



Project: A Boatful of Kids

The city of Puerto Lopez in Ecuador is a poor community, definitely third world. Seventy percent of the economy of Puerto Lopez falls within the fishing industry but as more and more fish are hauled from the sea, the small fisherman such as in Puerto Lopez are being asked to do with less to survive as the waters are being depleted. This is simply not a sustainable economy in this pueblo. My Foundation is working with local scientists to promote a more sustainable economy based upon a very sustainable resource, tourism.

Every year during the months of June through September a pod of humpback whales migrate to the waters off Ecuador. The waters of Machalilla National Park in Manabi are breeding grounds for the whales and a growing tourism industry is taking hold. But many of the poorer families are still reliant upon fishing as a source of family economy. This is true because the young children are drawn into a way of life that their parents and grandparents had. They know of nothing else. Our Foundation is beginning to fund a program where 40-50 local students each year from this small pueblo are allowed the opportunity to actual see a whale. By seeing a whale and being apart of this exciting adventure, these kids will have a first hand look at not only how rich their oceanic ecosystem is but would also allow them to see value in a very eco-friendly career--- Tourism . The tourist industry can co-exist with the fishing industry but a better blend or balance needs to be attained. Fishing is still viable in this community but not in the numbers as they have seen in the past.

Getting kids on a boat to "watch a whale" is a simple economic problem. It's not that the kids in Puerto Lopez do not want to see whales! But, for this to occur, each child would have to pay \$20 to view the whales from one of the tourist operator boats. They too have to survive in this hard economy and \$20 is a ton of money for these families. So our goal is to collect enough money each year so we can begin educating the youth about their environment. By sending 40-50 kids out to the whales each year, we could begin to enlighten the youth about whales and hopefully, begin the process of developing a more eco-friendly economy in the town of Puerto Lopez.