

# Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational experience No. 2

A photograph of four women sitting in a field of tall grass, engaged in a discussion. They are wearing traditional clothing, including hats and shawls. One woman in the foreground is wearing a white jacket and a grey hat with a peacock feather. Another woman is wearing a purple top and a black hat. They are holding and looking at documents, suggesting a meeting or a collaborative work session.

Land  
management

# LAND MANAGEMENT



Before and now

*The indiscriminate extension of the agricultural frontier to the Paramo (moorland areas) threatened the water supply in the rural community of Chilco. This situation led to a rethinking of the people and they decided to revive their Paramo and thus restore the water storage capacity. This proved to be a strategic step which also had a positive effect on the economic situation of the families living there.*

## Our paramowas dying

The Angochagua region in the Ibarra canton, in the north of the Ecuadorian Andes, draws attention to the beauty of its landscapes. Since the Spanish colonial rule, however, little has been done on land ownership. Haciendas occupy almost all the territory in the valleys, exerting until the date the property right on the water that descends in ravines and streams from the moors. The peasant population, living in close-to-slavery conditions during the colonial period, settled thereafter on the mountain slopes, on the limits of these Haciendas at 2500m high. The community Kichwa of Chilco began with the exploitation of the “páramo” (sector at the top of the mountains), a very fragile ecological area important for the supply of water for human consumption and agricultural and livestock activities.

In 2004 a drought, that lasted 25 months, began and the few slopes that, due to the overgrazing and extension of the agricultural frontier towards the “páramo”, reduced their flows to such an extent that they could not even supply the water for human consumption. The scene of this situation is still present in the memory of the community: child malnutrition and food shortages, migration to the city, rick-

ety animals and dusty soil. The time had come that for the community to make decisions and actions to deal with the problem.

## Change of course

With the support of the Social Cultural Foundation Ibarra, the community faced with the unsustainable and dramatic situation opted for a change of course. An exchange visit was made to peasant communities with experiences in moorland conservation. Finally, at a community level, the withdrawal of animals (among cows, lambs and even horses) from the moor was arranged. Between 2006 and 2007 conflicting scenes took place in 20 opportunities where some families had to be forced to remove their animals from the moorland. This decision meant that many families had to reduce their livestock.

Once the closure of the moor for any agricultural or livestock activity was achieved, a forest nursery was started to produce Alder seedlings, a species native to the moorland. Through more than 25 “mingas” (community work day) with the participation of 40 families of the community it was managed to reforest 45 hectares of the “Páramo”, planting 27,000 trees.



Full participation of women

Manuel Aparicio Escola, community ranger in Cholco, remembers: “The erosion had been badly inflicted on our paramo, and instead of soil, we only saw stones and gravel, and the ecological balance of moor had disappeared. People and animals were dying due of the lack of water, but in Chilco we did not understand why we could not have our animals grazed up there in the moor, we drank contaminated water “

Clara Lechón, habitant of the community of Chilco complements Manuel’s words: “Before we had more cows, sheep and horses but we had no water and they called us dirty Indians.”



Overgrazing leaves traces (source image material: José Obando)

The moor is a precious resource that moderates water flows, absorbs water and acts as a sponge when it rains and releases it slowly throughout the year; this helps to reduce flooding and to have water during the dry season.

Knowing that moors have little capacity to recover their natural state (low resilience), and that low adaptability to anthropic impacts that affect them, are reasons why they are considered as highly vulnerable ecosystems.

The water retention capacity is reversible to a certain extent, then the drought is irreversible, since the impacts change the physical characteristics of the fragile soils of the moor.

(Except from the document: The Paramo of Chilco - a story worth telling, Fundación Social Cultural Ibarra, 2012)

The example of the “Paramo” of Chilco has taught a valuable lesson. The local administration of Angochagua made up of the community of Chilco plus five other communities, supports the work of the community rangers with public resources; The cantonal and provincial governments have taken the closure of Chilco’s moorland as a reference to promote an adequate use of the ecological floor of the moors.

## Positive reception

After 8 years of the recovery of the moor there are good news. The flow of the main slope that supplies drinking water has increased from 0.5 to more than 4 liters per second, guaranteeing enough quality water for the entire community, their crops and their



Regeneration of the vegetation of the moor.



Regeneration of the vegetation of the moor (source image material: José Obando)

animals. The “Pajonales”, natural vegetation of the Moorland, have been regenerated reaching again a fiber length of up to one and a half meters. Typical flora and fauna of the Paramo have returned. The humidity in the depth of the ground, that had fallen to less than half a meter, reaches again up to 4 meters.

The native animals, such as the Condor, a mythical bird with a high cultural value which the peasants had not seen fly for over 30 years, the owl as well as the fox, rabbit, hawk and wolf among others have returned to the “Paramo”.

During an informal meeting in the páramo, María Juana Ilichon, María Cecilia and María Helena Sandoval, Lucila Matilde Pilataxi and Clara Lechón speak about the current situation: “We now have fewer animals but we have clean water; few cows three or four, but it’s better” “With water for irrigation we can feed the animals and rent grassy land to neighbors who have more animals.” “Now we are happy with our forest on the moor. We are going to organize tourism in the páramo, without destroying but opening trails “.



## Messages to the future

- Understanding ecosystems and modifying routines allows people to improve their quality of life in their daily lives while influencing local government policy development.
- Instead of using a short-sighted and extractive logic, the use of the area in Chilco is to keep the externalities as small as possible, to practice sustainable forms of management, and to place public welfare in the foreground.
- The reduction of the agricultural frontier as well as the number of older animals (partly compensated by smaller animals) has improved and stabilized the quality of life of the collective.

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The text, which is based on visits and discussions in situ, was created by Jorge Krekeler (Consultant Misereor as AGEH specialist), but initially made consensual with the people visited. Special thanks go to Manuel Aparicio Escola of the municipality of Chilco and José Obando as well as the team of the Fundación Social Cultural Ibarra.

# Almanac to the Future

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