

2. Actors

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

The Andean Program for Food Sovereignty began in 2007, when Michel Pimbert from IIED invited two South American NGOs, Pratec from Peru and Mainumby from Bolivia, to take part in a global initiative with three other established groups in West Africa, West Asia and South Asia. After a period of conversations dealing with the idea of democratising the governance of agriculture and food systems, the partners agreed that the peasant altiplano communities of the south Andean region should be the protagonists of the initiative. The bottom-up process would combine participatory methodologies to create safe spaces for deliberative processes regarding food and farming at the community-level linking with multiple levels.



IIED entrusted Maruja Salas and Timmi Tillmann with the task of introducing participatory methodologies and supporting the local groups (NGOs, communities and elders networks) to facilitate their own plans of action regarding food sovereignty. This involved a sustained process of thinking together about how agricultural science and food policies would be able to include people's knowledge about food and their right to make decisions about it.



There was a slow take-off, which felt like everyone was trying to solve a puzzle of tangled methodologies, concepts, and interests. The national and local NGOs had their own experiences in the role of accompanying and supporting farming communities as well as hidden biases about development work. It took time for everyone to agree upon the importance of building upon inclusive, transparent and overarching processes defined by representatives from the communities.

One difficulty was to break free from creating simplistic plans constrained by finance and conventional development objectives and learning to follow the flow of the participatory continuous action-reflection-action (ARA) process. This power shift was often seen as illusory, especially when achievements seemed to be invisible; the NGOs claimed that some of the participant communities were asking for material benefits, income-generating activities, or conventional research proposals. There were moments of silence, and of crisis.





The four local NGOs that formed part of PASA are:

Paqalqu (reciprocal support), with Lidia Faggione, who shifted from university life to a full involvement in rural life. Francisco Tito is an agronomist who left conventional agricultural extension work and is dedicated to the support of peasant communities and their ritual life cycle. Both are devoted to their own growing and consumption of Andean crops and are members of a large network in the communities of Vilurcuni, Sanquira (Yunguyo) and share the values of rural society with the farmers.

Qolla Aymara (the cure for the Aymaras), with Sabino Cutipa, who is a son and grandson of fishermen. He is an engineer in agronomy, but professional life has reunited him with his community of origin, Perka, where he accompanies family groups in different development activities. Raymundo Aguirre is part of Qolla where he contributes as an anthropologist without forgetting his origins. He is an active member of the Ayrumas Carumas community and shares with them a pastoral lifestyle, and in particular, a love of music.

ASEVIDA (Association for the Study and Envigoration of Diversity in the Andes). This small NGO is led by Odón Gomel, an animal technician who spends most of his time in the altiplano communities of Aymaña, Chimboya in Carabaya immersed in agropastoral life.

CEPROSI (Centre for Promotion and Integral Services) is based in Cuzco city. Elena Pardo, a teacher, and Rosío Achahui, a social worker, have a long-standing relationship with several peasant communities, especially with Queramarca and Raqchi in Vilcanota Valley. This has been strengthened through the annual organisation of the *Watunakuy*, the gathering of families, communities, regions and peoples who celebrate and cherish local seeds. The *Watunakuy* is an opportunity to exchange experiences about wisdom and practices related to crops, animals, and medicinal plants encompassed in a joyful celebration of life.

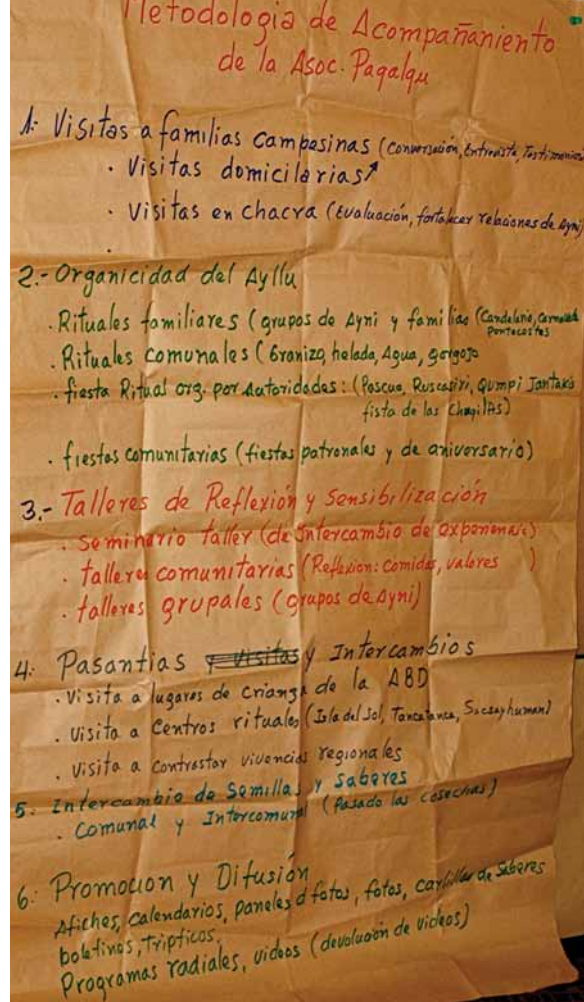


Role of local NGOs

The advantage of having the four local NGOs involved in PASA is that as ‘cultural affirmation companions’ they already have a presence where peasant families are nurturing their lives. It is also fortunate that all members of these four NGOs have a personal openness and flexibility that allows them to move between community life and development demands. This is in contrast to members of other NGOs and State development organisations who react exclusively to development demands and act intrusively in rural areas.

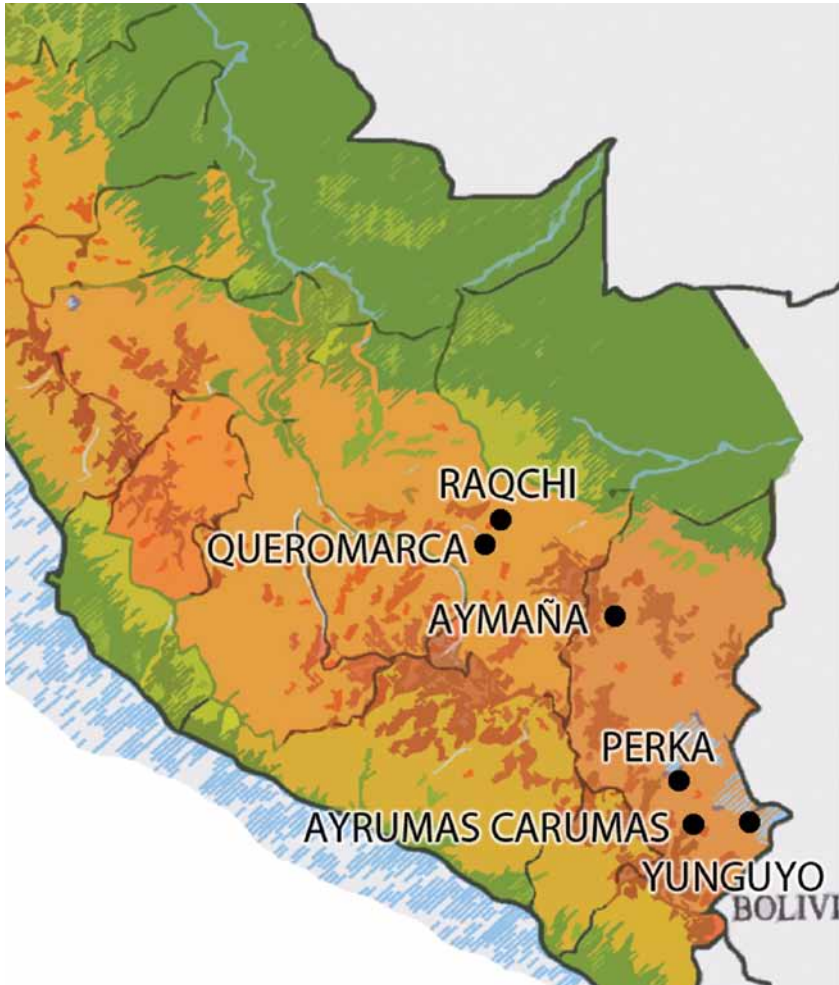
The adoption of participatory facilitation techniques took place according to each NGO cultural companion’s capacity to come to grips with the idea of community-based self-determination in matters of food sovereignty.

After four years, the NGO companions and participatory facilitators have moved on in various directions. Some of the former found PAR personally beneficial and applied it professionally in other institutional development contexts. Others have fully explored and appropriated the PAR methodology, recognising the virtues of seeking a creative power balance that diminishes knowledge divides and adds value to their close relationship with the community-based actors. This process grows in tandem with the demystification of developmentalism and the empowerment that community video has supported. Besides a certain spiritual flourishing and new awareness produced by their deep reflections on food sovereignty, some of the NGO companions have earned respect as a new breed of development managers.



Community-based voices

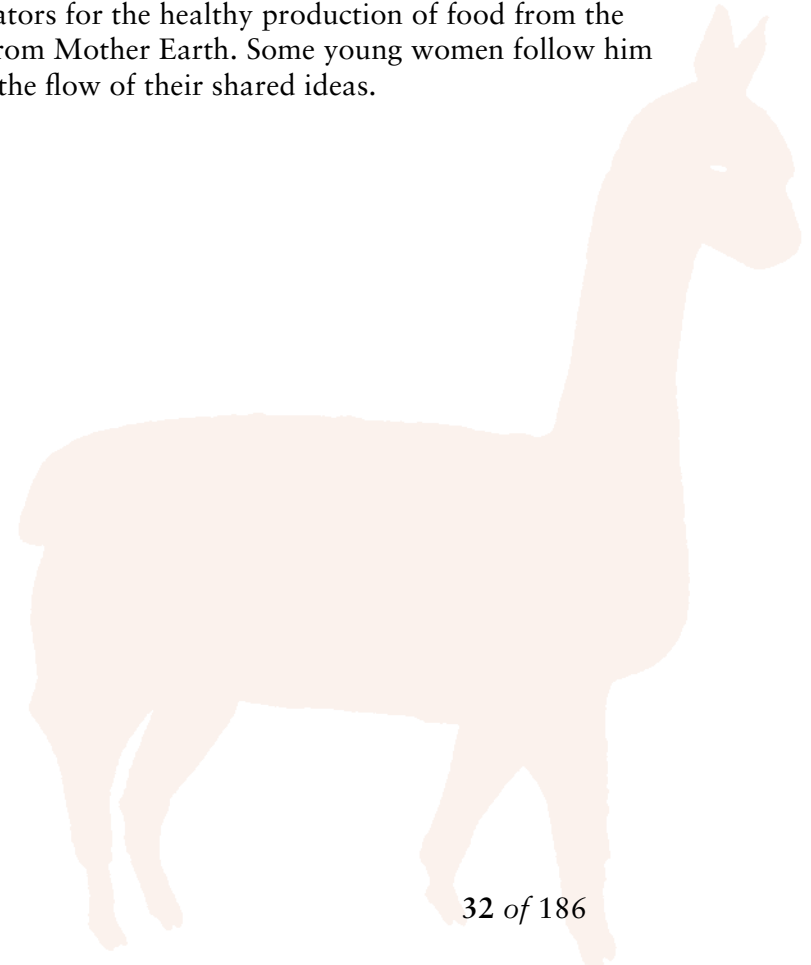
In May 2009 PASA began with a few community-based persons from the peasant communities of Perka, Vilurcuni, Sanquira, Ayrumas Carumas, Aymaña, Queramarca and Raqchi, who with goodwill began to take part in group conversations about food. This happened in different ways, sometimes as conversations while eating Andean snacks, other times during debates about



whether using aid funding to modernise kitchens would have consequences on the quality of food. Some groups began to visualise their food preferences and this made them aware of the larger picture of food sovereignty and its link to a global movement from below.

It appears that fifty years of food and agricultural modernisation policies have not robbed this rich culinary culture of all its treasures.

Perka is a community on the shores of Lake Titicaca in Plateria district. A group of women of different ages, and an elder, Don Pedro Cruz, have an outdoor meeting. Don Pedro talks about the celestial signs, the behaviour of animals, plants and the Lake itself as indicators for the healthy production of food from the fields, a gift from Mother Earth. Some young women follow him and visualise the flow of their shared ideas.



Another group concentrates on seeds and visualises the intimate flavours of food grown from local seeds, and the joy accompanying the selecting and exchanging of such seeds. They feel that touching the seeds awakes deep emotions. Sometimes the seeds are considered daughters, at other times they are

mothers, or mothers- and daughters-in-law, so they are dressed accordingly during harvest ceremonies. Seeds and women are one in their reproductive capacity and therefore the genetic modification of seeds is felt as a loss of self-dignity and the autonomy to produce nutritious food.



In the community of **Sanquira**, protected by the Royal Mountain Range of the Andes, Don Rufino Chambi and his wife associate food with travelling down to the coast and through the jungle. When they were young they went once to barter highland products with ocean algae or rice and fruits from the farmers in the tropical valleys. Don Rufino's wife enjoys cooking in her old-fashioned kitchen, near the fire, with her clay and wood utensils. She does not like fast food, by which she means prepared ready-to-cook goods from the village shop that are heated up on the gas stove and served in plastic dishes.

From the household level to the community there are other scenes of a vigorous food tradition. It is harvest time, and a large group of relatives are classifying potatoes. Between 30 to 50 varieties of potatoes and more than 17 varieties of *quinua* are counted. At least three generations of one family are taking part in conversations about which potato variety is suitable for which Andean culinary specialty. It is also time to prepare the potatoes to be sent to relatives in Lima who greatly miss the taste of potatoes grown in these particular fields.



In **Vilurcuni**, Don Andrés Ramos, his wife Doña Juliana Chura and Don Calixto Chura compare the happiness of the past with the sadness of the present. In their lifetime they have seen how the harvest of native fish, edible cattail and lake weed have all decreased due to contamination of Titicaca's waters. Each August they ask the Lake for permission to fish in a ritual known as *Chuwa*.

The Aymara communities of the high ranges still have their pristine air. This landscape still has its far-flung cattle ranches and llamas transporting small loads of potato harvested from remote fields – but this contrasts with the new four-wheel-drive cars of those prospecting for valuable minerals to mine.



Aymaña is a small area populated by agropastoral Quechua families like Don Antonio Pineda's. In his courtyard potatoes and other Andean tubers are spread out in the sun. In particular, *chuño* and *moraya* – processed potatoes – and jerky are already separated to load onto the backs of llamas

to be bartered with products from lower ecological zones. The families are proud of their ability to fill their storerooms with a variety of long-lasting produce, allowing them to prepare a great range of dishes for daily meals, ceremonies and rituals or medicinal purposes.





The Río Blanco (White River) runs along the territory of **Ayrumas Carumas**, at 4,000 metres above sea level. This is an area densely populated with *alpacas*. Don Severino, Don Santiago and Pastora explain the incomparable flavour of the meat of *alpacas* that range free in natural mountain pastures and drink from unpolluted springs. Severino emphasises that healthy landscapes, animals and humans are interrelated. His mission is to maintain the harmony among these three and the divinities: he knows about herbal medicines, minerals, procedures and some secrets that he learned from his father and grandparents.



In the Vilcanota Valley in Cuzco, two Quechua communities consented to be part of PASA. **Raqchi** is a community that coexists with the archaeological complex of the Wiracocha Temple. The agricultural terraces and irrigation systems are part of the national historic patrimony, and are administered by the state. Here, there is a group of very entrepreneurial women, who sell handicrafts to tourists, lodge the visitors, and cook for them typical Andean food (although their own stores are empty and their fields are mostly left fallow).



The other community is Queromarca, where Hipolito Espirillo has started an association with ten women and three men, **Sumaq Kausay** — good living.

Yet they themselves value eating food grown from local seeds and are ready to find ways out of their market dependency. Martina Mamani and her group **Sara Mama** – mother maize – regained their awareness of food by making a video about maize in which they recall many varieties and the advantages of having a full storeroom. They also unravelled the multiple manifestations of the spirit of the mother seed — *muju mama* — and hoped for a better future.



Sumaq Kausay wishes to recover a number of local varieties of maize since most families in Queramarca are growing food for the market and hence have only white maize and other cash crop vegetables. They know how fertile their fields are, and that because of market demands they were abusing their plots with chemicals and high-yielding varieties. Indeed, their lives have been monetised to such an extent that many of the men folk are working in gold mines while the women are domestic workers in the coastal cities.



Reflecting upon the advantages of growing their own healthy food gave them an incentive to regain their food diversity in a practical and spiritual way. The best seeds are kept in a sacred space, a temple-like storeroom to venerate the fertility of the seeds, *mujumama*. As a group they have regained diverse maize varieties in a practical and also ritual way.

Both **Sumaq Kausay** and **Sara Mama** underwent thorough preparations to participate in the wisdom dialogues. However, unbalanced communal and individual interests, the strong sociocultural distance between community members and scientists as well as doubts about dedicating time to food sovereignty endeavours made both groups postpone their attendance at the dialogues.

