

Cusco, 2024



INDIGENOUS BIOCULTURAL TERRITORIES FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND RESILIENCE

Grassroots Evidence for Agroecology



1. INTRODUCTION

This case study on grassroots evidence for agroecology demonstrates how the establishment of Biocultural Territories strengthens the resilience and food sovereignty of Indigenous communities. The evidence comes from two successful experiences in the Peruvian Andes, the Potato Park and the Chalakup Park.

Biocultural Territories are indigenous and traditional land management systems that address land tenure, production and exchange systems, cultural identity, community organisation and simultaneous objectives of endogenous development and biodiversity conservation .

The implementation of Biocultural Territories (BCTs) supports food sovereignty, defined as the right of peoples to access healthy, culturally appropriate food produced through socially just, ecologically sound, and sustainable methods. It also affirms their collective right to determine their own food production, distribution, and consumption policies, strategies, and systems.



At the same time, BCTs contribute to the resilience of the communities implementing the model. **Community resilience** is the capacity of a community to prepare in advance of hazards, adapt to changing conditions, and withstand and recover quickly in the event of disruptions.

As evidence that BCTs contribute to food sovereignty and resilience of indigenous communities, we will explore two examples of successful BCTs in the Peruvian Andes.

2. TWO SUCCESSFUL BIOCULTURAL TERRITORIES

The **Potato Park** was formally established in 2004, and over the last 20 years has developed a process of organisation, innovation and capacity building, which has made them internationally known as a successful experience. They share their experiences widely with other communities and policy makers, resulting in other BCTs in various stages of implementation in Peru and other parts of the world, including China, India and Tajikistan.

The Potato Park focuses on the conservation of native potato diversity, which forms the basis of important economic activities, such as agro-ecotourism, gastronomy, handicrafts, and natural products. They conduct research on the impacts of climate change and industrial agriculture, while exploring solutions such as conserving resilient crop varieties and adapting to shifting climate conditions. Potato Park farmers are in the process of establishing a native potato seed enterprise to provide some of their potato diversity to other indigenous communities in the Andes.



Following the model developed by the Potato Park, **Chalakuy Park** was established in 2016 in the Lares Valley. There they focus on maize diversity and barter markets. Their barter markets continue to be very important for the participation of women, elders, and others who do not have much access to money but usually have access to land, water, and community support to produce food and medicine. Barter markets, called Chalayplasa, contribute to a diverse, healthy, and culturally appropriate diet. They contribute to the distribution of products that grow at different altitudes and contribute to strong social relationships.



“Sumaq Kausay”

The Chalakuy Park and the Potato Park have been recognised as **Agrobiodiversity Zones** (ZABD) by the government of Peru. This national recognition values the knowledge and practices of indigenous farmers and their important contributions to the conservation of the genetic diversity of critical food crops in the world. The recognition process included documenting the diversity of cultivated and wild plants, animals, traditional knowledge, and the development of livelihood plans.

The examples of the Potato Park and Chalakuy Park show that, despite the challenges they face, it is possible for indigenous communities to implement BCT, and that it is valuable. That is why we want to share these experiences with other communities in the region, and with a wider audience, including policy makers, academics and tourists.

3. STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE THROUGH BIOCULTURAL TERRITORIES

Sumaq Kausay is central to the Andean vision of the world and reflects a holistic vision, where the three communities (ayllus) of nature, humans and the sacred are interdependent and interact in reciprocal relationships. Sumaq Kausay promotes close connections between mother earth and people, animals, plants, mountains, and waters and thus the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems and species of local and global importance. BCT is based on the Sumaq Kausay concept (and others like it) and maintains the balance between humans, nature and the sacred/ethical, and strengthens a community's capacity to prepare in advance of hazards.

BCTs help to maintain healthy environments, which help to cope with and adapt to climate change, including extreme and unseasonal weather events, and global warming.

For example, traditional farming systems, compared to industrial agriculture, do not pollute and impoverish soil and water with chemical fertilisers and pesticides, use less water, and maintain more diversity. In addition, the seeds used by traditional farmers are adapted to the local environment, and are being systematically adapted to climate change.

Additional key resilience benefits for the Potato Park include:

- Increasing native potato diversity through local management and the repatriation of native potatoes from the International Potato Centre, to conserve 1,380 native potato varieties in the territory.
- Improved social cohesion within and between the communities that make up the park, where inter-community conflict has decreased.
- Contributions to the local economy through micro-enterprises based on traditional knowledge and biocultural innovations. Economic activities include gastronomy, handicrafts, development of natural products based on medicinal plants, and agro-ecotourism.

Their resilience has been put to the test during the Covid-19 pandemic. While city residents had difficulty accessing food and health services, those living in communities were able to continue to produce their own healthy food and consume their own medicinal plants. In addition to providing food for their families, they were able to donate tons of potatoes to elderly centers, youth centers, and soup kitchens in the cities. Family members who previously lived in the cities have returned to the communities and were able to contribute to excellent food production in the following year.

The benefits of establishing a BCT are being replicated in Chalakuy Park, where communities have successfully maintained their maize diversity and increased their native potato diversity. They were also able to donate tons of maize and potatoes to soup kitchens during the pandemic. Recently they are developing cultural products such as soaps, ointments, lip balms, mates, and nutritious biscuits.

4. BIOCULTURAL TERRITORIES CONTRIBUTE TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The implementation of BCT contributes to the food sovereignty of indigenous communities, in terms of their rights to healthy and culturally appropriate food, production through socially just, ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and the collective right of these peoples to define their own policies, strategies and systems for food production, distribution and consumption.



In terms of their rights, the indigenous communities in the Potato Park continue to manage their territory with autonomy for each community, and their collective rights over their lands. They maintain a collective approach to the intellectual property of their knowledge, resources, and agrobiodiversity. Collective and collaborative conservation allows them to insert their rights within the international seed system. For example, the Potato Park's deposit of 700 native potato varieties in the Svalbard Seed Vault enables the international system to recognize the communities' rights over these seeds, unlike other seeds deposited by governments.



Food production is done in an organic and socially appropriate way, applying traditional knowledge and practices. They use natural fertilisers and pesticides, observe biological, astronomical and meteorological indicators to plan their agricultural activities. At the same time, their production system is not static, but experimental and adaptive, responding to new conditions and integrating new knowledge and techniques. For example, as part of the repatriation process, they receive in vitro seedlings from the International Potato Centre, and have also produced botanical seed for deposit in the Svalbard Vault.

BCTs help to value and celebrate practices, customs, language, dress, rituals, identity, and working together in a variety of ways. In the Potato Park, conservation work and research on agrobiodiversity is carried out in Quechua, and includes the use of important rituals for the start of agricultural work, initiation of events and exchanges, and participants wear their typical clothing with great pride. They promote collective work and solidarity in the communities through collective decision-making based on inter-communal agreement, collective organisation of economic activities, and contributions to a communal fund.

Through the Chalayplasa, barter markets for food from different ecological zones, the Chalakuy Park demonstrates the significance of solidarity economy practices. Bartering allows the participation of people with few economic resources, especially women. It helps to have a balanced diet for nutrition and health, because they can obtain products from the jungle (fruits, vegetables), from the middle zone (grains such as quinoa and maize, beans, Andean roots) and from the high Andean zone (native potato, alpaca). Bartering is not motivated by profit, as in capitalist markets, but also strengthens social connections between neighbours. It provides the opportunity to support the most needy (widows, orphans, or when there was little harvest), respecting the dignity of all.



5. POLICY ADVOCACY FOR BIOCULTURAL TERRITORIES

The impact of BCTs goes beyond their geographical boundaries. We can see their impacts on political processes that link the local with the regional, national and international. Representatives from the Potato Park and Chalakuy Park have been able to attend many international events, and have been involved in organising several. This has enabled them to learn about policies that impact them, such as those related to indigenous peoples, agriculture, environment, biodiversity, and climate change. At the same time, it has given them the opportunity to share their experiences and learnings in implementing BCTs.



The International Network of Indigenous Peoples of Montana (INMIP) has inspired Indigenous communities across 10 countries, including China, India, Tajikistan, and Kenya, to adopt conservation initiatives based on the Potato Park model. Youth from the Community Agroecology Network have traveled from Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua, and the United States to share experiences with peers from the Potato Park and Chalakuy Park. The Potato Park has hosted the International Potato Congress, attracting scientists, entrepreneurs, and academics from around the world, while researchers frequently visit to learn from its farmers and ANDES partners.

The influence of the BCTs is evident in regional policy-making, including an anti-transgenic ordinance replicated across most regions, which helped drive a national moratorium on transgenics. In collaboration with ANDES and the Potato Park, the Cusco region also implemented an ordinance against biopiracy. Additionally, in partnership with Chalakuy Park, the municipality of Lares approved an ordinance recognizing barter markets as part of its cultural heritage, which supports the conservation of agrobiodiversity and strengthens food security in the district.

In 2004, the Potato Park convinced the Peruvian government to declare May 30th as National Potato Day. Twenty years later, on May 30, 2024, the United Nations recognized the first International Potato Day, marking a global celebration of this vital crop. Currently, ANDES, along with the Potato Park and Chalakuy Park, is part of a network aiming to influence national seed policies, with a focus on protecting and supporting traditional seed systems. The Potato Park has been recognised by the national government as one of the first Agrobiodiversity Zones in Peru, and the Chalakuy Park is in the process of recognition. The two parks are likely to influence the development of policies on the management of the ZABDs, and it is planned to facilitate exchanges of experiences between the ZABDs.

6. CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

The advantages of preserving and promoting traditional knowledge, particularly in traditional food systems, are evident. We know that implementing BCTs is one way to support the process. At the same time we know that there are major challenges and obstacles for communities in doing so.

The main obstacles include:

- Industrial agriculture, national programmes and laws promoting industrial agriculture.
- Difficulties in reaching agreements between communities due to policy issues and frequent changes in leadership.
- Difficulties in accessing fairly priced markets for biocultural products.
- Lack of funding for the implementation of Biocultural Territories and Agrobiodiversity Zones.
- Environmental crises are diverse and interconnected, including the migration of young people from Indigenous communities, the loss of traditional knowledge, climate change, and biodiversity decline. Additionally, challenges stem from the impact of mining and other extractive industries.



7. WHAT CAN YOU DO?

We present here evidence that shows that the implementation of BCTs and/or ZABDs by indigenous communities contributes to resilience and food sovereignty. We recognize that BCTs align with the values and priorities of Indigenous communities, such as Sumaq Kausay (Good Living), environmental stewardship, healthy local food systems, agrobiodiversity, and resilience. Therefore, we believe it is beneficial for indigenous communities in Peru:

- Re-evaluate and strengthen their practices and knowledge related to their traditional food systems.
- Implement biocultural territories and/or agrobiodiversity zones.

We also recognize that implementing BCTs and/or ZABD aligns with the priorities of policymakers. These include preserving traditional knowledge and culture (supported by MINCUL, MINCETUR), promoting agrobiodiversity and healthy food production for the national population (backed by MINAM, MIDAGRI), and fostering multi-sectoral networks and collaborations. We therefore call on policy makers to support the implementation and management of BCT and ZABD through:

- The development and implementation of policies that protect the rights of Indigenous peoples, promote biodiversity, and ensure food sovereignty are essential.
- Providing economic resources to Indigenous communities is crucial for the effective management of Biocultural Territories and Agrobiodiversity Zones.

8. CONCLUSIONS



The experiences of Potato Park and Chalakuy Park clearly demonstrate the benefits and effectiveness of Biocultural Territories in enhancing the resilience of Indigenous communities and supporting their food sovereignty, despite facing significant challenges. They continue to strengthen their capacities in conservation, research, and development of new economic models. As part of their vision of Sumaq Kausay, they seek collaboration and solidarity with other communities, and offer to share their learnings with other communities, researchers, educators and students. They await you with open arms, open minds and open hearts.



GLOSSARY

A. Resilience

Community resilience is the capacity of a community to prepare for hazards, adapt to changing conditions, and quickly withstand and recover from disruptions. This capacity is bolstered by traditional knowledge, the use of traditional crops and medicine, prioritization of collective interests, and the practice of self-governance.

B. Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty is the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food, produced through socially just, ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and the collective right of these peoples to define their own policies, strategies and systems for food production, distribution and consumption.

C. Sumaq Kausay

Sumaq Kausay is central to the Andean cosmovision and reflects a holistic vision, where communities (ayllus) of nature, humans and the sacred are interdependent and interact in reciprocal relationships. Sumaq Kausay fosters strong connections between Mother Earth and the people, animals, plants, mountains, and waters, promoting the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, and species that are important both locally and globally.

D. Biocultural Territory (BCT)

Indigenous and traditional land management systems encompass land tenure, production and exchange systems, cultural identity, community organization, and the simultaneous goals of endogenous development and biodiversity conservation.

E. Agrobiodiversity Zone

The Agricultural Diversity Zones, recognised by the Peruvian State, are oriented towards the conservation and sustainable use of its biological diversity and conservation actions of ecosystems, species and genes, favouring those of high ecological, economic, social and cultural value.

Credits

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