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Conservation of Peruvian Terraces through Intensification and Diversification - The Role of German Students in the Process

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Abstract

Peru is widely known for its impressive terraced landscapes built by ancient cultures like the Inka. Laraos, 100 km southeast of Lima, situated at 3500 meters a.s.l. is one of very few sites where people still use terraces as their ancestors did for centuries. Throughout history the community established a complex social system of sharing hard work, scarce water resources and harvest. Like elsewhere, this unique system is endangered due to globalisation. The main threat to conservation and sustainable use of the terraces in Laraos is migration due to low income of agricultural work. Subsistence farming based on potato and corn became less lucrative to young local population. As a consequence, the population dropped dramatically and 20 % of the terraces already vanished due to eroded irrigation systems or terrace walls.

The “Laraohuinos” together with a student group from Berlin and Lima, worked on strategies to preserve the terraces which have an economic and intrinsic value. Together with the farmers, main threats to the terrace system and actions needed to address them were investigated. Participatory methods based on theatre, work shops, and interviews were used by the students. Especially the theatre plays on legends encouraged public discussion. Threats and strategies to confront them could be named, hierachal ordered and communicated (e.g. to emigrants in Lima). The “Laraohuinos” discussed solutions in workshops on land tenure, water distribution and irrigation and on diversification of products. As a result, concrete actions have been taken in the agenda of the municipality.

With the help of external students the public could be sensitized and motivated. Thereby the students acted as initiators and participants at the same time. As a not materialistic interested party they where accepted in the whole process as moderators and as questioners because of still being students. This position allows students to play a perfect facilitator role in the participation processes. Furthermore, because of the high number of students communication became an intensive group dynamic process.

Keywords: Agro-biodiversity, Andes, migration, participation, Peru, students, terraces, theatre