

CHAPTER ONE



Traditions and Food Sovereignty: Agricultural Resistance Practices of Indigenous Peoples

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Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own policies and strategies for the production, distribution, and consumption of food, with the aim of ensuring that it is healthy and culturally appropriate, as well as sustainably produced. Indigenous peoples have played a fundamental role in the promotion and defense of food sovereignty, implementing ancestral agricultural practices and strategies of resistance in the face of contemporary challenges. These communities have developed productive systems based on crop diversification, seed conservation, and sustainable land management. Nevertheless, factors such as climate change, the expansion of agribusiness, and the lack of adequate public policies have put these practices and their food security at risk.

Indigenous peoples face challenges related to the right to food that is their own, decent, and sustainable. Although legal frameworks differ from country to country, struggles for food sovereignty, territorial defense, and seed conservation are shared across many Indigenous territories on the continent. Communities such as the Misak, Nasa, Wayuu, Embera, Kayambi, Asháninka, Náhuatl, Maya Q'eqchi', among others, have developed proposals for agro-food resistance based on ancestral practices, the recovery of native seeds, and community organization in the face of the impacts of armed conflict, extractivism, and state neglect.

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Food sovereignty: *the Indigenous strategy*

Ecuador's 2008 Constitution incorporates the concept of "Buen Vivir" or Sumak Kawsay, a vision of life in harmony with nature and the community, deeply rooted in the Indigenous worldview. This constitutional framework recognizes food sovereignty as a fundamental right, allowing communities to define their food and agricultural policies without external interference. Food sovereignty is protected under Article 281 of the Constitution, which establishes measures to promote agroecology, protect biodiversity, and guarantee access to land and productive resources.

Indigenous organizations, such as the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations (CLOC-Vía Campesina), have been key actors in promoting policies that strengthen food sovereignty. These organizations advocate for the protection of native seeds, the promotion of agroecological practices, and resistance to industrial agricultural models that threaten biodiversity and traditional practices. They also have participated actively in the formulation of laws such as the Organic Law of Agrobiodiversity, Seeds, and Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture, which seeks to protect traditional knowledge and guarantee farmers' autonomy in the face of trans-national corporations.

As in Ecuador, Indigenous peoples in Colombia have developed proposals for resistance in response to the loss of their traditional food systems. Although the 1991 Political Constitution recognizes the pluriethnic and multicultural character of the country and grants autonomy to Indigenous territories, public policies regarding food sovereignty remain fragmented and, in many cases, disconnected from territorial realities. One of the greatest challenges has been the replacement of ancestral food systems with assistance-based food distribution models, which has led to a loss of traditional knowledge, a decrease in agrobiodiversity, and economic dependency.





In this context, some state institutions have begun to incorporate more territorial and inclusive approaches. The Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF), for example, has implemented the Local Purchasing Strategy, an initiative aimed at strengthening the country's food security and sovereignty. This strategy aims to support the development and entrepreneurship of local families and communities; comply with Law 2046 of 2020, which promotes the public procurement of food produced by small and medium-sized producers; and advance the objectives of the National Development Plan 2022–2026. Although it still faces challenges in implementation, this strategy represents an opportunity to link institutional supply with the production of healthy, sustainable, and culturally relevant food, thereby strengthening peasant and Indigenous economies.

Colombia recently adopted the Public Policy on Agroecology (Resolution 0085 of 2024), a legal milestone that recognizes agroecology as a means for transforming food systems. This policy integrates ancestral and scientific knowledge, fosters agrobiodiversity, promotes sustainable production, and strengthens community processes such as agroecological schools, participatory guarantee systems, and food sovereignty. Its nationwide implementation aims to support peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities in the agroecological transition, promoting buen vivir, fair trade, and respect for life and territories.



Agricultural resistance practices of Indigenous peoples

Indigenous communities in Latin America have developed and maintained ancestral agricultural practices that not only ensure food production, but also preserve biodiversity and strengthen cultural identity. These practices represent forms of resistance in the face of agricultural homogenization and the loss of traditional knowledge. In the Andean region, among the most relevant strategies are the chakra system, the conservation of native seeds, and, in the Amazonian region, agroforestry systems.

Spirituality also plays a fundamental role in Indigenous peoples' relationship with the land, as agricultural rituals, offerings, and ceremonies are an essential part of food production, promoting a holistic view of nature. Ceremonies of gratitude to the Pachamama (Mother Earth) are held before each planting and harvest; lunar cycles and the teachings of wise men and women are considered when determining the appropriate moments for sowing and harvesting, thus maintaining a balance between nature and agricultural production.





THE ANDEAN CHAKRA

The Andean chakra is an integrated agricultural system implemented by the Kichwa peoples of the Ecuadorian highlands. This system is characterized by crop diversification, land rotation, and the use of agroecological techniques that maintain soil fertility and resilience against pests and diseases. The chakra is not only a production unit, but also a space for the transmission of knowledge and cultural practices, where new generations are taught how to cultivate the land.

Among the Indigenous peoples of Colombia, who share roots and cultural ties with the Andean and Mesoamerican peoples, ancestral gardens also occupy a central place in community life. For example, for the Misak people, the yatul (chakra) is much more than a garden or production plot. It is a holistic space where diverse foods are cultivated, native seeds are conserved, ancestral knowledge is transmitted, and the spiritual relationship with Mother Earth is strengthened. The yatul is governed by principles of complementarity, reciprocity, and balance, functioning as a true unit of life where sustainable agricultural practices converge with the Misak worldview. Its management, both collective and familial, is a form of cultural resistance against hegemonic agricultural models and a cornerstone in the construction of food sovereignty rooted in territories.

RESCUE AND CONSERVATION OF NATIVE SEEDS

The conservation of native seeds is an essential strategy of resistance. Indigenous communities have established seed banks and exchange networks to preserve local varieties adapted to specific conditions. For example, in the province of Cotopaxi, in Ecuador, several communities have recovered ancestral potato varieties, not only contributing to agricultural diversity, but also strengthening local food security and resilience in the face of climate change.

In Colombia, this process has been driven by the Free Seeds Network of Colombia, a broad and decentralized space that brings together peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian communities, as well as social, academic, and cultural organizations, around the defense of creole and native seeds. This network promotes the recovery, conservation, and free circulation of seeds in response to policies that favor privatization, the use of GMOs, and corporate control. Through regional nodes and action areas, it strengthens food autonomy, agroecology, and sovereignty in territories such as the department of Cauca in Colombia. Communities such as the Misak, Nasa, and Ampiuile peoples have succeeded in conserving more than 70 varieties of native potatoes, adapted to their páramo and high Andean ecosystems, integrating ancestral knowledge, intercultural education, and climate resilience strategies.

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AGROFORESTRY PRACTICES IN THE AMAZON

In the Amazonian region, Indigenous communities such as the Kichwa of Pastaza implement agroforestry systems that combine food crops with native forest species. These practices promote environmental sustainability, economic autonomy, and biodiversity conservation. In addition, they strengthen the role of women in the local economy and in the transmission of traditional knowledge.





Responses of resistance



Despite the progress made, Indigenous peoples face significant challenges, such as pressure from agribusiness, climate change, and public policies that do not always favor family farming, let alone the recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems. In response, they have developed resistance strategies based on their worldview and community organization, including the defense of territory, intercultural education, and political advocacy regarding the formulation of agrarian laws.

In Ecuador, CONAIE has led massive mobilizations against extractive projects that threaten ancestral territories and biodiversity, and demands recognition of territorial rights and respect for free, prior, and informed consent. On several occasions, it has filed lawsuits before the Constitutional Court to halt mining and oil concessions on Indigenous lands.

In the field of intercultural education, CONAIE and the Confederation of Peoples of the Kichwa Nationality of Ecuador (ECUARUNARI) have promoted the creation of community schools with pedagogical models based on ancestral knowledge, strengthening the transmission of knowledge regarding food sovereignty and agroecology. The Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples Amawtay Wasi, which includes subjects related to sustainable agriculture and food autonomy in its curriculum, is an example of this initiative.

Regarding political advocacy, CONAIE has actively participated in the drafting of regulations such as the Organic Law on Agrobiodiversity, Seeds, and Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture, which promotes the protection of native seeds and access to credit and resources for small-scale farmers. It also has promoted initiatives to ban transgenic crops and has advocated for the creation of community markets that favor direct marketing between producers and consumers, reducing dependence on agribusiness.

In Colombia, as in Ecuador, Indigenous peoples fight for the recognition of their knowledge and the right to decide how and with what they nourish themselves. People in various territories and organizations, such as the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon (OPIAC), the Tayrona Indigenous Confederation (CIT), the Indigenous Authorities of Colombia and Gobierno Mayor (AICO), the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), and the Movement of Indigenous Authorities of the Southwest (AISO), are also developing processes that engage with these forms of resistance and create new alternatives rooted in the diversity of seeds, languages, and cultural practices.



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