

Restoring for water: The case of the community of Kiuñalla, in the southern Andes of Peru

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The peasant community San Ignacio de Kiuñalla is located in the district of Huanipaca, Abancay province, Apurímac region at 2970 meters above sea level. Kiuñalla is home to a population of 1250 inhabitants on an area of 3,179 hectares. In front of the community is the Inca Choquequirao archaeological complex, in the Cusco region.

The people of Kiuñalla, with poverty levels that exceed 40% (almost double the national average), face problems arising from the segmentation and degradation of the Andean native forest (more than 600 ha) in the territory of the community, basically due to the expansion of the agricultural frontier. With this, it intensifies the decrease in water flow, the loss of biodiversity and the potential for income generation for the community in activities such as ecotourism and honey production due to the increase in forest fires.

As of 2012, the community decided to take action to address the problems of contamination of water sources, the advance of cultivation areas within the forest and the need to preserve the landscape with a view to undertaking activities such as: ecotourism, improving the productivity of local crops and activities outside of agriculture, among others. The community members recognized *“the need to have cleaner water, the possibility of maintaining forest resources for future generations and the opportunity to have an attractive landscape for a potential community tourism initiative”*.

With the goal of protecting the native forest, restoring the most affected areas and improving the supply of ecosystem services, especially water regulation, a Community Forest Restoration Plan was developed in a participatory way to benefit more than 300 families. On a pilot area of 105 ha, the Plan included the application of assisted natural regeneration techniques, soil treatment, installation of artificial perches, planting of native species in different arrangements, among others. The activities involved various actors at different levels (national, regional and local), such as the National Forest and Wildlife Service (SERFOR), the Apurímac Regional Government, the Huanipaca Municipality, the Andean Forests Programme (PBA) and the NGO CEDES.

After three years of effective implementation of the Plan, they achieved these results:

- the strengthening of the forest management committee, the approval of the community statute and the formulation of its Life Plan;
- the protection of 105 ha of forest with a communal agreement for its conservation, the afforestation of 5 ha with the native species “queñua” (*Polylepis* sp.) and the commitment to the protection and recovery of springs (water sources) in the intervention areas;
- the establishment and operation of a communal nursery for the production of native species;
- the construction of a rustic dike to form a “ccocho” (artificial lagoon) to recharge natural aquifers;
- the installation of 1600 m of protection fences to prevent animals from entering the restoration plots;
- the formation of communal fire brigades;
- the realization of training activities for the community, for example: on the importance of relict forests for biodiversity in fragmented landscapes, prevention and control of forest fires, recovery of Andean ecosystems with afforestation of native species, beekeeping (production of organic honey from the native forest); and
- the monitoring of the forest development and water flow and regulation (eco-hydrological monitoring).



As economic alternatives that contribute to the sustainability of the restoration initiative, the community - with the support from PBA and CEDES - is working to promote ecotourism, develop mechanisms to improve agricultural productivity and soil conservation associated with local crops, and in a scheme of remuneration for ecosystem services.

From all these actions, and especially the efforts made by the community to conserve and restore their forests, since mid-2019 the REGENERA Platform is financially compensating these efforts, having signed an agreement with the community so that these small funds be used in restoration and recovery activities of the Kiuñalla forest ecosystem.

Despite its short history, the Kiuñalla community restoration initiative has served to generate some lessons in the framework of a process that is participatory by nature and adaptive by necessity, highlighting the following statement:

The work approach to address restoration must be broad and inclusive in relation to the other challenges of the community. In that sense, it is important to place the restoration initiative in perspective on the territory, the roles of people, the community and the support institutions. It is also important to identify alternative economic activities that improve local income and that reinforce the collective practice of restoration.

