

## 1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: Secoya-Sinoa, Secoya-Sinoa, Tuconoan (1) Alternate names: Angotero, Encabellao (1)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): sey (1)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Ecuador's Northeastern jungle, along the Aguarico, Cuyabeno, and Eno rivers, near Colombian border (1°30'S 71°02'W). (1) The Secoya people are an indigenous ethnic group living in the Ecuadorian Amazon or Oriente region of Ecuador. They share territory along the Shushufindi, Aguarico, and Cuyabeno river with the Siona people, with whom they are sometimes considered a single population. (1)

1.4 Brief history: First contacted by Jesuit missionaries in 1599, the Secoya (the Jesuits named them Encabellado due to their long hair) were involved in ongoing raiding with neighboring groups across the Napo river. Despite the Jesuits best efforts, these natives were soon involved in raids and reprisals with the Portuguese missionaries. Although relations between the Jesuits and the Secoya were hardly ideal, in the 18th century the Spanish court authorized the establishment of 17 Jesuit missions in the Aguarico-Napo region. At the time of contact, most Secoya-Sinoa groups lived in small settlements along secondary rivers and streams. The average population density throughout the Encabellado homeland is estimated to have been 0.2 persons per square kilometer at the time of European contact (3). The priests employed a variety of strategies in their attempt to convert the natives, including moving natives from traditional dispersed forest settlements to larger villages along the banks of the major rivers. These short migrations were not referred to as a relocation but a "reduction". The new mission settlements were unstable as natives frequently abandoned them to go foraging or whenever illness or accusations of sorcery arose. In 1767, when King Charles III ordered the Jesuits expelled from Spain's New World colonies, their missions along the Aguarico-Napo died out (2).

In the 19th century, various Western Tukanoan groups developed exchange relationships with itinerant European river traders, bartering forest products and hammocks for iron tools, cloth, and manufactured items. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with their populations greatly reduced by epidemic diseases, many native settlements fell under the control of European patrones who exploited native labor to collect forest products and grow crops; and in 1941, when Peru invaded Ecuador along the Río Napo, Western Tukanoan populations were shattered. Today, remnant Siona populations live in small settlements along the Río Putumayo and its tributary, the Rio San Miguel. Other Siona and mixed Siona-Secoya communities are located along the Rio Aguarico and its tributaries, the Eno and Cuyabeno. And in Peru, Secoya and Angotero settlements are located on the Angusilla, Santa Maria, and Yubineto rivers (2).

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: Over the centuries, the Secoya have been pressured and exploited by Jesuit missionaries and Spanish and Portuguese explorers and fortune hunters (see 1.4). As a result, modern Siona/Secoya groups are organized politically through the Secoya Indigenous Organization of Ecuador. They are currently involved in a conflict with Occidental Petroleum over oil drilling in Block 15 of Ecuador (2). In addition, there is evidence that environmental degradation brought on by petroleum and agriculture industries may be responsible for emergent health problems of modern Secoya populations (14).

1.6 Ecology: The area occupied by the Siona-Secoya is generally equatorial rainforest, but it contains a number of habitats including: Terra firme forests, river shores, swamps and lagoons. There are two seasons: From December to March is the dry season; the rainy season runs from April to November. (11)(12).

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: As of 2007 the total estimated population of Secoya was 690. Of this total 550 live in Ecuador and 140 was in Peru (1). Siona-Secoya settlements are flexible and temporary arrangements varying from isolated households, to small clusters of households, to larger villages of a 100 or more individuals.

## 2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Staples are manioc, plantains, maize, and peach-palm fruit ( *Bactris gasipaes* ). Wild plant foods contribute roughly 5 percent of the overall diet, but are of greater importance seasonally and when people travel (4).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: More than 60 species of game animals are hunted. “Among the most important are white-lipped and collared peccaries, tapir, woolly and howler monkeys, pacas, agoutis, guans, curassows, turtles, and caimans.”(4) Numerous species of catfishes, characins, and cichlids are also consumed according to location and season (4).

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Traditionally, blowguns and spears were used for most hunting. Today these groups rely on shotguns, which were introduced in the 1950s (4).

2.4 Food storage: No Data

2.5 Sexual division of production: As with many native groups, men hunt and clear gardens, and both men and women fish and plant, weed, and harvest gardens. But harvesting and processing of manioc tubers is women's work. Women also do much of the cooking and child rearing. Men build houses, canoes and hammocks, make wood carvings and do feather-work, while women make clothes, netted bags, pots, and other ceramics. Some men become shamans and headmen, while women may become herbalists and midwives. “Boys are not expected to do serious work until late adolescence. Girls assist their mothers in household tasks. Older men and women work as their strength permits, often cooperating as members of extended households.” (4)

2.6 Land tenure: There was no tradition of formal land ownership. However, local groups maintained territorial interests in specific rivers or segments of rivers. With an average territory about 1,150 square kilometers in size, settlements were semi-permanent relocating from time to time within a given territory. “Individuals still make gardens on any unused land. Such gardens are abandoned after several years, but the cultivator claims harvest rights to the palm and fruit trees he plants.” (5).

2.7 Ceramics: The Secoya-Siona (mostly women) make clay pottery and other ceramics (4).

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: No Data

2.9 Food taboos: No Data

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? No Data

### **3. Anthropometry**

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): No Data

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): No Data

### **4. Life History, mating, marriage**

4.1 Age at menarche (f): No Data

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): No Data

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): “The traditional household consisted of an extended family living in a large oval house set on the ground. Modern houses are often smaller and elevated and shelter a single nuclear family. Such houses may form clusters that reflect an extended-family pattern.” (6)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): No Data

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): No Data

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: No data, but either husband or wife can commence divorce either by stating their intent to separate or by moving out of the household (6).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Although there are instances of polygyny, marriages are generally monogamous (6)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: Under ideal conditions, the male supplies bride-service to his wife's household for a time before marriage (6).

4.9 Inheritance patterns: These peoples have no clear inheritance rules. There is no private ownership of land, and personal belongings are either buried with the dead or smashed, burned, or thrown into the river as a sign of mourning (6).

- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: No Data
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: No Data
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): No Data
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized? No Data
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”) No Data
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No Data
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: No Data
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): “The ideal practice is to seek a mate beyond one's patrilineal sib, and also beyond one's mother's immediate lineage, although individuals who carry their mother's sib name may be considered marriageable if they are not closely related to her.” (6)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? No Data
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring?: No Data
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? No Data
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females?: No Data
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades: No Data
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): No Data
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? No Data
- 4.24 Joking relationships? No Data
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: No Data
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: Both cross- and parallel-cousin marriages are prohibited. No Data
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Yes, and the ceremony concludes when the bride joins the groom in a hammock (6).
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? No Data
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) No Data
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Marriages are arranged by parents (6).
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: No Data

### **Warfare/homicide**

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: No Data
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: No Data
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: “Accusations of witchcraft contribute to the brittle relations between settlements. Suspected sorcerers are sometime killed.” (7)
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): No Data
- 4.18 Cannibalism? No Data

### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Siona-Secoya settlements are flexible and temporary arrangements varying from isolated households, to small clusters of households, to larger villages of a 100 or more individuals (1).
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): No Data
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): “Siona-Secoya society is fundamentally egalitarian. The basic social unit is the patrilineal, patrilocal, extended household, headed by the eldest male. In larger settlements the most respected elder shaman serves as the headman for the community. Headmen exercise influence rather than authority. Relations between the sexes are complementary and cooperative. Although women do not become shamans, individual women are respected for their intelligence and wisdom.” (7)
- 5.4 Post marital residence: males supply bride-service to his wife's household before establishing patrilocal residence (6).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): No Data

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): “Both sexes play together until age 9 or 10, when girls are instructed to spend their time assisting their mothers.” (6)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: No Data

5.8 Village and house organization: “The Secoyas lived in big houses with many families inside. Each couple had its own fire and cooked separately. The floor was the ground itself. They hung up the hammocks next to the wall and slept off the ground. The center of the house was an open space that was used when they had a fiesta or drank yage. Although each family had its own hearth, the relatives shared meat and fish and corn chicha. They lived as a group.” (10)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses): No Data

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? “They hung up the hammocks next to the wall and slept off the ground.” (10)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: No Data

5.12 Trade: “The Siona-Secoya sell timber, animal skins, chickens, pigs, maize, hammocks, pottery, and other artifacts.” (4) The extent of pre-contact trade is unknown, although indigenous exchange of artifacts and raw materials probably existed to cement social relationships and alliances (4).

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Siona-Secoya society is fundamentally egalitarian. Each group, be it a small household or a larger settlement is headed by the eldest or most respected male (7).

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

6 Time allocation to RCR: No Data

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): “Each group has its own headman-shaman who looks after his community, diagnoses and treats the illnesses of its members, and performs rituals to protect against the sorcery of enemies.” (7)

6.2 Stimulants: Calling themselves “airo pai” (people of the forest), the Secoya are known for having incredible knowledge of hundreds of medicinal plants, including “yahé” (Ayahuasca vine), which is used to purification of the soul. And for “Seeings” where the animals are, control over dark beings and have the help of celestial ones (9) (10)(11).

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): The deceased’s personal belongings buried with the body or smashed, burned, or thrown into the river as a sign of mourning (6). At first menses girls undergo a lengthy puberty ceremony (6).

6.4 Other rituals: “The fundamental ritual of the Siona-Secoya is the yahé ceremony presided over by the shaman. These ceremonies do not follow a regular schedule but are held at varying intervals depending on the needs and desires of the community. The ceremony serves multiple purposes, including the diagnosis and treatment of illness, the identification and punishment of enemy sorcerers, the calling of game animals, appeals concerning the weather, communication with supernatural spirits and the dead, and the naming of individuals with special spirit names. The ceremony is a communal one, with the shaman acting as leader and guide. The hallucinogenic ayahuasca ( Banisteriopsis caapi ) potion is the medium through which contact with the spirit world is made.” (8)

The Secoyas would adorn themselves to go to the yage house. They combed their hair, they painted their faces with freshly picked achiote, highlighting those designs with curí, achiote cooked and mixed with other aromatic herbs. They made long stripes in the same way. All these designs had no greater meaning; they were just designs. They dyed their lips black and, with cooked achiote, adorned their feet, calves, arms and hands. They dressed in new tunics and decorated their hammocks, and they wore flowers and fragrant plants on their bodies. At the end they put on feathers, crowns and necklaces.

At around four in the afternoon they would perform these preparations and leave their houses dressed like this, if they lived near the yage house. But if they lived far away, they would set out dressed normally, and then, a short distance away from the yage house, they would adorn themselves. No participant entered the

house unadorned. Once inside, they would hang up their hammocks and remain in them from the beginning of the ceremony at dusk until it ended at dawn. In the morning, breakfast was served, and then the guests would return to their homes, where they would bathe to remove their designs.

Families who had someone sick would bring him to the yage house. He'd lie in his hammock in a corner of the house. Then, at a given moment, the shaman would give him prepared water, fan him with leaves, and, finally, say to his father,

"Your son is going to get well. That sickness will not come back."

When the son was all better, the father would thank the healer, and would pay him with a hammock, because everyone was aware of the suffering he had to pass through to graduate. That's the reason to pay him.(10)(12)

6.5 Myths (Creation): "The culture hero Baina ("With the People") is the main protagonist of the origin story, and his deeds of transformation in mythic times account for the known earth." (8)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Musical instruments used include one-stringed bows and flutes of bamboo (8)(10). Small drums which may be of European origin, and large ceramic trumpets are used for signaling.(8) Arts and crafts include wood carvings, pottery, featherwork, bark-cloth manufacture, and the weaving of hammocks, arm bands, netted bags, and baskets (Modern Secoya often exchange these materials with other tribes or westerners). "Men's songs are of the shamanic genre, whereas women sing of domestic life and its problems." (8)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Men but not women can become shamans (7).

6.8 Missionary effect: More than 5% of the Secoya-Sinoa people are Christian (15).

6.9 RCR revival: No Data

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: "Most deaths are ascribed to sorcery. The dead person is wrapped in a hammock and buried under the house, which is then abandoned. The soul ( hoyo ) of the deceased travels to the sky world and lives among the "heavenly people" by a great celestial river. Such souls occasionally return to earth and cause mischief." (8)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? No Data

6.12 Is there teknonymy? No Data

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): "Siona-Secoya religion is animistic; the natural order is explained without recourse to concepts of good and evil. The Siona-Secoya believe in a multitude of spirits that inhabit natural phenomena such as animals, trees, rivers, and stars . . . The Siona-Secoya believe in a tiered universe, with an underworld, the earth, and multiple celestial realms." (8)

## **7. Adornment**

7.1 Body paint: "Face and body painting are important modes of individual artistic expression." (8)

7.2 Piercings: No Data

7.3 Haircut: 17<sup>th</sup> century Jesuits named them Encabellado due to their long hair (2).

7.4 Scarification: No Data

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Paint their faces with freshly picked achiote, highlighting those designs with curí, achiote cooked and mixed with other aromatic herbs. They dye their lips black and adorned their feet, calves, arms and hands, with cooked achiote. They wore flowers and fragrant plants on their bodies. At the end they put on feathers, crowns and necklaces (10)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: See (6.4)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: No Data

7.8 Missionary effect: No Data

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: No Data

## **8. Kinship systems**

8.1 Sibling classification system: "The foundation of Siona-Secoya kinship is the exogamous patrilineal sib that provides each individual with a reference group of "brothers" and "sisters." Unlike Eastern Tukanoan practice, Western Tukanoan sibs are not ranked in status, nor does each sib have a separate creation myth. In modern times

the surnames used by Siona-Secoya individuals are based on sib names. For example, in the name "Elías Piaguaje," the surname is derived from P 'ā Wahi, the "living bird" sib." (6)

8.2 Sororate, levirate: No Data

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

“The terminology of the Siona of the Río Aguarico is of the Omaha type but has an elaboration in that certain terms in Ego's generation and the first ascending generation have age-grading prefixes. Secoya terminology is similar, but lacks age-grading prefixes in the first ascending generation.” (6)

## 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

### Numbered references

- (1) Ethnologue. Languages of the world, Secoya page, Available at:  
[http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=sey](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=sey)
- (2) Countries and Their Cultures; Siona-Secoya History page; Available at:  
<http://www.everyculture.com/South-America/Siona-Secoya-History-and-Cultural-Relations.html>
- (3) Countries and Their Cultures; Siona-Secoya Settlements page; Available at:  
<http://www.everyculture.com/South-America/Siona-Secoya-Settlements.html>
- (4) Countries and Their Cultures; Siona-Secoya Economy page; Available at:  
<http://www.everyculture.com/South-America/Siona-Secoya-Economy.html>
- (5) Countries and Their Cultures; Siona-Secoya Kinship page; Available at:  
<http://www.everyculture.com/South-America/Siona-Secoya-Kinship.html>
- (6) Countries and Their Cultures; Siona-Secoya Marriage and Family page; Available at:  
<http://www.everyculture.com/South-America/Siona-Secoya-Marriage-and-Family.html>
- (7) Countries and Their Cultures; Siona-Secoya Sociopolitical page; Available at:  
<http://www.everyculture.com/South-America/Siona-Secoya-Sociopolitical-Organization.html>
- (8) Countries and Their Cultures; Siona-Secoya Religion and Expressive Culture page; Available at:  
<http://www.everyculture.com/South-America/Siona-Secoya-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html>
- (9) Ayahuasca Ecuador (Guide to Ayahuasca, ceremonies, retreats and Shamans in Ecuador): Available at:  
<http://ayahuasca-ecuador.webnode.com/tribes-and-shamans/secoya-siona/>
- (10) Payaguaje, Fernando, *The Yage Drinker*; Electronic Book (pdf); Available at:  
<http://anthrome.wordpress.com/2010/06/18/the-yage-drinker/>
- (11) Guillermo Paz y Miño C. , Henrik Balslev and Renato Valencia; Useful Lianas of the Siona-Secoya Indians from Amazonian Ecuador; *Economic Botany* Vol. 49, No. 3 (1995), pp. 269-275
- (12) Kricher, John C. *Tropical ecology*; Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2011
- (13) Wing, Steve; Grippped by Sunlight: The Education of a Secoya Shaman; Qarrtsiluni; Available at:  
<http://qarrtsiluni.com/2006/09/15/grippped-by-sunlight-the-education-of-a-secoya-shaman/>
- (14) Riach, James R.; Health patterns of the Secoya of the northeastern Ecuadorian Amazon; PH.D. Dissertation; University of Georgia; 2001
- (15) Joshua Project, Secoya, Ecuadorian Siona of Ecuador page: Available at:  
<http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=14809&rog3=EC>