

PEACE & CONSERVATION *IN THE* CORDILLERA DEL CONDOR BORDER REGION *BETWEEN* ECUADOR & PERU



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INTRODUCTION

The mountainous Cordillera del Condor border region between Ecuador and Peru has witnessed territorial conflict and armed disputes since the 19th century. Peace talks between both governments began in 1995, with several environmental and scientific organizations, including the Ecuadorian non-governmental organization (NGO) Fundacion Natura and Conservation International (CI), promoting the inclusion of a conservation component as part of the peacebuilding process. In 1998, President Jamil Mahuad Witt of Ecuador and President Alberto Fujimori of Peru brought a solution to the bilateral dispute with the Brasilia Agreement, effectively ending the longest-standing border dispute in the Americas. The agreement underscored the need to establish protected areas on both sides of the border. Both countries committed to promoting socioeconomic and environmental cooperation in the transboundary area.

A formal agreement was signed in 2002 by government representatives, Fundacion Natura, and CI to create a network of protected areas. The agreement called for coordination between national environmental and diplomatic authorities and the provision of technical support to indigenous peoples in both countries to facilitate the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. These conservation efforts are not only contributing to the conservation of the extraordinary biological wealth shared by the two countries, but also creating an environment of trust which is an essential element for bringing sound and lasting peace to the region.

THE PROCESS

The “Peace and Conservation in the Cordillera del Condor, Ecuador-Peru” bi-national project was implemented by Fundacion Natura and CI-Peru, with technical support and monitoring provided by both governments, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and CI.

A pre-project phase (1999-2000), supported by ITTO, allowed a consultation process with the Shuar, Awajun and Wampis indigenous organizations, as well as with the local authorities. The first phase of the project (2002-2004) focused on the creation of several protected areas and a bi-national coordination mechanism; while the second phase (2006-2009) emphasized the implementation of management plans for the protected areas and promoted sustainable livelihood activities, such as agro-forestry. These efforts culminated in the creation of Condor-Kutuku Conservation Corridor. Important steps included:

1. **DEVELOPING A SHARED VISION FOR CONSERVATION** – Exchange workshops between environmental authorities of both countries contributed to improved cooperation and coordination in the region. Bi-national technical and political committees were created to establish common policies, methodologies and strategies, and proved to be essential for developing the shared vision for a regional conservation strategy.

2. ADOPTING DIFFERENT STRATEGIES TO FIT LOCAL CONTEXTS

– Different strategies and governance systems were employed, based on varying environmental and social conditions on both sides of the border. For example, the northern region of Ecuador is occupied by 1,200 Shuar families organized into six associations with more than 200,000 hectares of forest. So, an integrated approach that linked territorial rights and natural resource management with governance, health, and local development was needed. In the southern region of Ecuador, where municipalities are largely responsible for natural resource management, the strategy focused on institutional strengthening of local governments.



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3. STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS & LOCAL NGOS

– The three indigenous groups participated in the bi-national meetings, where they incorporated their traditional knowledge and experiences and played important roles as key stakeholders in the process.

LESSONS LEARNED

- ◇ **Use third-party science to get conservation on the peacebuilding agenda.** Biological expeditions carried out in the Cordillera del Condor in the early 1990s generated strong scientific evidence about the biological importance of the mountain range. This was critical for getting conservation on the peacebuilding agenda.
- ◇ **Work at both local and regional scales.** A bi-national coordination mechanism was established to define common policies, methodologies, and strategies. Several protected areas with different governance systems, including public protected areas and community conserved areas, were created in Ecuador and Peru.
- ◇ **Create a highly participatory process.** The Cordillera del Condor is a culturally-rich region inhabited by the Shuar, Awajun and Wampis indigenous communities. These populations use their traditional knowledge of the forest and freshwater ecosystems in their daily life. Taking a rights-based approach and working to strengthen indigenous organizations and their governance mechanisms in both countries were important for ensuring the initiative's success.

CONCLUSION

Efforts to connect peace and conservation in the Cordillera del Condor resulted in the creation of the Condor-Kutuku Conservation Corridor. Straddling the border between Ecuador and Peru, this transboundary initiative was supported by a shared vision for biodiversity conservation, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. Consolidating this peace process will require a long-term commitment from the governments of Ecuador and Peru as well as other stakeholders, such as the indigenous peoples, scientists and NGOs, to build a culture of trust and dialogue between the authorities and citizens of both countries.

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