as complex dynamic systems” (2011: 93).

Third Millennium Alliance is a non-profit organization pursuing an integrated approach to conservation and development in Camarones, Ecuador. The organization seeks to protect the coastal Ecuadorian rainforest, and to encourage sustainable land management and development. The community of Camarones is an example of an area rich in biodiversity, home to a community in which the majority of residents live, “well below the poverty line” (Camarones Community Coalition 2011). The community is home to about three hundred people, over half children, and about eighty men and sixty five women. It is located about 111 miles northwest of Quito, just about five miles off of the Pacific Coast. Situated in, “the most threatened tropical rainforest in the world”, the forest is part of the Tumbes-Chocó-Magdalena biodiversity hotspot (Third Millennium Alliance 2011). With only two percent of the original forest remaining, this habitat for white-faced capuchin monkeys, mantled howler monkeys, and six feline species including the ocelot and jaguar, is critically threatened. (Third Millennium Alliance 2012, Camarones Community Coalition 2011). Solutions that can balance community livelihood needs with the protection of the rainforest are ideal.

My introduction to Third Millennium Alliance was through their website. I found the organization through a search on Idealist.org. I was seeking an opportunity to engage in applied and practical research related to conservation and community development, and they were soliciting interns for their two-month sustainable community development internships. After perusing their website, and exchanging emails with the directors, Isabel Davila, Jerry Toth and Bryan Criswell, I was inspired to develop a research project for my master’s degree with the organization. Following several conversations concerning the role of community participation in conservation, we agreed that a report based on interviews with community members could provide useful insight into community needs and perceptions of the organization, facilitating an avenue for communication, insight into community aspirations, and highlighting areas of intersecting goals. While the organization has a notable presence in the town of Camarones, and the directors have professional and friendly relationships with many members of the community, this is the first systematic gathering of feedback in the form of interviews from the community.

For two months I lived in the bamboo hut within the Jama-Coaque reserve, which is three kilometers up the road from the community. I participated in the daily life of the

agroforestry research station, taking care of trees and planting food, building steps, cooking, cleaning, and doing random projects, and spent some amount of time in the community. During my last few weeks at the reserve I conducted forty-five interviews with residents of Camarones, which serve as the basis for this report.

## ***Methodology and Methods***

### *Setting and Context of this Research*

Action research, often used in educational settings, is an applied methodological approach that undertakes systematic inquiries with the purpose of improving policies or practices (Glesny 2006). This research uses an action research methodology, depending on perceptions of and suggestions given by residents of Camarones, in order to articulate potential win-win policy measures that can come from these insights.

This report utilizes qualitative methods, and is based upon semi-structured interviews conducted over the course of two weeks in May 2011 by Betsy Vaca and myself. Betsy is a resident of Camarones who came to be a friend during my time in the town. While I conducted the majority of the interviews, Betsy's contribution was critical, as she is a well-respected member of the community, who has good rapport with her neighbors. Betsy introduced me to residents of Camarones, helped me with the Spanish language, and took notes.

Betsy made it possible for me to approach people's houses, where she would introduce me to the potential interviewee and ask if they were interested in doing an interview. She would then explain our intentions, and how the process would proceed. I am neither a native nor fluent speaker of Spanish, the official language of Ecuador, however I am at a conversational level. Ms. Vaca, although not an English speaker, nor a translator, was able to express any words that I missed due to my limited vocabulary or unfamiliar local colloquialisms, into simpler language. She was also able to re-phrase questions on the occasions when I had difficulty articulating an idea clearly.

Additionally, Ms. Vaca took notes, keeping track of the responses to each question. Although we recorded the interviews on a mini-cassette recorder, the quality of the recordings was very low. For this reason, Ms. Vaca, manually recorded the response to each question. After returning home from Camarones, I was able to review the recordings, and pulled quotations from some interviews. I was also able to double-check when the written transcriptions were unclear. Due to the poor quality of the recordings, it was not feasible to transcribe them verbatim, though I feel that the written transcription adequately captures the essence of what respondents said.

There are roughly fifty homes in Camarones. My goal was to interview an adult from each household. There are an estimated three hundred residents of Camarones, and of those, we were able to interview forty-five people, which is about thirty percent of the adult population. To carry out the interviews, we set out each day, and knocked on doors. Betsy introduced me, and explained that the purpose of the interviews was to provide feedback to Third Millennium Alliance, that I was a student working on my thesis, and that the feedback would be provided with confidentiality.

At that point, we would typically sit down and begin the interviews. Some interviews were as brief as ten minutes, while others spanned more than an hour. I coded these interviews by highlighting themes in the responses, and grouping together

like answers. For example, in response to the first question, “what do you like about living in Camarones?” responses ranged from the tranquility of the region to the community to a sense of connection to the land. I grouped responses such as “this is my land” with “this is where I was born”, and “this is where I was raised”. Each of these responses share a characteristic of having a sense of connection to the land based on lived experiences there. I attempted to group responses simply and logically. Please see the appendix for raw data.

### *Limitations*

My intention is that this research is but one tool, useful for supporting engagement between Third Millennium Alliance and the Camarones community. The most obvious limitation to this study is that I was an outsider, with imperfect Spanish-speaking skills, and interviewees may have told me what they thought I wanted to hear, particularly in response to questions about the perceptions of the organization. I have attempted to present interview responses clearly, allowing them to speak for themselves, and the personal reflections that I have provided are my subjective views, and should be interpreted as such. The following are the interview questions accompanied by a discussion and reflection of the responses to each question.

## ***Interview Questions and Responses***

### *Question #1: What do you like about living in Camarones?*

The first question was generated with the help of the community intern coordinator, who had experience conducting interviews. She suggested that I ease people into the interviews with a question that was somewhat positive, but could also be relevant. We came up with the question, “What do you like about living in Camarones?” While some people responded with one word, others gave a few reasons – I tallied the frequency of each type of response. Of the 45 people we spoke to, thirty-three (73%) said that they like living in Camarones because, “this is my land”; it is where they were born, where they were raised, and where they have had their life experience. Nearly half of the people spoke of the tranquility of the environment, saying that they enjoyed the countryside because it is peaceful and beautiful. Some of these responses included references to the trees and forest as a positive feature of the town. Five people (11%) responded that there were opportunities to work in the countryside, citing the agriculture and ability to raise plants and animals. Two men talked about the water. One said that the river was close to his farm, which was a positive aspect of living in Camarones, and another man said that what he liked about the area was that the water is free. One response was about the community, “here we have each other,” said one woman. Someone responded that the location was close to everything. Two people said that they like everything about Camarones.

These responses suggested that people had a sense of pride about their hometown, and felt a sense of connection to it as their land. Many people spoke to the beauty of Camarones, and the peaceful nature of the town. I was somewhat surprised by the responses about there being work here, because a lack of work in Camarones was something that I heard frequently discussed (this is clear in some of the other interview responses).

### *Question #2: Have you noticed any changes in the weather, the rivers or the forest in the past ten or twenty years?*

In response to the environmental changes, the majority of people spoke about the changes in rainfall and climate. Camarones historically has a wet and dry season, the former being winter and the latter being summer. This is a typical rainfall pattern in the tropical rainbelt. According to the residents, the weather is getting hotter and the winter season (the rainy season) is disappearing. Thirty-seven people (82%) answered that the climate, rainfall, water levels, humidity, or seasons had been changing. A few people said that there are no winters now, only summers.

Nine people answered that there have been large shifts in agricultural production, saying that it is much more difficult today to live as a farmer, as the harvests are too small. Among these responses, people said that there used to be more agricultural products. Others said that they have to plant more, but there are less fruits to harvest. One man focused specifically on coffee, saying that the coffee that is planted, dies. Others echoed the sentiment that it is very difficult to produce now, saying that there is no harvest. One person said, “We used to sow a lot- what we planted, we harvested. Now you can’t produce”.

There were eight people who responded that the forest or amount of trees is changing. The majority of those people were referring to a loss in forest cover in Camarones. One person answered that *la reserva* is now protecting the forests. Another respondent suggested that, today people cut trees down, but do not plant anything.

Five responses said that, in general, things used to be better in Camarones – that things are changing for the worse. Some simply said that, “it used to be better here”, or “it used to be more peaceful”. One woman, speaking of a lack of jobs in the area, said that there used to be more security. Two others mentioned the declines in work opportunities. One woman said that the way of life in Camarones has changed.

Four people talked about the cleanliness of Camarones, one saying that everything was cleaner in the past (this gentleman was nearing his seventies). Others suggested that things were cleaner now that there is trash collection. A few people mentioned that the trash collection was a project associated with *la reserva*. An intern with the reserve coordinated efforts with the municipality to begin trash collection. One person said that there is less trash in the river now because there is trash collection service. Three others spoke to infrastructural changes in Camarones, mentioning the addition of a school, road and electricity.

Two people noted that the presence of tourists was changing the community. One man said that many of them only speak English, and walk by, but do not say hello. He mentioned that the truck, which drives reserve volunteers up the mountain, was loud. Another person said that he thought the tourists might bring in business. The tourists being referenced were, at least in part, volunteers or workers associated with Third Millennium Alliance.

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**What environmental changes have you noticed?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency (x)</b>
Climate, rainfall, water levels	37
Shifts in agricultural production-more difficult to farm	9
Change in forest cover	8
Things are changing for the worse	5
It is cleaner	4
There is more infrastructure	3
Higher population	3
More tourists	2
Less work/change in livelihood	2
Less shrimp	1

*Table 1:* To the left are responses to question 2. Frequency represents the number of times each response was mentioned – some interviewees had multiple responses to the question.

**3. What do you think caused those changes in Camarones?**

As a follow-up question to the changes seen by residents, we asked what people thought caused those changes. The responses varied, because they were dependent on the reply to the second question, of what changes were noticed. Eighteen people (40%) associated the changes in climate, and related declines in agricultural productivity, with deforestation. One man lamented that the worst error they had made was to cut the trees. The language used in many of these responses was strong. One woman said,

“things have changed, because now, there are no forests”. Another person responded that the weather had changed because, “everything has been cut”. Nine others responded that the changes in weather had caused the earlier mentioned plummet in agricultural yields. One replied that, because of the changes in rainfall, there is no agricultural production. Another said that because of the dryness and the declines in rainfall, farmers are no longer able to produce.

There were a couple of people who cited chemical contamination as a result of changes in agricultural practices. One woman said that agricultural inputs had caused a disease in chickens, which was not common ten years ago. Another person mentioned that agriculture was changing, saying that it was now necessary to use chemicals in order to achieve the same harvest level as in the past.

There were two replies stating that there were now more trees because the reserve protects them from being cut, and three responses attributing a cleaner river to trash collection. Nine people said that they did not know what caused the climatic changes, a few saying that only God knows these things. One woman said that Camarones was changing because of the new generations, saying that young people now drank alcohol with their parents, which was not the norm in the past. She missed the “old days” when there was more respect for each other and for the land.

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**What do you think caused those changes?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>frequency (x)</b>
<b>Deforestation</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>The weather</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Unsure of what caused changes</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The river is cleaner</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Contamination from chemicals</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>More trees (because of the reserve)</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>New generation</b>	<b>1</b>

Table 2: To the left are responses to question 3. Frequency represents the number of times each response was mentioned – some interviewees had multiple responses to the question.

*4. How do you make a living? What is your livelihood?*

Over half (22) of those interviewed earned the majority of their income in some type of agricultural activity, such as owning or working on a farm or raising animals such as cows, pigs, or chickens. The agricultural products mentioned were corn, rice, peanuts, and yucca. Eight others said that they (if men), or their husbands made a living working with a machete, or clearing trails.

The next most common reported profession was logging. Eight people either said that they cut trees or collected tagua, a nut, which can be a food source or used to make arts or crafts. One man described his position on his livelihood, stating, “Here, we make a living from tagua. What else is there to sell? Coffee? There is no water.” Another logger who I spoke with more extensively said that logging provided a secure income with which he could support his family. He spoke of the micro-forestry program, and said that while it seemed interesting, for him, it was not practical. He cited the lack of rainfall, and the distance of his land from the river as major reasons that he did not want to be a farmer. He also mentioned the workload associated with farming. These

considerations could be useful in understanding why some people prefer logging to agricultural work.

Seven people owned their own business. Examples given were driving a truck, making and selling desserts, owning a small store, and working from home. Clearly, many of the people listed above, the farmers and loggers, were also self-employed, though they were not represented in this number.

Many women in Camarones work at home and take care of the family needs, cooking, cleaning, helping with agricultural work, and raising children. One of the only options for women to formally work is the local shrimp factory. Women are the primary laborers in the local shrimp-packing factory, and there is a van that comes by to pick them up for their night shifts. The work is challenging, but it provides steady income in a place where financial security is rare. I interviewed one woman whose hand and face were burned from allergic reactions to the bleach-like chemicals used in the factory, She said that she had no choice but to return to work despite the debilitating effects of the reaction. There were three women who answered that they work in the shrimp factory, though I know that several more women from the community are employed with the company. Throughout the interviews, the themes of insufficient work, and a lack of work opportunities for both men and women were raised several times. One person replied that her husband worked whenever there is work available. Another said that they made a living by exchanging and sharing products with neighbors. Three of those interviewed received financial assistance from their family.

*5. Have you or your partner ever worked with the Jama-Coaque Reserve? If so, how did it go?*

Out of forty responses to this question, ten people had worked with the reserve, and twenty-six had not. Six of those who had not worked with the reserve said that they would like to, if there were an opportunity. In response to the second part of the question, the majority said that it went well working for the reserve, and that they were happy for the work because there is a lack of sufficient employment in Camarones. One man said that working for the reserve was “okay”. His choice of words was, “fue un poco bien”, which means that it was okay, or literally, a little bit good. He followed that it was not, really good (“no bien bien”), and then he began to say why, but decided not to go into it.

*6. Do you have an opinion of the reserve? What do you think about it?*

The overwhelming majority replied with positive reactions to the reserve and their objectives. Out of forty people who replied to this question, 37 (92%) had what I have coded as a positive reaction. These responses ranged from simple replies of, “yes, its good”, or “its lovely that they are here” to more specific responses. The following expresses the sentiment of some residents of Camarones:

- “It is good that they care for and protect the animals. We can learn from their ideas and teach them our ideas about farming and conservation.”
- “It is good because sometimes they offer work.”

- “For me, it is good that the reserve is there, without them, there wouldn’t be trees. Yes, it is good for us.”
- “It’s good that they bring new ideas. They offer opportunities, and a little bit of work. It’s good that they take care of the forests, and care for the river.”

It is difficult to say what degree of influence my presence had on these responses. Although we were clear that, while I was interviewing on behalf of the reserve, the responses would be kept confidential, residents may have felt uncomfortable if their actual opinions of the reserve and the people associated with it was negative. Nevertheless, as an outside observer, it appeared that interactions between community members and the directors of Third Millennium Alliance were friendly and neighborly. Some of the longer-term employees of Third Millennium Alliance have developed close relationship with residents.

The people who did not respond to this question replied that they knew very little about the reserve, and weren’t familiar enough to have an opinion. This makes sense, as those living in the lower community would have less interaction with the reserve and its volunteers.

#### *7. What do you think about the idea of having a small market here in Camarones?*

With the advice of Third Millennium Alliance, I added this question into the interviews after I had already completed some of them. An intern was interested in following through with an idea to start a small roadside market in which local farmers could sell their produce to one another. This would be enable people to buy and sell locally without having to take a bus, camioneta, or motorcycle to Pedernales or Jama. We decided to ask this question in order to generate an understanding of the level of interest in this project. It became clear that there was a lot of interest. Everyone I asked thought that it was a good idea. Many people mentioned that it would be cheaper and more convenient to buy things in Camarones instead of having to travel to buy produce. Some farmers were interested in the market because it would also be more convenient for them to sell their produce. After the interviews I generated a list of interested farmers (with their permission), which I gave to the intern who was doing the initial research for the project. These quotes give an overview of how the majority of people responded:

- “It seems good because there aren’t any good services here. But we don’t have the resources to start a market.”
- “A market would be good because we wouldn’t need to go to Pedernales and we could have everything here. We wouldn’t have to pay to go to Pedernales.
- If there were a small market, that would be nice. We could buy and sell our products, and not have to leave town. “
- “Money would stay here in Camarones.”

While the sentiment of creating a market was overwhelmingly positive, the barriers to such a project are many. The level of coordination for such an undertaking would be large, and, in my opinion, would necessitate the dedicated commitment of at least a few individuals. Because there are very few people in the community who own cars or trucks, getting the produce to and from the market could be an issue, although

there are a couple of trucks for hire, who could potentially coordinate transportation of the commodities. Also, the project would require one or more persons to commit to working at the stand. I am awaiting an update on the progress of this project. It is my opinion that this type of effort would be ideally implemented through participatory strategies, as there is a great deal of community interest, and a need for long-term coordinated efforts to achieve such a goal.

*8. How do you feel about the learning center? Do you have any suggestions for the learning center?*

While I was in Camarones, Third Millennium Alliance was remodeling their community house, and adding a community-learning center downstairs, which would host activities and educational opportunities for children, and serve as a space for the community. The purpose of this question was two-fold: to inform community members of the project and let them know that there would be activities for kids beginning in June, and to receive suggestions and input regarding the types of activities residents would like to see offered.

Many of the replies to this question were general and positive, offering no suggestions, but saying that it is good that children and young adults will have an opportunity to learn more. The most common request was for English classes – nineteen responded that they would like to see English classes offered. One person suggested that an English certification could help people to find jobs outside of Camarones. Three respondents said that they would like reading classes, two of these suggesting reading instruction for adults who are not literate. Another woman suggested that continuity in education was important. She said that often volunteers only come for a few months, and suggested that, if there were an English teacher in the community, he/she should either remain in the community for longer periods of time, or organize lessons in such a way that the same information wasn't taught repeatedly as teachers changed.

Two women suggested that a park or garden next to the learning center would be a positive addition to the community, which is something that came up from different people in response to other questions as well. One woman responded that she would like to see something for women. She said that there were few opportunities for women to get together in the community, saying that they had nothing to do. She complained that, while there was a bar in the community and a pool table for men, it was frowned upon for women to go to the bar or drink at night with men, suggesting that some type of sports for women and children would be beneficial, as well as a night each month in which women could get together. She thought that the community center could be a place for these gatherings to take place. In other conversations, and responses to different questions, the idea of opportunities for women, and a park or playground for children was recurring. Another recommendation was for specific activities– people suggested drawing, painting, beauty school, crafts, and training in mechanics.

Two women suggested that positive role models were important for youth. One said that youth do not have a lot of time with their working parents, and any activities after school could help them with values. One person wanted their children to be educated about conservation. One woman suggested that the learning center should have a computer so that youth and young adults can have a head start.

*9. Do you have any ideas for small projects? What would you like to see in your community? Do you have any suggestions for Third Millennium Alliance?*

With this question, as with the ones before it in which we were soliciting feedback, we were clear that, while the reserve was open to hearing the ideas of the community, they are small organization with particular goals and limited funding, and were not making any promises of development. Like the question about the market, this was added in the middle of the interview process, so not every person interviewed was asked this question.

A number of people responded to this question in a general, vague way saying that whatever projects the reserve wished to do were fine with them. One person said, "It is good that the community continues to move forward with the help of others." The most repeated response dealt with water issues; thirteen people spoke to the need for water projects. The majority of residents in Camarones do not have access to potable water, though some do have pumps. A few people mentioned potable water as an important community need. There had been a project started years ago to bring potable water to the community, and infrastructure was built, however everyone I spoke with said that the municipality had stopped working on the project a few years ago, and they were not sure why. Many people boil water from the rivers, and one man said that they only take water at certain times of the day because in the middle of the day it is dirty because of people using it for defecation and urination. People in the lower community suggested education for those in the upper and middle community, who they say defecate in and wash laundry in the rivers, spoiling the water for the lower community.

Other suggestions regarded starting a project which would ensure that the rivers are healthy, and a couple of residents suggested that tree-planting would encourage higher humidity levels, more rain, and offer protection to the river. Respondents mentioned building a pool for when there is no rain, building a small bridge over the river to avoid people driving through it, and education which would teach about the negative impacts of chemical contamination in the rivers. Based on the wide-spread awareness of water-related issues, it seems that conservation efforts geared toward river cleanliness, hydrological cycles, and the connection between those and the forest, could be a way to address multiple conservation related themes that would benefit both the community and conservation goals.

Ten people spoke of the lack of employment opportunities in Camarones. Two women suggested that there needed to be work for women so that they could still be with their families. There were many ideas for small businesses, including: a bakery, a chicken farm, a coffee and cocoa processor, a daycare, a pharmacy, and a pig farm. Others simply said that work is needed in the town. Six people spoke to the need for a health center. One idea was to start a community bank (which I believe has been started independently of Third Millennium Alliance). Another person mentioned an enclosure for the school, and one person suggested that the town needed a road that could be used in the winters.

As had been mentioned in previous responses, three women suggested that a garden or park would be a beneficial addition to their community. One woman spoke of the lack of community that she felt because there was no place for her to meet with other women, and no place for her children to play. She talked about having to go to Pedernales to give her children an opportunity to play. There was a sentiment expressed that the community should come together with the reserve in order to share

ideas and build community. One man said, “We should come together to talk, visit and have reunions. We should share ideas about farming- they can share how they operate, and we can share our ideas about farming, because we work in a different manner.” Another person replied that they needed a space to get together as a community. The learning center could be an appropriate space for community meetings or reunions. Several people mentioned that they would like to be invited to the reserve in order to see what is happening there.

Do you have any ideas for small projects? What would you like to see in your community? Do you have any suggestions for Third Millennium Alliance?	
Water related responses- restoration, education, potable water	13
Small business development	10
No suggestion/General comments	15
Health Center	6
Reunions, Gatherings, Exchange of Ideas	4
Park/Garden	3
Something for women	2
Road	1
School	1
Bank	1
Teach about God	1
Finish what you start	1

Table 3: To the left are responses to question 9. Frequency represents the number of times each response was mentioned – some interviewees had multiple responses to the question.

### *Reflections*

There are points of intersection between the goals and priorities of Third Millennium Alliance and the residents of Camarones that could lead to cooperation, participation, and continued results. It is clear that many people in the community view the NGO as an environmental steward which protects the rainforest. While the majority of residents held high opinions of the reserve, a number of them were unaware of the organization’s different projects, and despite interest, had never visited the reserve. The logistics of inviting community members to the reserve could be challenging, because of the location, however something as simple as a “reserve day”, could help to inform and include more local residents.

In *Reasons for Success: Learning from Instructive Experiences in Rural Development*, the authors write that, “Participation in all its aspects, including participation in benefits as well as in decision making, implementation, and evaluation, is perhaps the most central feature of successful rural development” (Uphoff, Esman, Krishna 1998: 76). They go on to write that levels of participation vary depending on the particular contexts, and highlight the importance of participation by women and youth. I believe that participation and more active engagement with the local community could support conservation and development goals in Camarones. Based on my time and conversations, it is clear that there is a desire within the community to develop sustainably and have a healthy place to live; however, there appears to be very little organization within the community. Encouraging participation, furthering conservation goals, and supporting sustainable development, could be as simple as

providing a space for meetings, planning community gatherings, or facilitating educational exchanges with farmers from surrounding areas.

A number of residents expressed interest in being invited to the reserve, and emphasized a desire for more community cohesion. Reunions could serve as a means to facilitate more awareness about Third Millennium Alliance's projects and goals, simultaneously opening up areas for cooperation, and increasing the agency of community members to act toward their goals. Third Millennium Alliance can maintain a focus on conservation, and facilitate increased agency among community members, supporting efforts toward sustainable development and the creation of sustainable livelihoods. Providing space for community meetings is one way that Third Millennium Alliance can encourage community activism and efforts without needing to shift their primary focus from one of conservation.

Conservation is often accompanied by unavoidable tradeoffs with livelihood practices. The importance of protecting the remaining remnants of forest in Camarones is clearly a priority of Third Millennium Alliance, however protecting the rainforest impacts local loggers. A few loggers mentioned this friction, although they also appeared to see the value of protecting the forest, seeing a connection between deforestation and declines in rainfall. Third Millennium Alliance's approach of hiring loggers for trail building and field guides addresses this tension, however, it is questionable as to whether the amount of work offered is equal to that forfeited by losing access to the trees on the Jama-Coaque reserve. Increased participation in the micro-forestry program may be a remedy to this loss of work opportunity, although there are certain obstacles to this that must be addressed, such as declines in rainfall, access to water, and pests. Also, residents may not have an interest in farming, or altering their livelihood practices. Additionally, some of the small development projects proposed by Third Millennium Alliance, such as the soap project, may offer alternatives to the income generated by logging.

The main concerns that people expressed about the microforestry program are the lack of rainfall and the increased difficulty of reaping bountiful harvests. Informational meetings or community reunions were suggested by a few farmers who had some interest in the program, but knew little about it. Learning sessions could generate understanding about what would make microforestry accessible and successful in Camarones, and how to sustainably address issues such as water, pests, and soil erosion. Continuing to coordinate workshops in agroforestry and agro-ecology is one way that Third Millennium Alliance can help to support the emergence of a small-scale sustainable agricultural shift in the area. A couple of farmers spoke of an exchange of ideas among farmers and Third Millennium Alliance. The Campesino a Campesino (Farmer to Farmer) movement serves as a model in which NGOs have facilitated and supported grassroots efforts for sustainable agriculture, acknowledging and respecting farmers' knowledge, and encouraging experiential and experimental learning. Some farmers noted that they could share their experience with Third Millennium Alliance, and would be open to an exchange. By respecting and incorporating the knowledge that local farmers have, and using culturally appropriate teaching methods, Third Millennium Alliance can strengthen the move toward sustainability in Camarones.

Implementing a roadside market may also increase interest in the microforestry program. The overwhelming enthusiasm for a market suggests that supporting a farmer's stand could benefit Camarones economically, supporting small-scale sustainable farmers, and increasing access to food security. One manageable approach

to the initial implementation of a market could be to facilitate one which operates bi-weekly, for half of a day.

Additional suggestions that came up repeatedly, and could make a lasting positive impact on the community are projects related to: water conservation education and river restoration; increased access to potable water; establishing a community garden or children's play area, and utilizing the community learning center for monthly women's gatherings.

Fals-Borda, a pioneer of participatory research strategies, wrote that, "the results of participatory research are open to validation and judgement like in any other discipline, not only by fellow scholars and bureaucrats...but also by the opinion of the subject peoples themselves" (168). In a similar vein, I believe that the results of the approach to conservation taken by Third Millennium Alliance or any organization, is subject to the scrutiny of the community which is most affected by their presence. According to the results of this research, it appears that the opinion held by local community members of Third Millennium Alliance is overwhelmingly positive. While a great deal of the relevant literature on successful conservation and rural development calls for a higher degree of participation than practiced by Third Millennium Alliance, it seems that the organization has engaged with the community at a sufficient level to avert resentments or negative feelings that are sometimes felt by communities surrounding ecological reserves. I believe that incorporating more participation into particular projects, and facilitating community agency through simple measures such as providing a space for meetings, could be a useful strategy toward increasing local motivation, agency, and support for long-term, successful conservation and sustainable development in Camarones.

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