

Third Place

case 1-429-426
April 3, 2015

Runa: Creating Value in the Amazon

Before the sun rises above the canopy and the night's mist has yet to lift, families of the Kichwa people, an indigenous group of the Ecuadorian Amazon, gather around the fire. As the guayusa leaves boil they share ancient lore, interpret their dreams, and plan the day ahead. The tea, sipped from hollow coconut shells (see **Exhibit 1**), provides them with the energy they need to farm their *chakras*ⁱ and hunt the small mammals of the rainforest. For thousands of years, the Kichwa have grown and enjoyed guayusa as a way to be “runa” (fully alive).¹

A recent Yale School of Forestry graduate, Eliot Logan-Hines, was eager to launch a project in Latin America when he heard of Runa — an organization seeking to build the first guayusa supply chain in the world. The company was looking for an environmental consultant. Logan-Hines was intrigued; in 2010 he traveled to Ecuador to visit the company's small operations. It clicked. Logan-Hines was fascinated with guayusa's energy and health benefits and saw Runa's potential to make profound, long-lasting change.²

Fresh out of Brown University, Runa's cofounders — Tyler Gage, a comparative literature graduate, and Dan MacCombie, a marine biology graduate — launched the business in 2009. The young entrepreneurs developed an integrated supply chain that brought guayusa from the Kichwa's land in the Amazon to tea-drinkers in the U.S., using their Ecuadorian operations, Runatarpuna, to supply the guayusa, and their Brooklyn-based business, Runa LLC, to market the tea. But Gage and MacCombie's vision for Runa went beyond business — it was rooted in a deep desire to help the Kichwa improve their livelihoods.³ For this reason, they built a foundation to ensure their business operations remained socially and environmentally responsible. They had a solid hybrid model in place, but they needed someone driven, assertive, and visionary to run the foundation. When they met Logan-Hines shortly after launching, they knew he was the perfect person for the job. As executive director of the foundation, Logan-Hines quickly became a strategic leader on the ground for both Runa's business and non-profit branches. Gage and MacCombie — Runa's co-CEOs — came to rely on Logan-Hines' visionary capacities and out-of-the-box thinking to push the organization forward.⁴



i Chakras are plots of land used by subsistence farmers to grow many plants within one small area. They are permaculture forest plots.



Published by GlobalLens, a division of the William Davidson Institute (WDI) at the University of Michigan.

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