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From Fields to Policy: Protecting Peru's Agrobiodiversity with Communities at Heart

Three people, three different paths of life: Facundo López farms the fields in the southern Peruvian highlands, Eliana Apaza teaches and leads the local NGO Suma Yapu, and Cristina Quintana works to connect conservation with agricultural innovation for the National Institute of Agrarian Innovation. While their daily lives may look different, they are united by a shared purpose: protecting Peru's agrobiodiversity and the knowledge systems that sustain it.

Facundo dedicates his life to nurturing the rich diversity of crops across the highlands. Native potatoes, quinoa and cañihua stretch across the slopes, cultivated through ancestral knowledge passed down from generation to generation. Like him, farming communities grow over 9,000 native crop varieties in Peru, while maintaining traditional livestock systems, contributing not only to conservation, but also to food security and climate resilience. For Facundo, agriculture is not only a livelihood, but a connection to history. He explains: "After the Incas, our great-grandparents continued farming, and today we carry forward their and our values." Facundo believes that while elders are the guardians of this knowledge, young people should carry its legacy forward by learning to understand natural cycles and the importance of biodiversity.

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>
> Facundo López

Eliana Apaza shares this perspective. Like Facundo, she belongs to the Aymara people, one of the largest Indigenous groups of the Andean region whose traditional agricultural practices are rooted in respect for the land, reciprocity and balance. Through her work with local communities, she

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> Eliana Apaza

seeks to preserve these traditions, especially as she sees their continuity increasingly under pressure. "The new generations do not consider it; they see it as belonging to their grandparents' time, and it is falling into disuse," she says. "We must learn that scientific knowledge and ancestral wisdom are complementary and should coexist in a dialogue of knowledge." Supporting this dialogue is at the heart of her work every day.

Cristina Quintana works towards the same goal from a different angle, but in many ways, she moves in the same direction as Facundo and Eliana. She is helping implement national policies and programmes that link conservation with agricultural innovation. Cristina describes how part of the solution is taking shape: "To protect this knowledge and encourage more Peruvians to participate, the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Irrigation has recognised Agrobiodiversity Zones: geographical spaces determined by their richness in native, cultural and ecological agrobiodiversity, where Indigenous Peoples manage and conserve their natural resources." Through her work, Cristina understands the importance of conserving biodiversity through tradi-

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> Cristina Quintana

tional practices and therefore knows that the recognition of Agrobiodiversity Zones is not a top-down process. Local communities, including farmers, women and youth, are at the heart of the recognition and management of Agrobiodiversity Zones, leading efforts to preserve both traditional knowledge and biodiversity. Scientists and organisations work alongside them to document knowledge, identify territories and strengthen management systems, ensuring a Whole-of-Society effort. Supporting these community-led efforts requires ministries, government institutions and local authorities across sectors – including environment, agriculture, culture and education – to coordinate their actions through a Whole-of-Government approach, helping create the conditions for ancestral practices and agrobiodiversity to thrive across generations.

In many ways, Facundo López, Eliana Apaza and Cristina Quintana represent the same interconnected approach: one applies ancestral knowledge in the fields, another strengthens it within communities, and the third helps embed it into national policy. Working at different levels, their efforts come together like pieces of a puzzle to ensure that this knowledge is not lost but carried into the future. But the importance of Peru's agrobiodiversity extends far beyond the country's highlands, as Tulio Medina from the Ministry of Environment summarises: "The world's biodiversity is conserved by Indigenous Peoples, and in Peru more than two million farmers preserve this wealth through their traditional practices and customs, for the country and the world."

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>
> Tulio Medina

Recognising the global importance of the Indigenous stewardship, cooperation also extends beyond national borders. Projects such as *Strengthening National Implementation of Global Biodiversity Targets*, implemented by GIZ on behalf of Germany and co-funded by Norway, help to establish and strengthen Agrobiodiversity Zones in Peru. Through the project, GIZ supports similar activities in seven other countries, namely Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Madagascar and Namibia. In total, the project has worked with around 2,000 representatives of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as rights-holders and strategic partners in biodiversity policy. Together, these efforts help strengthen the biocultural systems that allow ancestral knowledge, cultural practices, territories and biodiversity to thrive across generations.

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Registered offices
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GIZ Global Project GBF Implementation

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32+40
53113 Bonn, Germany
T +49 228 4460-0
F +49 228 4460 1766
E info@giz.de
I www.giz.de/en

Author:
Steffi Noelting

Design:
Agnes Weegen, Cologne

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