

CONDESAN: An Innovative and Multi-institutional Andean Platform in Continuing Evolution



CONDESAN (Consortium for the Sustainable Development of the Andean Eco-region) is a 16-year-old consortium that offers an innovative form of organization and promotes horizontal integration among nongovernmental organizations, universities, national and international research centers, and governmental agencies from the Andean region. We are innovative and horizontal as we are able to cooperate with different types of actors—scientists, politicians, people from rural communities, among others—who participate and interact as actors with the same rights. Our aim is the sustainable development of the Andean region (mountains).

Working at the interface of research and development

We conduct research, facilitate analysis and dialogue, and make proposals on specific topics such as the food crisis, climate change, etc. We thereby aim to evaluate ways of addressing the problems of rural poverty and degradation of natural resources in the Andes (Figure 1). CONDESAN works at the frontier of research and development in the rural sector of the Andes and allows for participation by more than 80 research institutions, universities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and governmental agencies in this region.

CONDESAN is a member of the Mountain Partnership, the Mountain Forum, and the International Mountain Society. As a regional platform we represent the Mountain Forum and the Mountain Partnership Secretariat in Latin America, coordinate the CGIAR [Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research] Challenge Program on Water and Food in the

Andes, and act as the focal point for the FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization] Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountains program.

The “initiatives” approach

In past years, CONDESAN’s work has been organized around CONDESAN “initiatives” involving specific long-term research for development projects. These projects are the operational units wherein participation by our different partners is integrated around a common objective. Ideas for the initiatives concept were thought out and prepared in order to respond, in an anticipatory manner, to rural development challenges that require response and joint collaboration on the part of the research community, development agents, and policy-makers.

Initiatives such as Andean Watersheds and Andean Paramo addressed issues of growing relevance on the environmental agenda of policy and development organizations in Andean countries. Thus the Andean Watersheds Initiative focused on finding new mechanisms to recognize the economically positive effects of environmental externalities created by rural dwellers through new land use alternatives, which also increase their income. CONDESAN provided the institutional platform to put together different types of organizations to evaluate and enable these proposed mechanisms (ie Payment for Ecosystem Services schemes, revolving funds, etc). Research, development, and international cooperation agencies (ie the International Center for Tropical Agriculture; German Cooperation GTZ; farmers’

associations; several local NGOs such as CEDEPAS [Peru], Randi-Randi [Ecuador], and FUNDESOT [Colombia], among others) worked together for 5 years and participated in the formulation and implementation of development actions that resulted from the research activities. This initiative was implemented in the period 2003–2007.

Similarly, the Andean Paramo Initiative has been able to bring together governmental organizations, research organizations, and NGOs from the Andean countries to work together to find and promote key actions for the sustainable management of the *paramos* (a unique alpine grassland ecosystem in the Andes). Capacity building, awareness raising, and research activities are proposed as the means to identify actions that will conserve not only the *paramos* but the hydrological ecosystem services they provide as well. Intersectoral collaboration in this project is also promoted, supported, and facilitated through CONDESAN. The period of implementation of this initiative is 2006–2012.

Through initiatives like Andean Watersheds, CONDESAN operates under a research–action scheme. Research contributes to spatial prioritization of alternatives, actors, and policies that, by stimulating changes in land use, generate positive environmental and social impacts. This operational scheme has been evolving and is now complemented by a cross-learning action scheme. Taking advantage of the strong and heterogeneous institutional platform in the Andes, CONDESAN has played a role in systematizing knowledge about relevant topics in the Andes that involves a high level of political

FIGURE 1 A young woman from Puno, Peru, leading her alpacas to a grazing area. In such a fragile environment as the high Andes, adequate management of grazing areas is a key. (Photo by Walter Silvera)



interest and has the potential to improve rural livelihoods (Figure 2).

Synthesizing the state of the art: hydrological ecosystem services

In 2008 CONDESAN started a new program called Panorama Andino, a participatory process in which key stakeholders (scientists, policy-makers, and practitioners) work together to synthesize the state of the art of knowledge, policy, and practices on relevant key topics. The first subject was hydrological ecosystem services, a theme that was addressed from different perspectives: the state of the art of knowledge that could enable the creation of solid payment schemes for watershed services; the state of

the art of action, including all different economic and financial mechanisms to provide these services; and the state of the art of policies including laws, regulation, national policies, etc that enable the creation of such novel economic schemes (Céleri and Feyen 2009 in this issue; Garzon 2009; Quintero 2009). CONDESAN is already initiating a similar process for other relevant topics such as climate change in the Andes and innovation in agricultural systems.

These systematization processes require and promote interinstitutional cross-learning by facilitating dialogue among different actors with experience in selected themes. This process has been led by

CONDESAN as a result of its neutral status and recognition in the Andes that its actions do not obey a specific political agenda but seek only to promote positive and likely changes in the rural Andes.

InfoAndina: a well-established knowledge exchange platform

InfoAndina is another important CONDESAN initiative that promotes the generation of knowledge and dissemination of information through a website that contains useful information, allows participation in electronic conferences, and provides mailing lists according to specific interests. InfoAndina supports the work done in other CONDESAN initiatives and programs.

FIGURE 2 A field of canopy grass at the foot of Cotopaxi Volcano in Ecuador is one of the places where CONDESAN's Andean Paramo Initiative is being implemented. (Photo by Robert Hofstede)



Preparing for the future

Initiatives and systemization processes have framed CONDESAN's Route Map, which has been jointly shaped with its partners and is updated every 5 years. Currently, the main topics on the Route Map are water resource management and agricultural innovation systems, as these are believed to be the two main pivots around which the new rural development dynamic in the Andes can be initiated. During 2010 CONDESAN will review its Route Map and prepare a new strategy for the period 2011–2015.

Apart from evolution in the operational conceptual scheme of CONDESAN, we are evolving as an independent regional consortium. It is worth mentioning that CONDESAN was created by the efforts of many partners, but

especially the International Potato Center (CIP) and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). Both are part of the CGIAR centers, and as such, CONDESAN is both an ecoregional program of the CGIAR system and a regional consortium that has continually gained experience and recognition in the Andean region throughout the years. This has recently allowed CONDESAN and its lead partners to make possible the evolution of CONDESAN as a regional consortium, neither ascribed nor restricted to the spheres of the CGIAR organization, which confirms and allows for continuing evolution of this platform.

For further information about other CONDESAN projects, the Route Map, team members, partners, and the evolution process, visit www.condesan.org (only in Spanish).

REFERENCES

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AUTHORS

Miguel Saravia* and Marcela Quintero

*Corresponding author:

miguel.saravia@condesan.org
 Consortium for Sustainable Development
 Eco-region (CONDESAN), Av. La Molina 1895,
 La Molina, PO Box 1558, Lima 12, Peru
www.condesan.org

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