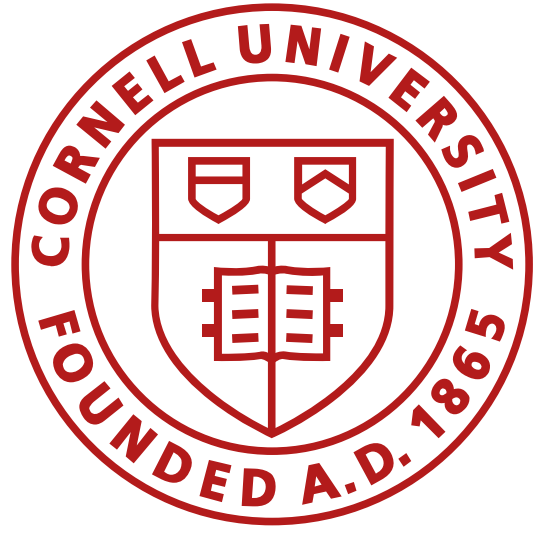




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Ecuador Leadership In Action

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Introduction

Before going to Ecuador, I wasn't sure what to expect. However, my trip turned out to be an enlightening experience that exposed me to various cultures and lifestyles.

The culture and lifestyles I experienced were wonderful. For example, in Mushullakta, we thought we were touring a farm, but it turned into a three-hour exploration of a forest filled with cocoa trees, plantain trees, and more, all maintained by the owner himself. In Pintag, we participated in a corn harvest celebration, which was truly a memorable experience.

Impact

The most impactful experience I had in Ecuador was in Lago Agrio. It was the toxic tour led by Donald Moncayo, the executive coordinator of Unión de Afectados por Texaco. We explored gas flaring sites and parts of the Amazon where petroleum companies had dumped oil. The water that local families relied on for cooking and showering was darkened by petroleum and had a strong smell of gasoline. Without this experience, I would not have understood the damage that petroleum companies are inflicting on marginalized communities. This experience made me realize the importance of public health initiatives that listen to and prioritize the needs of the communities themselves, rather than imposing outside solutions. I also came to appreciate the power of storytelling and listening to community experiences.



Leadership and my future

As I reflect on my experiences in Ecuador and my future as a leader, particularly in public health and environmental issues, I aspire to become a leader who is well-informed about the community's needs, directly from the community members themselves. I think of leaders like May and Daniel, who are both striving to make changes in various communities in Ecuador. They prioritize listening to the stories of the people and collaborating with them on the changes they want to see.

