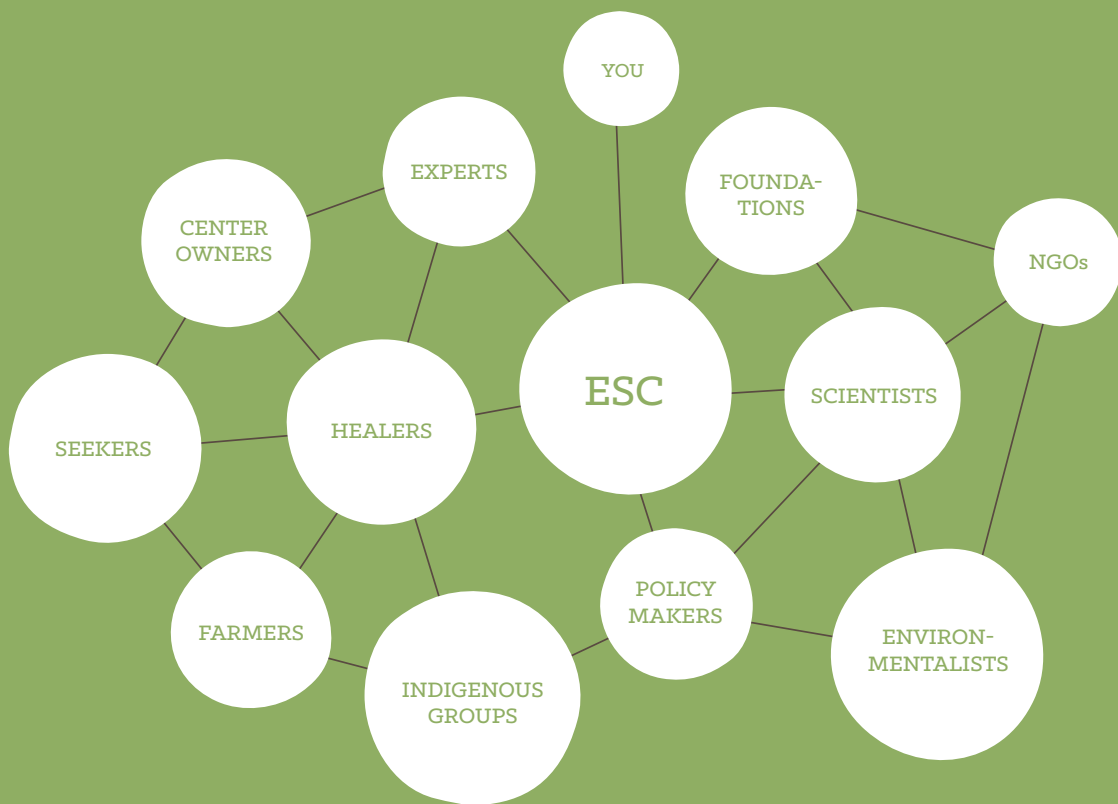


The Ayahuasca Dialogues Report

Preliminary research and prospects toward safer and more sustainable ayahuasca

Executive Summary



Full report features foreword by Dennis McKenna



This report summarizes the ESC's research findings to date on ayahuasca safety and sustainability issues and concerns. It presents a proposal for funding and collaborating on future continued work on the Ayahuasca Dialogues and subsequent Ayahuasca Agreement on safe use and sustainability best practices.

Whether ayahuasca cultures and ecologies are strengthened and respected—and whether this evolution produces more benefits than negative impacts for various affected groups—depends on the decisions we make and the actions we take now as a global community.

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At stake are the future of indigenous traditions, international drug policy, human health, and even the future understanding of the mind.

Ayahuasca is entering global consciousness on a trajectory similar to the expansion of yoga or meditation practices over past decades. After hundreds, or possibly even thousands, of years of traditional uses in the Amazon, this increase in awareness about the brew is now fed by major media stories that either explain why people take ayahuasca, explore the emerging scientific research on potential therapeutic benefits, or scandalize the cases of ayahuasca seekers who meet harm through accidents or ill treatment.

Our potential for action is pivotal. The actions of ayahuasca's allies can and will determine whether ayahuasca survives beyond the current generation as a valuable aspect of humanity's collective patrimony.

This report was prepared by the Ethnobotanical Stewardship Council (ESC), an international nonprofit registered in the United States.

The research findings are based on over one year of collaborative research and engagement with hundreds of people, along with recent field research across the Amazon interviewing over 90 center owners, healers, government officials, indigenous leaders, and others.

We ask you to join us in the Ayahuasca Dialogues.





About the ESC

The Ethnobotanical Stewardship Council (ESC) is a nonprofit organization launched in October 2013 that grew as a response to calls from ayahuasca community members to protect people who work with this plant medicine.

Mission and vision

The ESC’s mission is to transform lives by assuring the sustainability and safe use of traditional plants and enriching the peoples and communities who work with them.

The ESC’s vision is a world where plants, their traditions, and the people who work with them are respected and empowered culturally, legally, economically, and religiously.

“The formation of the ESC and start of the Ayahuasca Dialogues is a much needed effort to wisely and safely guide the expansion of the use of ayahuasca both where it was created in the Amazon and to the rest of the world.”

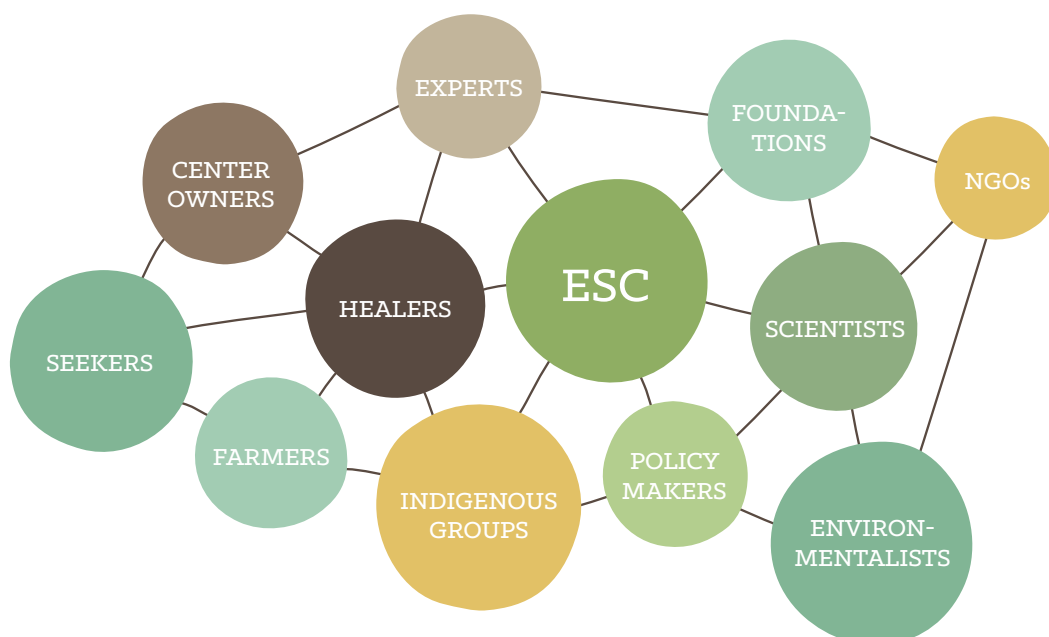
ESC board member Dr. Rick Doblin, Founder of MAPS

Principles and values

- Transparency;
- Stakeholder engagement, characterized by being inclusive, listening, and being responsive to feedback;
- Consensus (characterized by the lack of sustained opposition by any stakeholder group);
- Respect for traditional knowledge holders;
- Preservation of biological and cultural diversity;
- Personal and professional growth;
- Accountability to the stakeholders we serve.

Strategy

The ESC’s strategy is to facilitate transparent dialogue between all people who care about the future of specific traditional plants by holding a space where all stakeholders can collaborate as equals to identify best practices for safer and more sustainable ethnobotanical cultivation, trade, and use.





Report highlights

Ayahuasca culture is at a turning point.

We need to seize the opportunity to further protect and revitalize ayahuasca cultures, increase environmental conservation, and bring benefits to traditional knowledge holders in the Amazon.

Amazonian cultures face serious threats to their survival.

Unsustainable industrial development, village assimilation policies, and lures of modern life are tearing apart the ecosystems and cultures of the Amazon and imperiling the medicine traditions that have evolved there.

We must address direct threats to ayahuasca's legitimacy.

The rapid growth of new types of ayahuasca activity, changes in international drug policy, and reports of charlatanism, sexual assault, or even death threaten ayahuasca's reputation, its stewards, and its vaulted place in Amazonian culture. These threats, then, also present opportunities to recognize established good practices that can protect ayahuasca's legal, cultural, and medical status.

Ayahuasca can help protect the Amazon.

When used with other sustainable development approaches like sustainable tourism, carbon offsetting, sustainable forestry management, medicinal plant cultivation, and/or the development and certification of other sustainable non-timber forest products (NTFP), the planting and harvest of ayahuasca and admixture plants can compete economically and culturally with industrial development to be part of the solution to protecting the Amazon and improving the lives of Amazonian peoples.

Cultural misunderstandings are often at the heart of safety and sustainability issues.

During encounters between indigenous/local and foreign/non-local peoples, both sides have the potential for misunderstanding. Many indigenous interviewees said this stems from a lack of respect for and implementation of indigenous beliefs, as outside seekers often lack context or knowledge. This dynamic has practical impacts on the efficacy of treatment, safety, and reciprocity of ayahuasca exchanges, which all impact the future of ayahuasca and its traditions.

More must be done to improve ayahuasca cultivation.

More can and should be done to enhance and preserve ayahuasca's genetic diversity, knowledge of its cultivation, and benefits to people who grow the plants. Ayahuasca

churches have become pioneers in ensuring sufficient supply of sustainably grown ayahuasca and admixture plants, and we have much to learn from their efforts.

Ayahuasca's preservation depends on our co-operation beyond the ayahuasca community.

Ayahuasca cultures' continued vibrancy depends on forging and strengthening connections to wider communities and professionals focused not on ayahuasca alone, but on environmental protection, cultural revitalization, indigenous rights, FairTrade practices, traditional medicine, sustainable economic relations, and other issues that will determine the future of the Amazon and ayahuasca.

Ayahuasca "tourism" can be part of the solution.

Shifting from "ayahuasca tourism" to "sustainable ayahuasca tourism" or "ayahuasca eco-tourism" – with an emphasis on positive social, environmental, and economic benefits – promises to add further resilience to the cultures, economies, and forests where ayahuasca is esteemed.

Learning from and respecting traditional knowledge is crucial.

The ESC's governance, outreach, and consensus building approaches are designed to learn from and respect traditional knowledge holders.

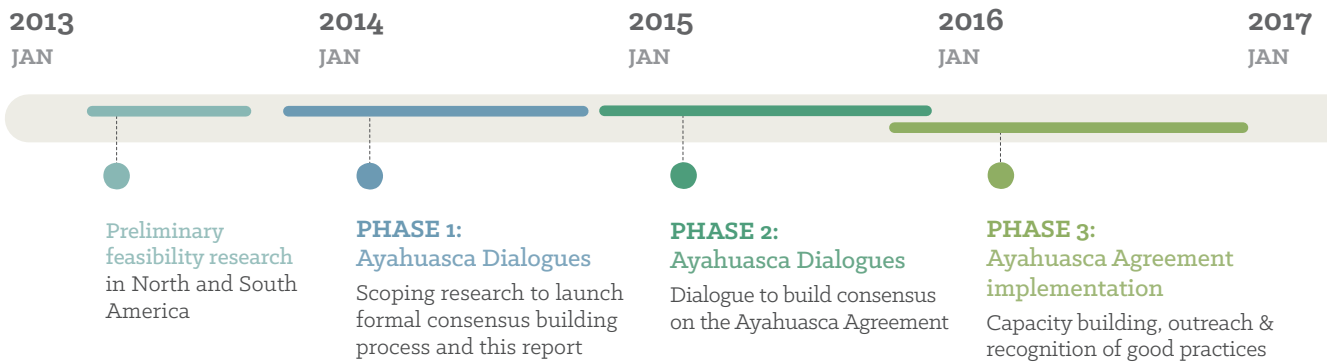
We must act together.

Rapid changes in ayahuasca cultures call for a formalization of safety protocols and best practices – and an ongoing partnership between Amazonian and western stakeholders – to help protect and preserve the medicinal treasures of the Amazon. (Note: We refer to a stakeholder as anyone who could affect or be affected by the ESC's activities.)

We aim to facilitate dialogue to achieve agreement and adoption, and to monitor the impacts of our work over time, to demonstrate replicable results.

Our success in building a global community of knowledge exchange and best practices also depends on you.

The ESC is already becoming part of the community of knowledge and exchange that is a crucial part of the solution, but our success depends on collective and individual efforts—from donors to volunteers, from policy makers to cultivators, from indigenous leaders to ayahuasca seekers, and beyond.



The Ayahuasca Dialogues

The ESC's Ayahuasca Dialogues team is engaging with concerned stakeholders to prioritize and find solutions to key safety and sustainability issues affecting the ayahuasca community.

From Dialogue to Agreement

The Ayahuasca Dialogues will produce the Ayahuasca Agreement, which will establish global consensus on principles and criteria for implementing and recognizing safer and more sustainable ayahuasca cultivation and use. These principles and criteria will be developed from the ground up using globally recognized best practices established by the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labeling Alliance (ISEAL).

Key stakeholders interests

- **Building knowledge networks:** helping stakeholders learn from one another.
- **Leveraging other resources:** helping academics, government officials, center owners, and others engage in other important initiatives they would not have otherwise known about.
- **Addressing risks to ayahuasca's future:** managing resources to help ensure that the next generations of ayahuasca healers are valued and their cultures and gifts are respected.
- **Revitalizing communities:** helping obtain funding and/or technical assistance for community development projects related to health care, training of young healers, resources to build *malocas* (ceremonial and meeting buildings), health insurance, sanitation, and other needs.
- **Recognizing centers and communities that adopt sustainable and safe practices:** assuring centers, communities and cultivation sites that want to be formally recognized for their sustainability and safety performance, using the proposed Ayahuasca Agreement as a basis.

We invite you to join the ESC in the Ayahuasca Dialogues and enhance this global conversation and network to protect ayahuasca. Please give us feedback at:

ayafeedback[at]ethnobotanicalcouncil.org



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