

# INDIGENOUS FEDERATIONS AS STEWARDS OF THE TERRITORY:

LESSONS ON AUTONOMY,  
LEADERSHIP, AND SUSTAINABILITY  
IN THE PERUVIAN AMAZON



**Paisajes  
productivos  
sostenibles**  
*en la Amazonía peruana*



**PERÚ** Ministerio  
del Ambiente



Con el apoyo de:



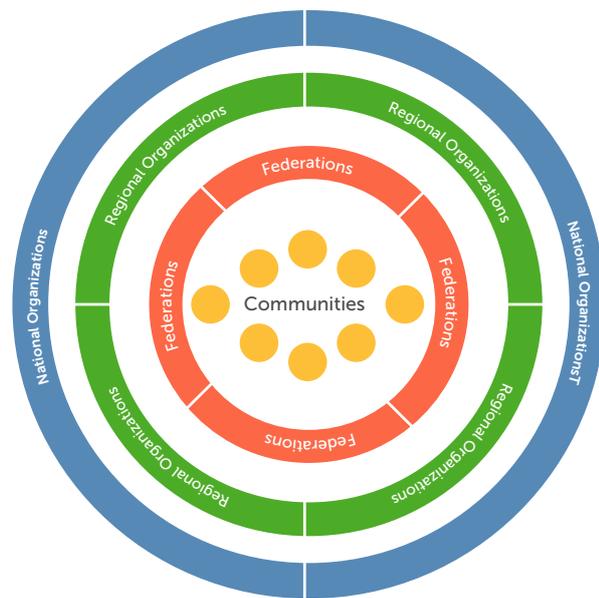
**ASL** Programa  
Paisajes  
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de la Amazonía

Indigenous peoples in Peru and around the world are leading transformative processes from within their own forms of organization, thereby reaffirming their rights and their relationship with the territory. Their right to self-determination has been recognized by international bodies such as the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and the Organization of American States. Convention 169, signed by the Peruvian State, establishes the obligation to guarantee their effective participation in decisions that affect their development.

## HOW IS INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE ORGANIZED?

For indigenous peoples, **everything originates in the communities**, which form the organizational base and elect their community leadership. These communities, in turn, are represented by federations that bring together several communities from the same people or territory.

The federations not only channel community demands but also participate in the formation of regional and national organizations through democratic election processes for their representatives. That is, regional and national leaders are elected by the federations themselves, which reinforces a grassroots-based, representative, and legitimate organizational system.



## WHY WORK WITH INDIGENOUS FEDERATIONS?

From its inception, the Sustainable Productive Landscapes in the Peruvian Amazon (PPS) project<sup>1</sup> opted for a **model of territorial co-management with the landscape's indigenous organizations**. This decision was not merely operational, but strategic and ethical: it recognized that indigenous federations are living structures of community representation and articulation, with legitimacy, knowledge of the territory, and leadership capacity.

Instead of being considered beneficiaries, **the federations were strategic partners in the project**, participating from design to implementation. A space for shared governance was established, and mechanisms were defined to ensure their active participation in planning, decision-making, and the direct management of resources. This shared responsibility marked a milestone in the way of relating to indigenous peoples and positioned their governance as a pillar for territorial sustainability.

<sup>1</sup> An initiative of the Peruvian State led by the Ministry of the Environment with technical support from the United Nations Development Programme and financing from the Global Environment Facility.



## FEDERATIONS AS PROTAGONISTS OF TERRITORIAL CHANGE

In the departments of **Huánuco** and **Ucayali**, **five indigenous federations and one regional organization led key actions to strengthen indigenous governance and the sustainable management of the Amazonian territory.** These federations cover approximately 10% of the PPS project's intervention landscape and directly managed an equivalent percentage of the project's total budget. They are the following:

- Federation of Native Communities of the Province of Puerto Inca (Feconapia)
- Federation of Native Communities of Ucayali and its Tributaries (Feconau)
- Federation of Yanesha Native Communities (Feconaya)
- Native Federation of Kakataibo Communities (Fenacoka)
- Regional Organization of Amazonian Nationalities of Ucayali (Ornau)
- Union of Asháninka and Yanesha Nationalities (UNAY)



## DIRECT MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES AND PLANNING

**The indigenous federations accompanied their communities in the collective prioritization of their aspirations and needs.** Based on this process, they accessed resources through micro-capital grant mechanisms, which they managed directly to respond to these priorities.

These funds were not the focus of the intervention, but rather a tool to strengthen the autonomy, management capacities, and implementing role of the federations. The experience showed that when resources are guided by decisions made from within the territory, the results are more sustainable, relevant, and transformative.



# RESULTS WITH AN INDIGENOUS FACE: IMPACTS OF LEADERSHIP AND DIRECT MANAGEMENT

The strengthening of indigenous leadership was reflected in tangible transformations in the communities and the territory. The federations did not just manage resources: they mobilized knowledge, energized community networks, and positioned their role as key actors in Amazonian sustainability. Some of the most significant impacts are the following:

 **The bond between the federation and the community base was strengthened.** Thanks to their active presence on the ground, the federations consolidated their position as legitimate points of reference, capable of coordinating technical assistance, accompanying productive processes, and facilitating solutions to local challenges.

 **The federations managed to become part of territorial planning spaces, such as the Concerted Regional Development Plans (PDRC).** This advance marked a milestone in the recognition of their political role as legitimate representatives of their communities in historically exclusionary processes.

 **The communities reconnected with their vision of development.** Through eleven participatively developed Life Plans, the federations helped their grassroots members identify their priorities and propose paths for action based on their own values and collective objectives.

 **Conservation processes were activated from a foundation of cultural identity.** More than 42,000 hectares of forest were committed to conservation through agreements driven by the communities themselves and their federations, integrating ancestral knowledge and current practices.

 **Women and youth emerged as agents of change.** From artisan ventures to leadership in environmental education, more than 50 women and 40 children and adolescents strengthened their role in community initiatives, alongside their federations.

 **Territorial surveillance once again became a collective practice.** Seven community surveillance committees were formed or strengthened, thereby reaffirming the role of the communities as guardians of their territories against external threats.

 **Technical assistance driven by the federations generated substantial productive improvements.** In crops such as cacao, banana, corn, and cassava, and in livestock farming with a silvopastoral approach, increases of up to 200% in production volumes and quality improvements were achieved, carrying out production that is responsible with natural resources. This translated directly into higher incomes and better living conditions for indigenous families.





Everything related to livestock farming, what is cacao, we are improving [...] Everything related to the reforestation of trees, as well. For example, now we buy seedlings to plant in what is a silvopastoral system.

**Roció Cóndor Ampiche** - Cacao producer from the Santa Isabel Native Community



## CHALLENGES

The experience provided valuable lessons, but it also revealed structural challenges that must be addressed to consolidate the sustainability of the progress achieved:



**Full recognition of the role of federations as actors** with the capacity for management, advocacy, and leadership in the territory, beyond formal representation.



**Direct and timely access to resources**, allowing federations to continue implementing community priorities and providing technical accompaniment to their grassroots members.



**Strengthening the role of federations in managing community conflicts**, which directly or indirectly affect the sustainability of the initiatives.



**Guaranteeing the operational sustainability of community surveillance committees**, ensuring their financing, coordination, and institutional support.



**Improving communication channels with cultural relevance**, so that all communities have timely and understandable access to key information.



**Continuing to promote the leadership and active participation of indigenous women**, thus ensuring that their empowerment is a cross-cutting priority in future interventions.

## LESSONS LEARNED

From their experience in direct implementation and work with their communities, the indigenous federations identified the following lessons as key to strengthening territorial governance:



**Federations are agents of change.** Their leading role in managing the territory and in guiding development processes demonstrates that they have the capacity to generate concrete, sustainable, and community-oriented results.



**Co-management is an effective and legitimate strategy,** provided it is based on respect for indigenous organizational structures and recognition of their political and technical role.



**Access to financing must be linked to existing local capacities,** prioritizing organizations that know the territory and have legitimacy among their communities.



**Initiatives are more sustainable when they are aligned with the communities' own vision of development,** not imposed from the outside.



**The participation of women, youth, and children must be structural,** not symbolic. Their active involvement is key to sustainability and intergenerational transformation.



The indigenous organization went from being a representative federation to a federation that implements on the ground. I believe the issue of governance has gone a step further. What it has allowed us to do is return to the territory, to be able to address the needs of the indigenous population and, along the way, to connect and strengthen ourselves as an organization.

**Juan Carlos Noli Moali** - Technical Coordinator of the Federation of Yanesha Native Communities - FECONAYA





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