

# *Indigenous Participation*

TRANSFORMING  
CLIMATE ACTION

## ISSUE PAPER 1

Base project: Indigenous Visions for Climate Justice

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*Indigenous Visions for Climate Justice*

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# Introduction

**Climate justice is not only an environmental issue but also a political one:** it defines who makes decisions about territories and ecosystems, and under what principles. In Peru, the state has implemented climate policies aimed at addressing the environmental crisis. However, challenges remain to ensure that Indigenous Peoples—whose territorial management systems have historically been given limited influence in decision-making—are recognized as key actors in this process and that their perspectives are incorporated.

The 249 Natural Protected Areas (NPA) established by the state are key spaces for analyzing government-led climate action. In these territories, although **the state has developed well-structured participatory mechanisms from an administrative and technical standpoint, they do not necessarily result in inclusive and equitable processes** for Indigenous Peoples—especially those without formal recognition or land titles. Regulatory, technical, and structural barriers persist, limiting their ability to influence the design and implementation of climate action.

Faced with this context, **Indigenous Peoples have challenged the state's traditional approach to climate action.** They do not oppose conservation or the fulfillment of climate commitments but rather call for participation that goes beyond consultation and has a real impact on decisions affecting their territories. They have politicized the climate debate—not as a barrier, but as an opportunity to build solutions that are more just, sustainable, and aligned with their own ways of managing and caring for the ecosystems they inhabit.

This document gathers **the experiences of the Kichwa Indigenous Peoples in San Martín and the Quechua Indigenous Peoples in Arequipa** through an ethnographic approach that combines documentary research, participant observation, participatory mapping, and interviews. It analyses the participatory spaces

promoted by the state and how they contrast with the realities of Indigenous governance within Protected Natural Areas. Based on these cases, the document offers criteria to improve Indigenous participation and highlights the experience of the Indigenous Peoples' Platform to Address Climate Change (PPICC) as a model for coordination and strengthened advocacy.

“We Indigenous Peoples have always cared for the forest. We don't need someone to come and train us on how to take care of our territory. We already know how to protect it.”

*(Indigenous leader Elaine Shajian, 2023)*



# Participatory mechanisms

Participation in the management of Natural Protected Areas (NPAs) in Peru has been progressively incorporated through mechanisms aimed at including communities and other stakeholders in decision-making processes. However, Indigenous leaders argue that these mechanisms often function more as administrative formalities than as tools to foster co-governance, projecting an image of inclusion without ensuring real influence over decisions affecting their territories.

- **Assessments and participatory studies**

Used in the creation and management of NPAs, these processes include workshops, interviews, and tools such as talking maps. While they gather community perspectives, their design limits Indigenous Peoples' ability to define agendas and priorities, instead aligning their outcomes with the logics of funders and technical agencies.

- **Management Committees and Multi-Stakeholder Platforms**

These spaces gather communities, NGOs, the State, and other actors to coordinate the management of NPAs. However, Indigenous representation is often limited compared to sectors with greater political and technical influence. Moreover, they tend to prioritise national or international institutional agendas, relegating Indigenous Peoples to a more consultative but non-binding role.

- **Prior consultation protocols**

Since 2011, only 14 prior consultation processes have been carried out for 109 nationally and regionally administered NPAs. Most Master Plans have not been subject to consultation, including those renewed after 2011, and only one national NPA has been created under this protocol. Overall, the protocol has had limited influence on the creation or management of these areas.

## FOR REFLECTION

- **How can we transform these spaces to make participation truly fair and effective?**



“Yes, decisions are made, but those decisions (around budget) no (...) We simply share ideas (...) No one's going to waste their time for free”

*(Former Management Committee President, 2023)*

## BOX: History and State Commitments to Indigenous Participation in NPAs

### History

- **1990s:** Creation of initial participatory mechanisms in NPAs
- **1994:** The Natural Protected Areas Law establishes Management Committees
- **2006:** Approval of SERNANP's Participatory Management Guide
- **2011:** Publication of the Prior Consultation Law in Peru
- **2020s:** Greater emphasis on participation in climate governance

### Commitments

- **Framework Law on Climate Change:** Article 22 – Indigenous participation; Principle 3.1 – Mitigation and adaptation based on traditional knowledge.
- **Forestry and Wildlife Law:** Article 6 of the fourth regulation; Article 20 – Participation in forest zoning.
- **National Climate Change Adaptation Plan:** Cross-cutting intercultural approach.

# The Kichwa People

## *Two Protected Natural Areas, limited participation, and lack of state will*

The Kichwa People, whose territories are located in the San Martín Region, have been directly impacted by the creation and management of two Natural Protected Areas (NPAs): the Cordillera Escalera Regional Conservation Area (ACR-CE), established in 2005 and managed by the Regional Government of San Martín through the Huallaga Central and Bajo Mayo Special Project (PEHCBM); and the Cordillera Azul National Park (PNCAZ), administered by SERNANP and the NGO CIMA. In both cases, communities have sought to influence the management of their territories but have been met with limited participatory spaces that, rather than strengthening NPA governance, deepen institutional distrust.

### **01** *Prior consultation remains an unguaranteed right*

Neither of the two NPAs was created through prior consultation, and subsequent attempts to consult on Master Plans were ultimately inconclusive: decisions had already been made, and there was no real dialogue with the communities. In addition, recognition was restricted to titled communities, despite the existence of several still undergoing the titling process. This prevented the Kichwa from influencing key aspects such as land-use zoning and access to resources.

### **02** *The management committees lack effective Indigenous representation*

In the CE-RCA, the criteria for Indigenous Peoples to participate in the committees have prioritised local residence over cultural identity, limiting the representation of Indigenous federations. In the PNCAZ, participation has been restricted to titled communities or producer associations, leaving out many others who share the same territory.

### **03** *Participation costs fall on the communities*

The lack of formal recognition and support for Indigenous representative structures—their federations—prevents their participation from being budgeted. Kichwa leaders must cover their own travel and time costs, creating an unequal playing field compared to other actors with greater resources.

### **04** *Indigenous knowledge and climate action are not valued*

While communities have demonstrated sustainable management practices, conservation plans have not systematically incorporated their knowledge and practices on land use, nor have they discussed with them the value of their contributions to ecosystem services such as REDD+.

Faced with limitations on their participation, Kichwa federations have turned to legal action and alliances with NGOs to influence environmental policy. In this context:

#### FOR REFLECTION

- **How can Indigenous Peoples rebuild trust in prior consultation?**
- **What changes are needed to guarantee recognition of their identity and the costs of their participation?**

“Because they’re basically behind the desk, right? (...) They want to conserve, and they want no one touching that territory. Imagine if that community does nothing and lets in illegal logging, illegal land clearing, land trafficking.”

*(Kichwa federation leaders, 2023)*

# The Quechua People

## *A trust-based model with unresolved tensions*

The Salinas and Aguada Blanca National Reserve (RNSAB) was created in 1979 to protect high Andean ecosystems, biodiversity and the water sources that supply Arequipa and Moquegua. Its management falls under SERNANP through a contract with the Center for Studies and Development Promotion of the South (DESCOSUR). At the time of its creation, there were no formal standards for prior consultation such as the ILO Convention No. 169. The Quechua communities with land titles within the protected area were not considered in its delimitation or governance. However, over the years, RNSAB's management has fostered trust-based relationships with the communities and encouraged their participation in dialogue spaces. This openness needs to be improved to ensure effective participation in decision-making.

### **01** *Management committees with low attendance and limited representativeness*

Although they are designed to promote inclusion, participation from rural communities remains limited. This is due, in part, to unclear communication around meeting announcements and to the perception that these spaces are largely declarative, with no guarantee that decisions will lead to concrete action. In addition, participation in these spaces involves time and financial costs that are not covered by the State, making it difficult for local actors to become fully involved.

### **02** *Partial integration of Indigenous knowledge*

Although local knowledge has been incorporated into biodiversity management—particularly in vicuña chaccu and the sowing and harvesting water practices—a gap remains. Field technicians often adapt State-led approaches without effectively integrating Indigenous criteria and methodologies into day-to-day management.

### **03** *Trust-based relationships that inhibit voicing disagreement*

The close relationship between RNSAB administrators and some communities has created a collaborative working environment. However, this trust has also created a barrier: the fear of generating tensions has led them not to voice certain concerns openly, limiting the possibility of discussing structural problems and promoting adjustments in the management of the protected areas.

RNSAB's experience shows that a close relationship between communities and managers is valuable, but it does not guarantee that Indigenous voices are truly listened to in the day-to-day decision-making.

#### FOR REFLECTION

- **How can technical staff recognise and respect other forms of knowledge in decision-making?**
- **How can we foster a dialogue where communities feel able to express their demands and propose changes without fear?**

“We use different words, and so do they, so we, who are from the community or populated centers, I don't know how we could say it... we feel a bit lesser, they intimidate us.”

*(Workshop in Arequipa, 2024)*

# Between discourse and practice

## Reviewing beliefs and learnings from key cases

Indigenous Peoples face multiple barriers that limit their influence in decision-making, such as a lack of effective representation, unequal access to resources and less power to exert influence. This creates a gap between the participation the state promotes in discourse and what actually occurs in the territory, as reflected in the following points.

What is believed	What actually occurs	Example
Participation is equal and fair for everyone	It's assumed that everyone can participate under the same conditions. However, in practice, Indigenous communities face barriers such as limited access to information, resources, time, and power in relation to other actors. Moreover, structural inequalities further limit their influence, as is the case with Indigenous women leaders.	"Since we live here in the highlands, we will need a talk. Sometimes the community where we live doesn't have good professionals, we don't know training, what rights we have. (...) <b>You always come, you came, but sometimes it gets forgotten along the way.</b> " (Quechua member of the Board of a Rural Community, 2023)
If there are community representatives, then participation is real	Having representatives from Indigenous communities in participatory spaces does not mean that all communities are being heard. In many cases, it is the same leaders who participate on a recurring basis, which can limit their independence and erode the legitimacy of participatory processes.	There is a more critical view of participatory processes among those who are not always invited to participate: "There's no good organisation, no equity, nothing. <b>It's all just favouritism.</b> " (Quechua President of a Rural Community, 2023)
Communities are always interested in participating in conservation	If participation does not lead to changes that address their demands, communities lose interest. Many of the issues they care about—such as access to resources and land titling—are not part of the agenda. The fatigue and lack of concrete outcomes make them see participation as a fruitless effort.	Referring to the NPA: " <b>Before, 600 people used to gather. Now, we have met here in the (populated center), just 8 of us.</b> Since there was little participation, they have restructured the programme for the worse, because... it's worse—there's no participation." (Meeting with local leaders in Arequipa, 2023)
Communities agree with the state's climate actions	The implementation of these mechanisms does not always ensure the legitimacy of climate action. If people feel their voices were not genuinely heard, they are likely to express and act on their disagreement.	"We did the consultation. They visited all the Indigenous communities that existed (...) I don't know what <b>happened—suddenly everything exploded</b> (...) you wonder, where did this bomb come from?" (Protected Area Management Official, 2024)  "We drew a clear line: until we reach a concrete consultation... they should stop entering the communities. <b>But (...) they kept insisting (...). That's when the rupture happened.</b> " (Kichwa Indigenous leader, 2023)
Communities agree with the state's climate actions	Communities may accept certain measures to avoid conflict with authorities they have close relationships with, even when they know those measures will not meet their needs. As a result, decisions follow a pre-defined course of action without truly satisfying the parties involved.	In the RNSAB, Quechua communities have expressed concern about restrictions to their traditional activities within the natural protected area. <b>However, to avoid conflict, they accept the technicians' proposals</b> (e.g., calendars for sowing and harvesting water) without openly questioning them, even though this affects the programme. (Conversation with Quechua leader, 2024)

# Criteria for improvement

## *Toward Genuine Participation in Climate Action and Natural Protected Areas*

To ensure the effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in the management of NPAs it must be recognised that the territory is not only a space for conservation, but also a political space that encompasses both the land and its ecosystems. Indigenous Peoples participation must go beyond an administrative procedure and become a genuine process of dialogue and joint decision-making.

Based on joint workshops with Kichwa and Quechua organisations and communities, key criteria have been identified to ensure that participation is a mechanism that enables communities to truly influence the management of NPAs.

### **01** *Strengthen community organisation*

#### **The influence capacity of communities depends on their level of organisation**

- Support capacity building for young Indigenous leaders, including access to professional training
- Encourage the rotation of representative roles within organisations.
- Promote accountability mechanisms within Indigenous organisations.
- Facilitate support networks between communities and strategic allies through internships and experience-sharing with other organisations.

### *More inclusive and representative calls for participation* **02**

#### **Effective participation should not depend solely on the legal recognition of organisations**

- Broaden the call to include actors with presence and activity in the territory, not only to titled communities or formally registered associations.
- Incorporate critical voices and a diversity of perspectives.
- Ensure that representativeness reflects real territorial dynamics and not only to pre-existing formal structures.

### **03** *Recognise participation costs*

#### **Attending meetings often means stepping away from work, household responsibilities, or managing the territory. Not everyone can assume the costs in the same way**

- Ensure and adapt resource management for travel allowances and time commitments.
- Differentiate costs according to gender, age, and economic situation.

## 04 *Transparency of interests and broadening participation*

**Participation should not be limited to the same representatives, but should also include women, youth and actors who are often excluded**

- Identify and give visibility to affected actors who are not at the table.
- Establish clear rules for reaching consensus on agendas that reflect the interests of all stakeholders.
- Ensure timely access to relevant information in accessible formats, and support decision-making with appropriate information-sharing processes.

## *Clarity over the impact of participation*

05

**Decision-making spaces should not be confused with informational meetings**

- Specify in the call if the meeting is to inform or to decide.
- Indicate when agreements will be binding for the management of NPAs.
- Implement monitoring mechanisms to verify that decisions reflect community demands.

## 06 *Acknowledging the history of distrust and inequality*

**The relationship between the State and the Indigenous Peoples has been marked by conflict and exclusion**

- Include accountability processes with verifiable progress on the part of the State.
- Create intercultural spaces that integrate Indigenous knowledge.
- Design long-term trust-building strategies developed jointly with communities.

## *Measuring the real impact of participation*

07

**It's not enough to record meeting attendance; it is necessary to evaluate concrete outcomes**

- Assess whether the decisions reflect community proposals.
- Include qualitative criteria in the evaluation of participation.
- Design indicators with communities in accessible language.

**! Having real power in the management of NPAs goes beyond opening participatory spaces.**

It requires transforming the structural conditions that currently limit Indigenous Peoples' ability to influence. Conservation will only be sustainable if it is also just and inclusive.

# A necessary effort

## Coordination to influence at the national level

Indigenous participation remains largely confined to the local level, centered on territorial issues, despite being equally key at the national level to shape broader policy. The Indigenous Peoples' Platform to Address Climate Change (PPICC) seeks to close this gap. Created in 2019, the PPICC institutionalises dialogue between Indigenous organisations and the State. While it does not solve all structural challenges, the PPICC offers a formal space to influence the climate agenda and challenge the systemic conditions that have limited their meaningful participation.

### Strengths

- **A unique model in the region:** The PPICC is a national platform inspired by the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP), setting a global precedent by bringing together multiple Indigenous organisations from a single country.
- **Institutionalisation:** Its legal recognition protects it from government changes and ensures its permanence within the State structure.
- **Diversity of actors:** Comprising seven national Indigenous organisations from the Amazon and the Andes, it links demands and proposals from across different territories.

### Key achievements

- **Influence on key climate** management instruments such as the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan, the National Climate Finance Strategy, REDD+ Safeguard Guidelines, and the National Biodiversity Strategy, among others.
- **Advocacy on climate finance** to ensure that resources reach Indigenous communities and align with their priorities.

### Challenges and next steps

- **Effective decentralisation:** Despite progress in creating Indigenous Peoples' Regional Platforms to Address Climate Change in Ayacucho and Junín, legal recognition is still pending. Strengthening decentralisation is key to ensuring territorial influence without fragmenting the Indigenous movement.
- **Sustainable financing:** The PPICC requires stable resources to foster its consolidation and technical operability. The regulation of Law No. 30754 commits the State to mobilise international climate finance to guarantee the PPICC's functioning and sustainability.
- **Overcoming the implementation gap:** Aside from ensuring that PPICC decisions influence policy and territorial management, a key challenge is internal coordination: reaching consensus and negotiating a common agenda among its own members.

“This platform is not only a space for dialogue and coordination, but also a mechanism to ensure that the voices and traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples are integrated into public policies related to climate change.”

*(Quechua leader Danitza Quispe, ONAMIAP, 2024)*



*Workshop held in Arequipa*

## *Building Together*

This document was developed based on the project “Indigenous Visions for Climate Justice”, that draws on 148 interviews, 352 hours of participant observation, 11 participatory mapping workshops, and three subnational and national workshops with 107 participants. In total, around 265 people were involved in the development of this research.

During the participatory workshops held in San Martín, Arequipa, and Lima, dialogue took place with Indigenous representatives, public officials, and other relevant stakeholders. The workshops in Arequipa and Lima were funded by IDRC through the “Indigenous Visions for Climate Justice”, and *Puna Resiliente*.



*Workshop held in Lima*



*Workshop held in Lamas*



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