



CONDESAN: The Consortium for Sustainable Development in the Andean Ecoregion ¹

8/17/00

A DIFFERENT APPROACH:

CONDESAN (Consortio para el Desarrollo Sostenible de la Ecorregión Andina) constitutes a unique mechanism for addressing poverty and natural resource abuse in the Andes. The underlying vision of CONDESAN, crafted during a series of meetings held in the early 90's, is based on four principles:

- Natural resource management and rural poverty are multidisciplinary themes that can best be addressed by a consortium of institutions.
- The impact of quality work going on in the Andes can be reinforced through the creation of an electronic information-exchange and sharing mechanism (InfoAndina).
- The core issues of poverty and resource management must make more local and political alliances, focusing on NGO partners, regional Universities, producer groups, and municipal governments.
- The Andean research and development consortium would not create additional organizational infrastructure, but rather would be a virtual entity, primarily working through its partners.

Today, CONDESAN is a consortium of nearly 50 organizations actively working in the Andes of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. The International Potato Center in Lima Peru is host to the Consortium. The membership primarily constitutes NGO's, Andean Universities and National Research Institutes, but also includes European and North American Universities as well as several international centers (International Potato Center, Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical, International Livestock Research Center, and International Fertilizer Research Center).

¹ Nota sobre CONDESAN, al constituirse socio del International Mountain Society (IMS), que será publicada en la revista Mountain Research and Development.

HOW DOES THE CONSORTIUM WORK?

CONDESAN's research agenda covers the intersecting themes of sustainable natural resource management, improved rural incomes and social equity. The Consortium facilitates research on cross-cutting, trans-Andean topics as well as work with benchmark watershed development teams.

The major trans-Andean research activities fall into four categories:

- soil and water management and conservation;
- conservation and use of agrobiodiversity in Andean roots and tubers and pasture species;
- improved farming systems, covering all aspects of the system from producer to consumer;
- policy research to promote sustainable development and conservation in the Andes.

Currently the Consortium works in seven benchmark watersheds (usually 10,000-100,000 ha) from Venezuela to Bolivia. Each site represents a small number of communities that share a common resource base and have an inter-related set of management and development challenges. A sampling of the active research/development programs underway includes:

- Pueblo Llano and Gavidia, (Mérida, Venezuela): Working to balance high-input potato production with sustainable development.
- La Miel, (Manizales, Colombia): Managing the Florencia cloud-forest bioreserve and developing profitable alternatives in the buffer zone.
- El Angel, (Carchi, Ecuador): Creating a sense of commonwealth and promoting rural prosperity along an irrigation canal.
- Cajamarca, (Peru): Building micro-watershed management plans with municipal authorities.
- Manazo, (Puno, Peru): Increasing incomes in a new irrigation district: From water management to marketing Andean products.
- Aroma, (La Paz, Bolivia): Intensifying livestock production in the semi-arid Andes: Landscape and risk management.
- Candelaria, (Cochabamba, Bolivia): Evolving from prospecting for germplasm to earning profits with Andean roots and tubers.

INFOANDINA, THE KEYSTONE OF THE CONSORTIUM

Our Spanish language communications network currently includes 800 subscribers, mostly from Latin America. In addition to producing InfoNotas and highlights from the larger Mountain Forum discussion lists, InfoAndina hosts electronic forums. Generally these e-mail forums cover a five-week period. A provocative opening statement is issued each Monday and a moderator's resume of the debate appears at the end of the week. During one of the weeks, we host a virtual café with open discussion among the participants. Once completed, the forum contributions are edited and put on our website. The forums generally attract 300 to 500 participants. Recent themes have included:

- Rural agroindustry in the Andes and the challenges of globalization
- Municipal governments and sustainable development in the rural Andes
- Challenges to improving post-graduate education in natural resource management in the Andean Ecoregion
- Experiences in bioserve management in the high Andes
- Sustainable use and conservation of the Andean paramo

STRUCTURE AND SPONSORS

The Consortium has an eight-person Board of Trustees that meets once a year. Board members can serve up to two three-year terms. A small coordination unit (four people) works to promote the Consortium's objectives full time. A general assembly of members was held in 1997 and an electronic town meeting took place in 2000. Financial support to the Consortium has come from the Canadian, Swiss, Dutch, German, Spanish and US governments, as well as the Ford Foundation.

THE FUTURE

Although not yet fully realized, our expectation is that the cross-Andean methodologies, research findings, and discussions will increase the effectiveness of the benchmark teams, and that the benchmark successes will, in turn, serve to focus the “cross-Andean” themes.

Our wager for the future is three fold:

1. That our research activities will help to develop new, user-friendly tools for natural resource management as well as better participatory methodologies and improved production technologies;
2. Our Consortium will grow stronger as the model of shared-risk, shared-benefit, multi-institutional teams continues to prove successful; and,
3. Our ability to have a real impact on sustainable rural development in the Andes will increase as the synergism of the cross-Andean methodology and in-depth benchmark site research activities intensifies.