

Andes and Women –

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The Andean Ecoregion is home of an extraordinary ecological and cultural diversity where some 40 million people live.

The paramos, jalcas and punas are unique and diverse ecosystems but are also under threat due to unsustainable human activity.

The Andean Ecoregion is central to the production of the water resources that are used in a large part of South America.

The rural economy depends greatly on farm irrigation, which is often based on centuries-old systems and knowledge but is also a major source of conflict in the Andes. In addition, water is a resource that links the country to the city.

The lack of basic infrastructure and access to basic services like health and education; the isolation; the language barriers; and the weakness of their social organizations are additional factors that seriously affect the livelihoods of Andean Ecoregion, specially, the indigenous women.

In our countries, men are still seen as heads of the household unless the woman is widowed or divorced.

Despite the fact that women in the rural areas play an active role in farming, they are mainly concerned with the house, small animals and the children.

Women are also involved in mother's clubs, giving talks on nutrition, family planning and so on - responsibilities which fit more easily with the traditional role of carer.

Some women take on work, to increase the family income but tend not to see these as "jobs"; rather as just helping out the family.

Women still rarely hold positions of authority but have worked effectively in women's committees fighting for better living conditions.

An example of this is the case of Pamparomás Women's association. The following short video briefly describe the story of a particular group of women leaders in a remote Andean community of Peru. They are working and learning together about their rights and how to use them into a male lead society.

VIDEO: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDYAP23W6pM>

As indicated by Soledad Ibañez, president of the Pamparomás Women's association, several women in the Andes are phasing challenges as the ones explained before. However they are also moving forward towards a society where they are listened and respected as an equal human being.

CONDESAN and the Mountain Partnership members in the Andes are working together around strategies to face the challenges that the Andean territory will experience in coming years.

The Andean territory is not foreign to the global environmental dynamic, marked by a diversity of interrelated phenomena, such as the modification of physical and biogeochemical environments and processes that impact in the livelihoods and welfare of the population worldwide.

As said at the beginning, the Andes harbors the most extense and diverse tropical mountain ecosystems in the world but, at the same time, these are fragile environments, subject to the effects of climate change and the dynamics of land use and transformation.

In the same way, agro-ecosystems that constitute a large portion of the Andean territory, are equally vulnerable and face similar problems.

In this context, it is imperative to analyze the relations between social and environmental systems in order to have a better understanding of the degree of vulnerability of rural Andean populations. At the same time, it is necessary to keep a critical approach regarding the significant differences existing among the inhabitants of rural areas, which implies different impacts and a range of possible answers and measures available to mitigate those vulnerabilities.

Aside from mining, the intensive exploration of new water sources, the mega infrastructure projects, energy generation projects, the production of biofuels and the expansion of crops of commercial interest in intensive schemes, generate alterations in the ecosystems and changes in the use of land. These dynamics mobilize economic resources to regions, but also affect Andean population that are most vulnerable and least prepared to take on these changes.

Pampamás is only one of the several examples of how poor women in the Andes are organizing themselves to improve their livelihoods and to understand the connection between women rights, environmental protection and a better life for them and their families.

CONDESAN and the Mountain Partnership members in the Andes are committed to continue supporting them. I am sure now, that we can count on you too.

Thank you very much.

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