

NURTURING SOLIDARITY THROUGH CHALAKUY

Lares Barter Market Park Contributes One Ton of Food to *Ollas Comunitarias* in Cusco



May 28, 2020

Cusco, Peru

Association of Communities of the Chalakuy Park

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis in Peru, it has become apparent that those best prepared to withstand the impacts of the pandemic are indigenous farming communities. The crisis has devastated urban economies, causing widespread unemployment, challenges in supply chains, and food shortages, which have produced a huge reverse migration of urban residents to rural communities. Meanwhile, indigenous farmers have been able to feed their families and their communities, withstanding the shocks of national and global shutdowns. The key has been the strength of indigenous food systems, which do not depend on long global supply chains, instead relying on strong links to local food traditions, family nutrition, and local economies.

The *Chalakuy* system (barter markets) of the Lares Valley in Cusco, Peru illustrates the importance of indigenous food systems in these uncertain times. This area hosts some of the highest agricultural diversity in the country, a product of the ecoclimatic diversity of the mountain ecosystem and its associated indigenous knowledge. This diversity is stratified and defined by altitudinal niches, and bartering arose as a key component of the unique local food system. Bartering consists of exchanging products, knowledge, and services without money and according to customary rules devised by Inca ancestors and based on the guiding principles of Andean thought. *Chalakuy* represents a form of economic solidarity whose practice ensures complementarity, reciprocity, redistribution, knowledge exchange, and autonomy amongst the communities. The Association of Communities of the Parque Chalakuy and Cusco-based NGO Asociación ANDES are working together to protect a network of barter markets that operate in the Valley of Lares.

“*Chalakuy* is the backbone of food and nutrition security, and key to the local economy,” says Ricardo Pacco of Asociación ANDES. “It enables all individuals in the communities of Lares to access diverse food products from different altitudinal ranges. For example, the vitamin-rich fruits of the lowlands are exchanged for the protein-dense Andean grains of the middle zone and the carbohydrate-packed roots and tubers from the high altitudes. This ensures access to balanced nutrition for all inhabitants of the

Lares Valley.” The current crisis is demonstrating the strong resilience of this local food system, which is helping the communities of Lares to overcome the considerable challenges of the pandemic. The Chalakuy system of Lares, which has endured for centuries, demonstrates the power of value-based agriculture, and continues to create powerful strategies and networks of solidarity for resilience and adaptation.

On May 22, 2020, the Association of Communities of the *Parque Chalakuy* of Lares, in collaboration with Asociación ANDES, brought 1000 kilos of diverse crops, including fruits, maize, squash, and beans to three *Ollas Comunitarias* [people’s kitchens] in Cusco. Collectively, these kitchens serve about 1000 meals per day, relying exclusively on the support of individuals to gather an adequate supply of food.

“This is an action against hunger,” says Victor Oblitas, local expert from the community of Ccachin and a member of the local government in the municipality of Lares. “Though we may be considered poor, we do not suffer from hunger. Although we have little money, we have a barter system to exchange goods and services without the use of money, so everybody can access the diverse foods they need. Bartering is a way of life for our communities. Our Incan ancestors never suffered food shortages or hunger because they practiced *Chaninchay* (solidarity), and the practice was strongest during times of crisis. In the *Parque Chalakuy*, we are working for a world with plenty of food for all. For that our Barter Markets should be protected.”

The donation from the *Parque Chalakuy* of Lares coincided with the International Day of Biological Diversity, underlining the importance of indigenous food systems for diverse, healthy, and just global food systems. Globally, biodiversity is increasingly threatened by climate change, globalization and the destruction of intact ecosystems, and these same forces are also threatening barter markets. “*Chalakuy* is a creation of Pachamama which maintains the diversity of crops and foods,” said Maria Chasin, a local expert from the community of Rosaspata. “We must respect *Chalakuy* the same way as we respect our *Pachamama*. Bartering is a way to nurture diversity, strengthen solidarity, and protect the gifts of Pachamama.”

Background of COVID-19 in Peru

In Peru, more than 115,000 individuals have been infected with the novel coronavirus¹ and, as the public health crisis continues to unfold, the population is also facing a related loss of income and food shortages. Urban areas have been particularly hard-hit by the pandemic, both in terms of infections and the accompanying food crisis. As the state of emergency declared on March 15 has forced businesses to close and sequestered Peruvians to their homes, tens of thousands of individuals have fled Peru’s largest cities, beginning the long journeys back to their communities of origin. This reverse urban migration is drastically changing the face of highly urbanized Peru, and raising questions about food supply and security nationwide. For those who stay in cities, there is an increasing need for food assistance and economic support. In response, several neighborhoods in Cusco have organized *Ollas Comunitarias* [people’s kitchens] to feed struggling members of their communities.

¹ <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/minsa/noticias/164455-minsa-casos-confirmados-por-coronavirus-covid-19-ascienden-a-119-959-en-el-peru-comunicado-n-110>