

The Consortium for Sustainable Development in the Andean Ecoregion (CONDESAN)

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Source: Mountain Research and Development, 20(4) : 372-373

Published By: International Mountain Society

URL: [https://doi.org/10.1659/0276-4741\(2000\)020\[0372:TCFSDI\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1659/0276-4741(2000)020[0372:TCFSDI]2.0.CO;2)

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The Consortium for Sustainable Development in the Andean Ecoregion (CONDESAN)



A different approach

CONDESAN (Consortio para el Desarrollo Sostenible de la Ecorregión Andina) is a unique mechanism for addressing poverty and degradation of natural resources in the Andes. The underlying vision of CONDESAN, crafted during a series of meetings held in the early 1990s, is based on 4 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 being done in the Andes can be reinforced through the creation of an electronic information exchange and sharing mechanism (InfoAndina).
- There is a need for more local and political alliances, focusing on nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners, regional universities, producer groups, and local governments, in order to deal with the core issues of poverty and resource management.
- CONDESAN would not create additional organizational infrastructure but would be a virtual entity, working primarily through its partners.

Today, CONDESAN comprises nearly 50 organizations working in the Andes of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. The International Potato Center (CIP) in Lima, Peru, is host to the Consortium. The membership is made up primarily of NGOs, Andean universities, and national research institutes but also includes European and North American universities as well as several international centers (the International Potato Center, the Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical, the International Livestock Research Institute, and the International Fertilizer Research Center).

The work of the Consortium

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

The major pan-Andean research activities fall into 4 categories:

- Soil and water management and conservation.
- Conservation and use of agrobiodiversity involving Andean roots and tubers and pasture species.
- Improvement of 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 7 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 interrelated set of management and development challenges. The active research and development programs underway include:

- 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): Formulating microwatershed

management plans with local 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 semiarid 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 5-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 300–500 participants. Recent themes have included

- Rural agroindustry in the Andes and the challenges of globalization.
- Local 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 *páramo*.

the pan-Andean themes. Our aims for the future are threefold:

- 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.
- Our Consortium will grow stronger as the model of shared-risk, shared-benefit, multi-institutional teams continues to prove successful.
- Our ability to have a real impact on sustainable rural development in the Andes will increase as the synergism of the pan-Andean methodology and in-depth benchmark site research activities intensifies.

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■: Areas in which CONDESAN research and development programs are currently being carried out.

Structure and sponsors

The Consortium has an 8-person board of trustees that meets once a year. Board members can serve up to two 3-year terms. A small coordination unit (4 people) works full time to promote the Consortium's objectives. A general assembly of members was held in 1997 and an electronic town meeting took place in 2000. Financial support for the Consortium has come from the Canadian, Dutch, German, Spanish, Swiss, and US governments as well as from the Ford Foundation.

The future

Although not yet fully realized, our expectation is that the pan-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