

# Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational experience No. 32

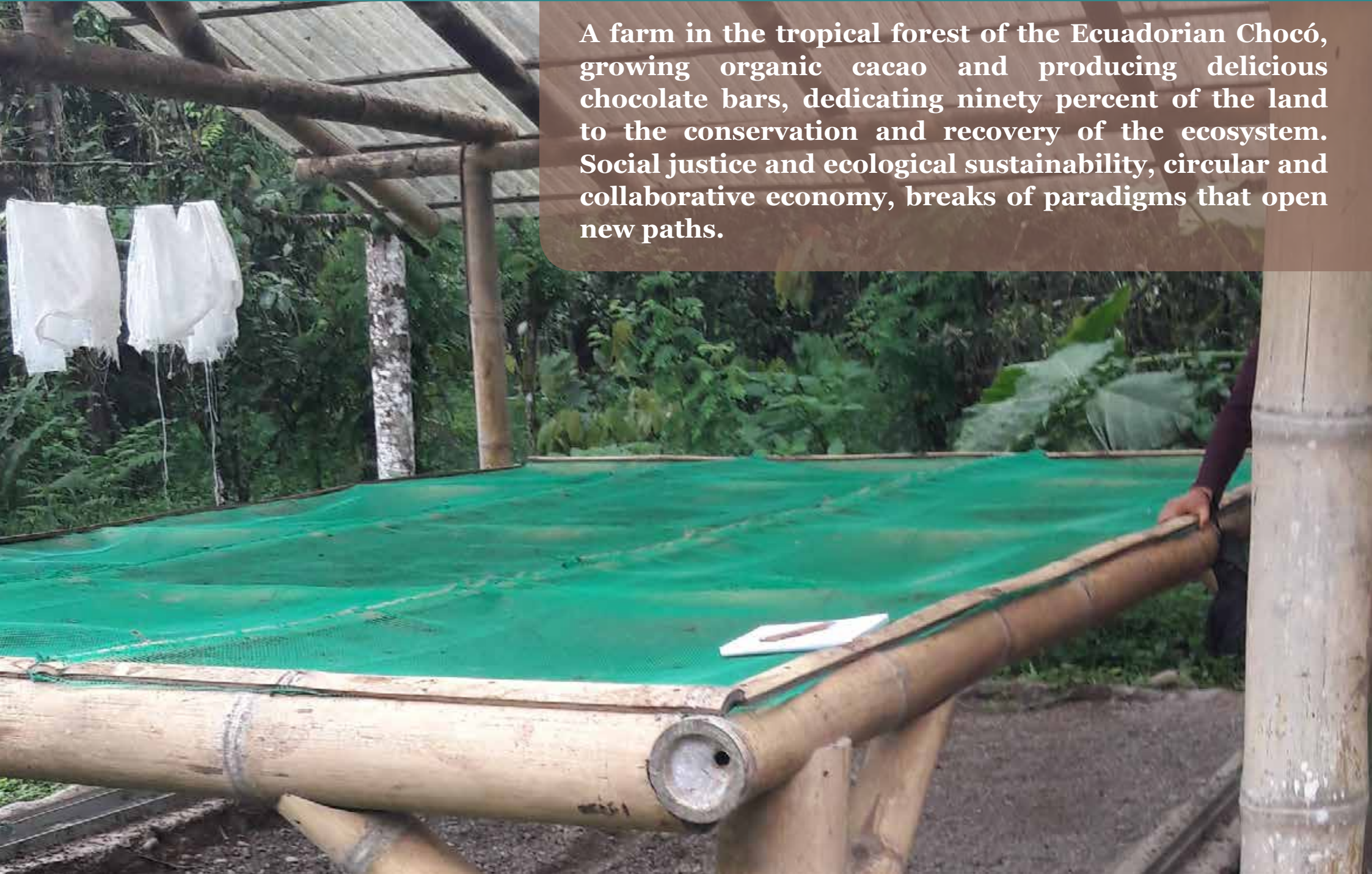


CHOCOLATE AND SOMETHING ELSE



# CHOCOLATE AND SOMETHING ELSE

A farm in the tropical forest of the Ecuadorian Chocó, growing organic cacao and producing delicious chocolate bars, dedicating ninety percent of the land to the conservation and recovery of the ecosystem. Social justice and ecological sustainability, circular and collaborative economy, breaks of paradigms that open new paths.





## Social justice and ecological sustainability

The property managed by Agustina y Alejo, located in the community of Mashpi, Ecuadorian Chocó, covers 56 hectares. During a walk around the farm, we visited the cacao plantations in similar agroforestry systems, the nursery and the processing area, all in the middle of the forest, Agustina explains: “When we started the project on the farm with Alejo, our purposes were two: restore the forest and preserve it while producing a chocolate with conscience.” Agustina lived her childhood with her parents on the family farm. Then she lived in the city and studied ecology, Alejo migrated from Costa Rica to the South looking for birds and stayed in these mountains.

The area of the Ecuadorian Chocó is characterized by its abundant tropical vegetation and generous rains, almost daily. Cocoa is produced only in a tenth of the surface of the farm; 50 hectares are not intervened at present and have entered a phase of regeneration of the ecosystem. Several of the families of neighboring farms, in part relatives of Agustina, are in the same wave of restoring the forest. This circumstance has allowed to form a broader corridor of ecological restoration, at the same time that a serious threat is opposed, since the area is concessioned for metallic mining.

“Our product, chocolate, contributes to social justice and ecological sustainability in the forest,” says Agustina. Cocoa plants are found only in the flat parts of the farm. “We have started from permaculture principles and tools of analog forestry for the design and management of food forests. At first the cacao plantations seemed more plantations of cassava or palmetto because



we planted the cocoa plants in an associated way, as the co-coas and some other fruit trees are trees, reason why they delay more in harvesting, we could take advantage of the natural succession with other food plants, especially with the diversity of shorter cycles.” As guardians of seeds, the couple protects more than 35 traditional varieties of Ecuadorian cocoa, the national fine aroma cocoa. The vast majority of cocoa producers opt for hybrid varieties. The production of cocoa on the farm is one hundred percent organic; fertilizers and bio-regulators are made on the farm. Cacao diseases that occur frequently in monocultures, such as the witch’s broom, caused by a fungus, do not appear or are easily controlled by bio-fertilizers with activation of mountain microorganisms that are applied. In addition to cacao, approximately three hundred varieties of fruits, nuts, and other tropical fruits are grown, all on a small scale.

## Cocoa to chocalate bar

Mashpi Artisan Chocolate is the name of the chocolate brand that is produced here on the farm. Agustina and Alejo are accompanied by three other people in the work of the farm. “When

we started harvesting our cocoa,” Agustina recalls, “we had twice sold the cocoa without processing it. The price we were paid had been so low that we made the decision to process the cocoa and produce chocolate right here.” Given that the volume of cocoa production on the farm is not very large, there was a need to organize small-scale processing. “Processing machines are usually designed for industrial volumes; but we have found ways to adapt the technical equipment to our needs; we also aim more at manual processes than mechanized ones”, explains Agustina, showing the facilities where the cocoa is fermented and dried and then the chocolate production section. The production and its volume are still handmade but even so, it has been necessary to expand the spaces of the chocolate factory.

It is not common to find in a cocoa farm the complete productive chain. Mashpi Artisanal Chocolate is a sample that is possible: from the cacao plant to the chocolate bar, giving more emphasis on the restoration of the ecosystem than in production. There is a fairly well-stocked offer of organic chocolate products with more than 20 products, including chocolate bars with different flavors, such as guayabilla (a variety of guava), dodderer, cardamom, as well as nibs, cocoa powder and others. The degree of concentration of cocoa in the products varies from 60 to 100%. The option of producing from the raw material to the final product on the farm has allowed to generate employment for people of the village who live 15 minutes and who do not have their own land.





# Mashpi Chocolate Artesanal on itself:

## Our production is Artisan: Art-healthy (Arte-sano, Spanish broken in two words)

- ▣ Each bar of chocolate that you buy will be unique, different and of great quality.
- ▣ Our work is highly manual, we do not use sophisticated technology, chemical or highly industrialized ingredients, guaranteeing that our products are essentially good, clean and fair.
- ▣ We rigorously apply environmental and quality controls of all steps of cocoa processing, thus developing the full potential of flavors and aromas unique to the world famous National Fine Aroma Cocoa.
- ▣ The concept of chocolate of origin takes shape in the Mashpi Artesanal Chocolate farm, pioneers in having an artisan workshop equipped with machinery designed to optimize the aromas and flavors of exquisite and excellent quality chocolates, unique in the world for being a cocoa 100% organic, which combines native, exotic and endemic fruits of Chocó.

**¡We process all the cocoa and produce chocolate on the farm!**

Source: <http://chocomashpi.com/chocolate-artesanal-mashpi>

“We offer interested people tours of the farm and facilities. Alejo, along with a young man from the area, also makes walks with bird watching”, says Agustina. The income obtained from the sale of chocolate and fruit products, as well as tours with visitors, allow the support of the farm and those who dedicate their work and life to this project.

## Market and certification

“Our products have a national sanitary registry in addition to organic certification for markets in Europe, Asia and the United States,” says Agustina. “Summing up marketing, we realized that it is more favorable to insert ourselves mainly in the local-regional and national market; instead of large volumes, we produce a wide range of products.” In fact, annual certifications are expensive as a requirement to be able to sell the products in Europe and other parts of the world. Agustina and Alejo rightly question the lack of seriousness of the procedures of these certifications. “The certifying companies, usually foreign, do not inspect the crops in depth, but mostly study documentation”. For each shipment of merchandise to markets overseas, in addition to the certification, high transaction costs arise.

## Collaborative logic

Alejo, Agustina and her sister Manuela, who is in charge of sales, are paid the same salary as the people who work at Mashpi Artesanal Chocolate: a base salary of approximately \$ 500 per month. “With this income we live very well; but more important than money income is being able to live in harmony with nature.” Agustina enjoys living on the farm and avoids spending much time in the city. Profits from the farm and chocolate are reinvested in the farm. “The neighboring farm is on sale,”

says Agustina. The owner lives in Quito and the production of heart of palm in monoculture does not meet his expectations, despite monthly liquid gains of several thousand dollars. “We have decided to buy a part of the farm to expand our project of regenerative agriculture and forest conservation.” The purchase will put an end to the use of agrochemicals and thereby reduce considerably the pollution of the Mashpi River. The collaborators of the Mashpi Chocolate Artisan project, two of them are single mothers and heads of family, will be as owners as the couple of the new restoration area. The economic logic of the farm and its owners is circular and collaborative: the profits ge-

nerated on the farm are the product of work among all. Three nearby small farms decided to accept Mashpi Artisan Chocolate training and currently produce cocoa that is processed on the farm of Agustina and Alejo. The benefits obtained remain in the area and are shared.

## Seed Guardians and pioneers

Alejo and Agustina are seed keepers in cocoa issues and are part of the Red de Guardianes (Guardian Network) community. The couple met this group when years ago they

were invited to a meeting. A characteristic of the guardians is their constant search and experimentation. In the case of Agustina and Alejo, they have decided to abandon the organic certification to venture into more accurate methods to be able to verify the advances around the restoration and recovery of the ecosystem. They are studying and preparing chromatography tests; it is a technique of biodynamic agriculture, analyzing the quality of soils. The chromatography allows to see in a paper support, how is the interaction between minerals, organic matter and microorganisms. In addition to chromatography, Alejo and Agustina are interested in certifying and monitoring their analog forestry in forest recovery and lost biodiversity. With Slow Food they are in dialogue to obtain the seal of Bastion with the Chocolate of Chocó. Javier Carrera who accompanies us during the visit is one of the people in the coordination group of the network of guardians that has recently been supported by Misereor. Regarding chromatography, Javier explains: “The guardians do not close ourselves to one way; we are convinced that another coexistence with ourselves and with nature is possible without falling into a dogmatism.” Mashpi Artisan Chocolate is the proof of what has been said: it is chocolate and, above all, something else.



## Messages to the future:

Produce to restore, reinvest in the recovery of the ecosystem instead of profit.

Cultivate healthy and with ecological justice, process and transform in an artisanal way generating local circuits based on the collaborative concept.

Economic logic based on the concepts of collaboration, reciprocity and holistic and distributive equity.

Each bar of chocolate produced is one step closer to a present with a future.

The text was prepared, based on on-site conversations by Jorge Krekeler, facilitator commissioned by the AGEH and Misereor and agreed with the people visited. We thank Agustina Arcos from Mashpi Artisan Chocolate and Javier Carrera from the Network of Seed Guardians



# Almanac of the Future

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