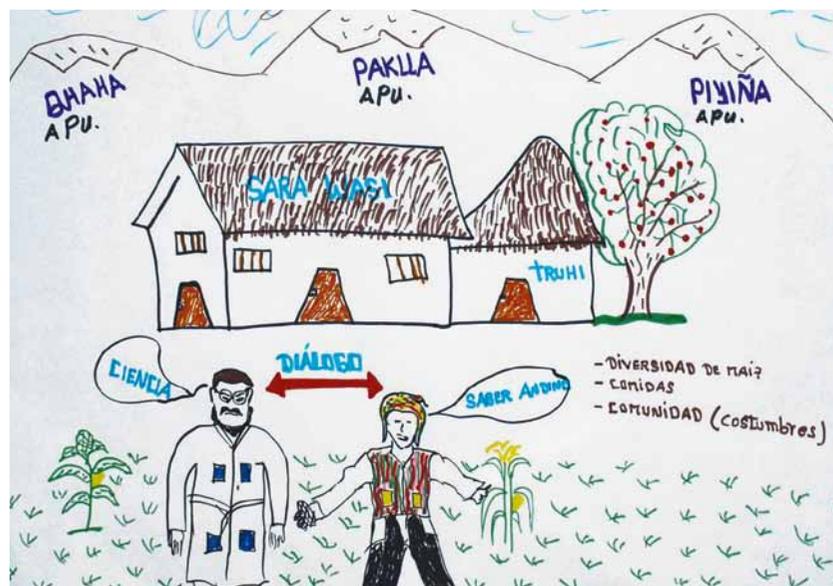


7. Wisdom dialogues

Participatory Action Research frames the wisdom dialogues that involve partners, in this case peasants and scientists, in a mutual construction of knowledge in which both parties learn, exchange ideas, feelings, images, beliefs, notions, concepts, practices, histories, wishes, and experiences to achieve a common understanding for joint action.

The underlying reason for these dialogues is that any person or knowledge system cannot know everything about a subject, because knowledge is incommensurable. We satisfy the desire to know by searching for meaning, questioning, and making sense of our own way of thinking regarding a topic or issue that may take us through unexplored domains. Further along, we make sense by creating synergies between other forms of knowledge in a dialogic fashion.

Dialogue sets up a scenario in which both partners are equally interested in their search for meaning regarding a topic. The interlocutors break the dichotomy of knower vs. ignorant by means of personal conversation, which invites joint reflection. When dialogue takes place both partners feel acknowledged and aware of their differences, which are considered with respect. Authoritarianism, that is imposing one's truth, or uncritical acceptance of other truths as one's own, suppresses mutual understanding. Dialogue encourages mutual understanding of partners' views while noting the differences in knowledge; differences are perceived, but the desire to learn one from another is the same, at equal footing. Both want to gain insights and ideas that are long lasting for their experiences and actions. And that is the political resonance of dialogue, that out of



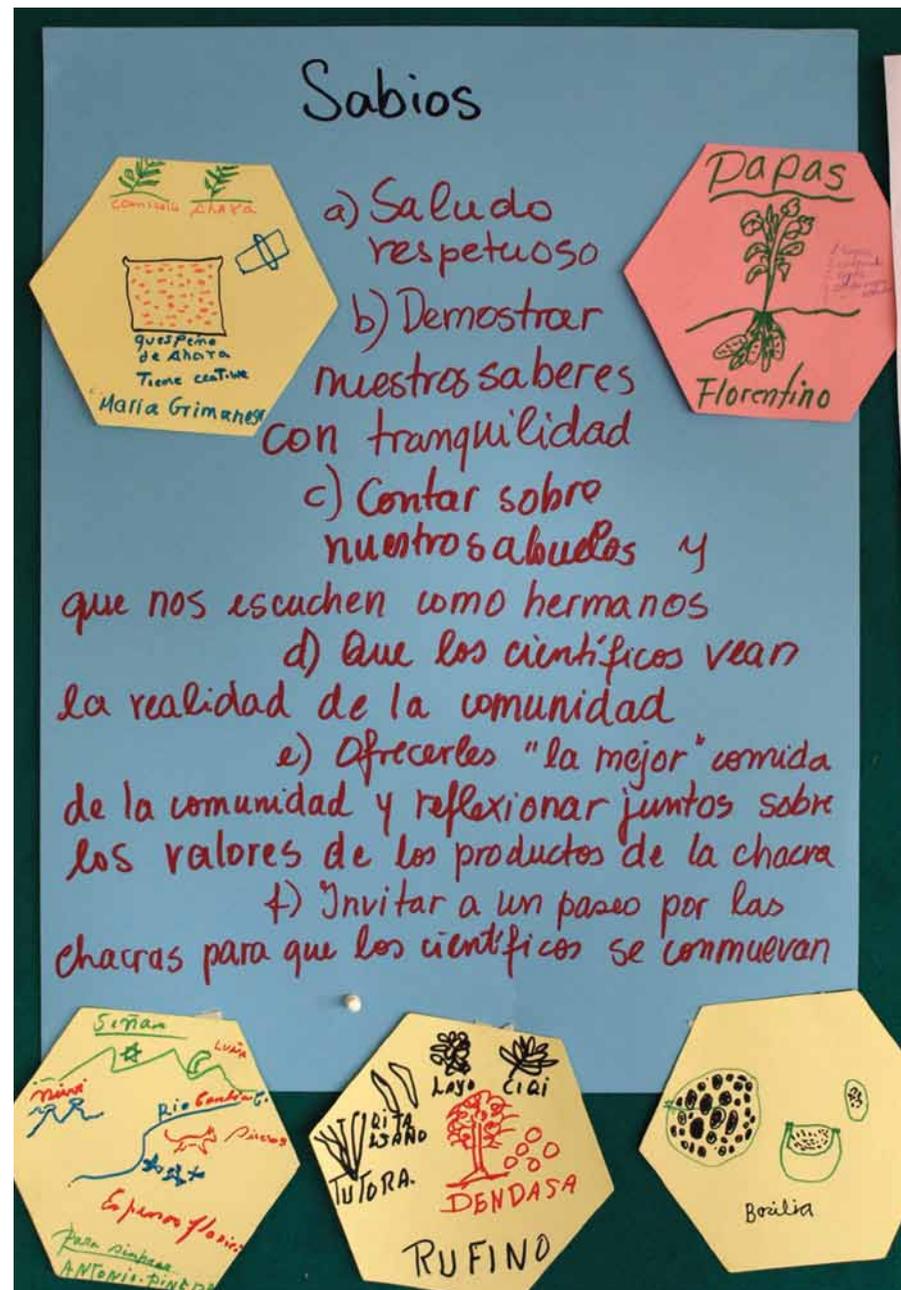
different understandings new, innovative perspectives are born from the encounter of both wisdom systems.

To achieve a fruitful dialogue, there are conditions to be fulfilled by both partners, scientists and wise men and women. In the Food Sovereignty project, a team of coordinators, facilitators and video-makers was necessary to organise preparatory visits to the research centres and conduct mock dialogues before the first round of actual wisdom dialogues could take place. This interactive process included two central days with specific scenarios. What follows are the most fruitful examples of the outcomes of the dialogue.

Establishing the conditions for dialogue

In the beginning, the wise men and women had mixed feelings about the dialogue. Although they had prepared themselves by graphically documenting their topics, the scientists were still unknown to them. 'Would they treat us without arrogance? Are we explaining our food sovereignty topics in such a way that there will be no disillusionment or misunderstandings?' One step to gaining confidence was that the elders established a code of conduct.

- Respectful greeting
- Patiently explain our knowledge
- They should listen to us like siblings
- The scientists should see our reality
- Offer them our best food and reflect together about the value of our food from the fields
- Walk with them through the fields so that the scientists feel touched emotionally

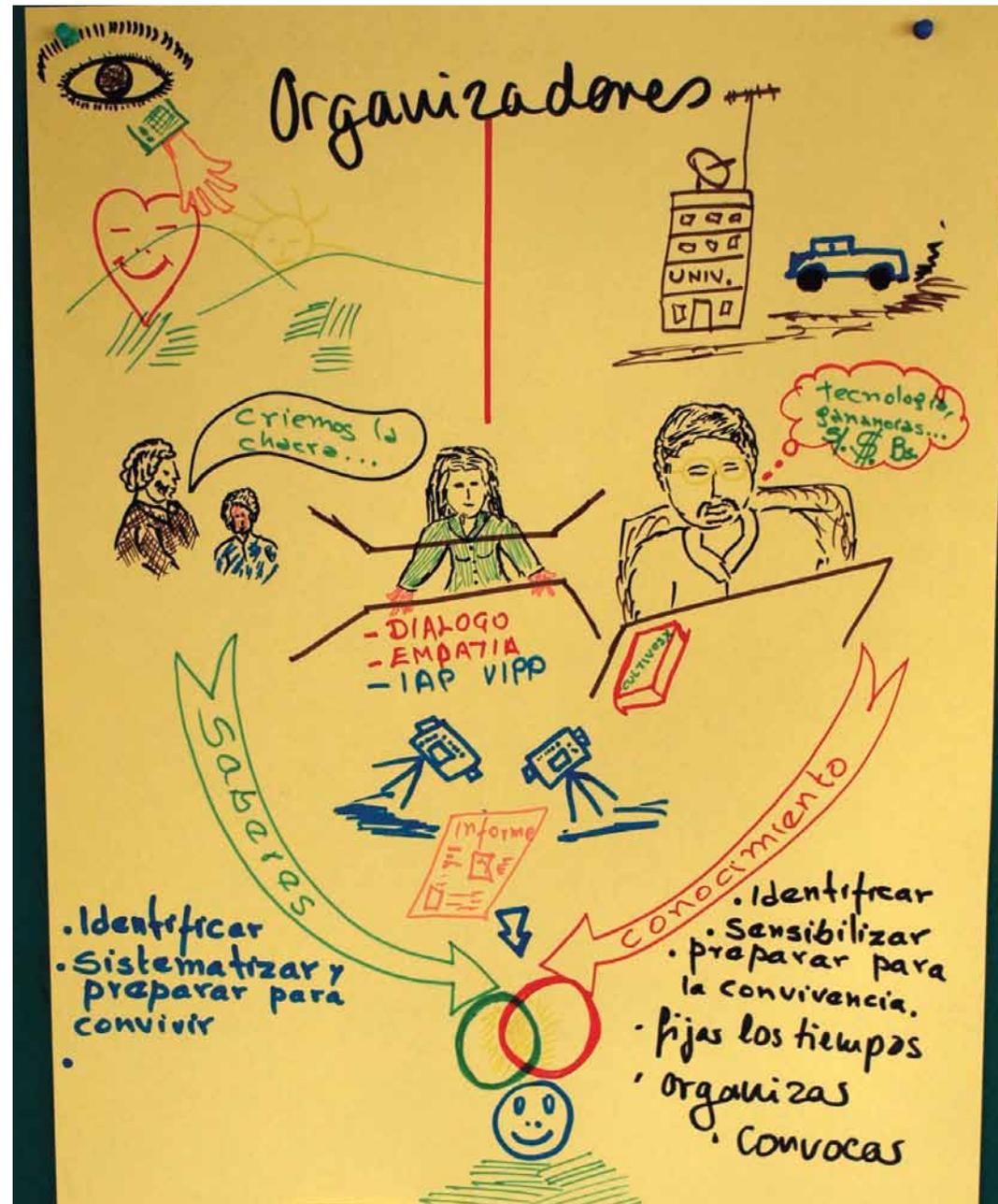


The teams that support the dialogue

This type of interaction requires a team of coordinators, facilitators and video-makers engaged in the organisation of dialogue process. The implementation of the wisdom dialogues required the agile and efficient methodological support of teams with differentiated roles.

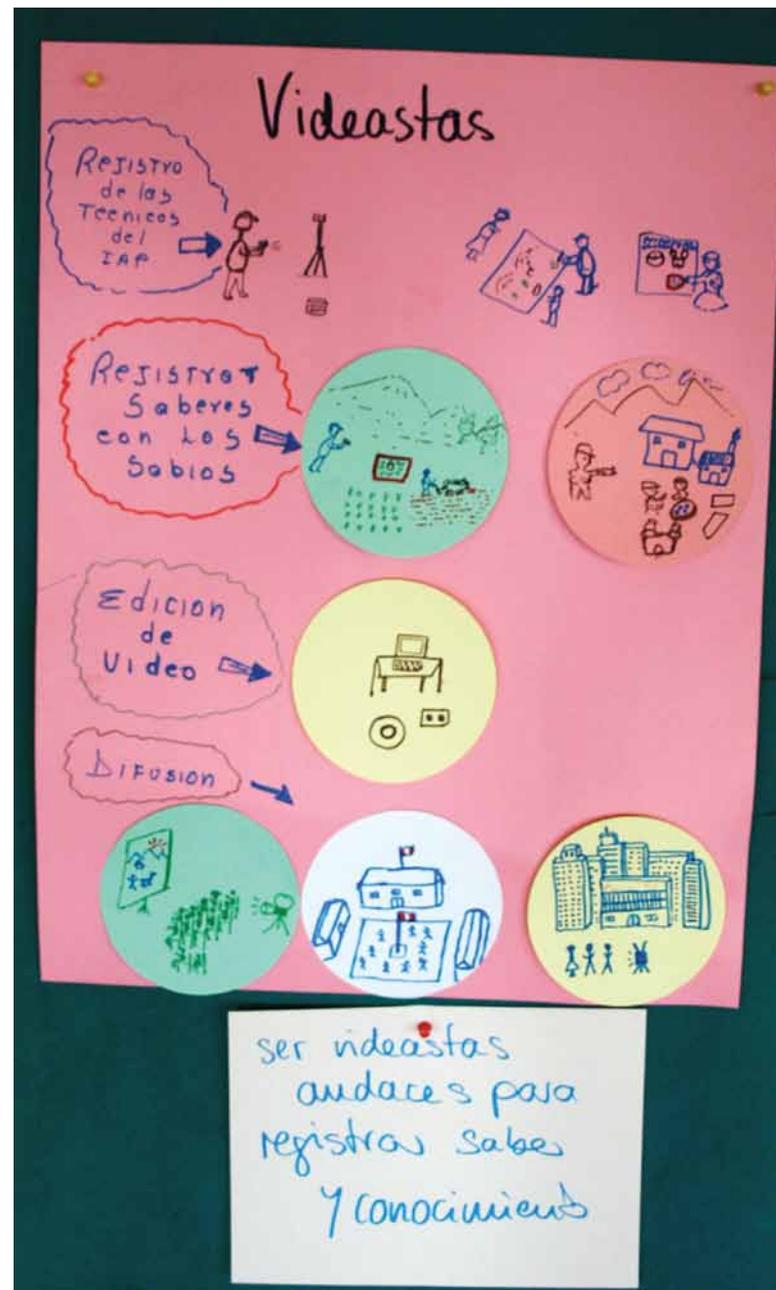
Coordination Team

This team is fully embedded in the vision and practice of dialogue and is engaged to ensure that it occurs in a transparent sequence of participatory steps that achieve the objective of exchanging knowledge. The coordination team sets up a plan with the consent of the facilitators and video-makers. This team stays in contact and communication with the scientists and wisdom networks, renewing the epistemological character of the event so that it does not turn into a political meeting or a top-down lecture. They are also in charge of planning for the provision of facilities, transportation, lodging, favourable learning environments, and visualisation materials in the communities, so that the dialogue process is a valuable experience for all.



Video-makers team

The team of video-makers take turns to document all sessions during a wisdom dialogue. First, their task is to produce a video covering the highlights of the event to be seen by all involved as a reminder of the commitments between scientists and wise men and women. Second, the video can be used as a methodological experience for other groups, to disseminate the dialogic practice and to prepare the space for political dialogue.



Previous visits

The members of the Alpaca Wisdom Network visited the National Agricultural Research Centre in Quimsachata. They were able to see where the intellectual life of the scientists takes place, their research methods and communication styles. They had a first glimpse of what they share in common and their differences regarding alpaca breeding and colour classification.

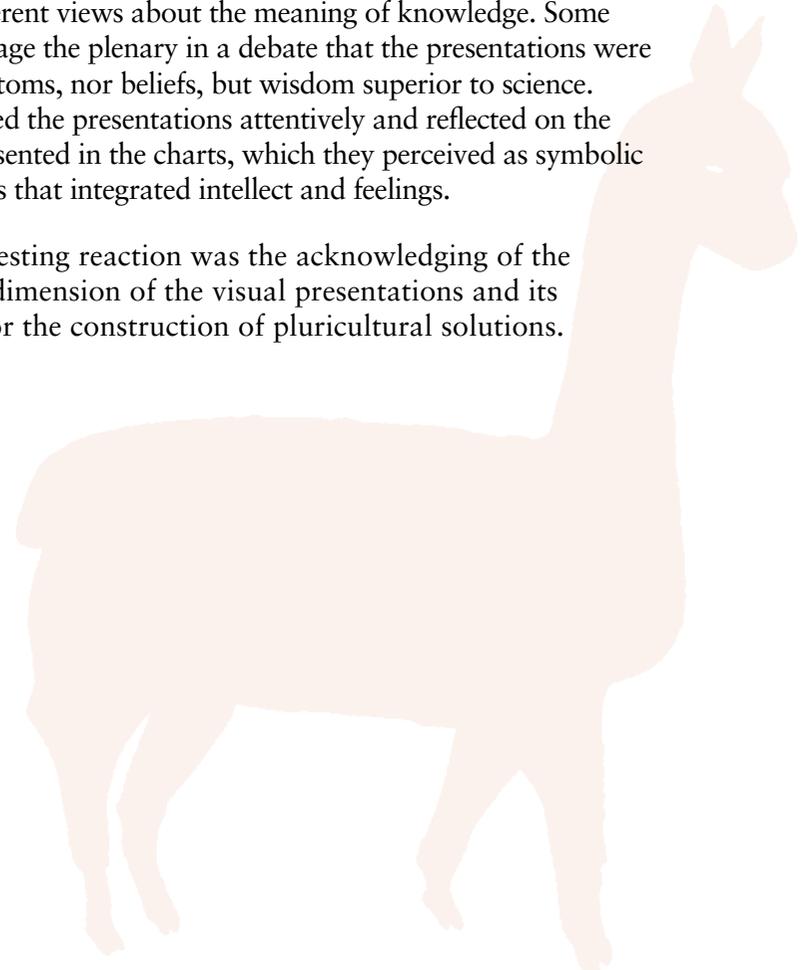
They also visited the Dean and a Professor of the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences in the Altiplano University of Puno. Both parties were surprised to find common topics of interest, which gave the scientists a reason to accept the invitation to the wisdom dialogue in Ayrumas Carumas.

Dialogue Rehearsal

Before the actual dialogue in the communities, the wisdom networks attended a meeting in which they presented their knowledge to scientists from several disciplines. It was a preparation for both and allowed each side to witness the different ways of understanding topics. But most of all it generated a disposition to gradually enter into breaking the existing power relationships between scientists and farmers. The members of the wisdom networks presented their visualised inputs and the scientists listened: a role reversal, and a new egalitarian practice.

It was interesting also to break down stereotypes about the scientists. They are not a bloc; on the contrary, among them there are those who hold different views about the meaning of knowledge. Some wanted to engage the plenary in a debate that the presentations were not simple customs, nor beliefs, but wisdom superior to science. Others followed the presentations attentively and reflected on the contents represented in the charts, which they perceived as symbolic representations that integrated intellect and feelings.

Another interesting reaction was the acknowledging of the intercultural dimension of the visual presentations and its importance for the construction of pluricultural solutions.



First dialogical encounters in the communities

The coordinators had sent the invitations for the agreed appointments to the wisdom dialogue. The first day, wise men and women set up a display of their knowledge clustered in sub-topics. In some cases, other members of the community, local authorities and schoolchildren got involved in complementing and validating the charts.



Who is who?

The second day, the scientists arrived and presented themselves in terms of their fields of knowledge, and their sense of belonging to the scientific community. Among the scientists were anthropologists, agronomists, educators, university professors and development officials from NGOs as well as from the state.



Purpose of the event

The facilitator renewed the reasons for coming together and the complexity of the wisdom dialogue, as well as the aim of engaging in a long-term relationship in the exercise of food sovereignty.



Moving experiences

One expectation of the wisdom network was to actively involve the senses, feelings and not just the intellect during the dialogue. Therefore a moment of surprise and inspiration was prepared. This was the live presentation of alpacas of all colours. Each animal with its particular shade was presented by men and women who showed the alpaca's colour, its age, and their attachment to it. They also spoke about the origin of the colours, the medicinal properties of the hair, and last but not least, the loneliness that herders feel in an unnatural all-white flock of alpacas. It was a magic moment.



Presentation of wisdom and the professionals' feedback

In Ayrumas Carumas: the cosmovision, the landscape, the herbal treatments and the colours of the alpaca.

In Perka: the *pukara*, spawning ground for native fish.

In Aymaña: cosmovision of alpaca breeders, annual cycle for llamas and alpacas, food calendar.

In Yunguyo: potatoes, the preciousness of each variety and the rotation fields

After each presentation of the Gallery of Wisdom, the facilitator invited the scientists to give a polyphonic feedback, which was shared in a visualised form. For the wise men and women this was recognition of their valuable efforts.



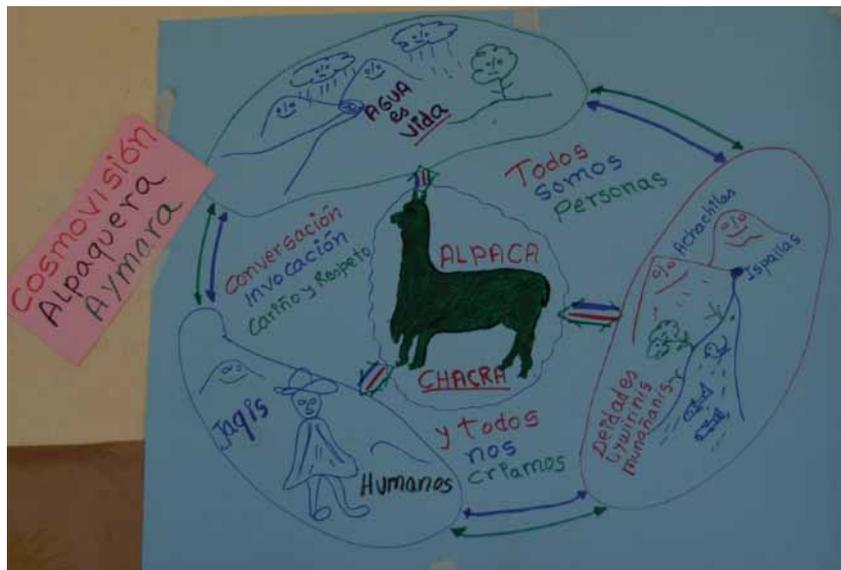
Face-to-face conversations

The classic dialogue situations were the apparent encounters and the contradictions since they initiated a deep interest into the underlying reasons for such differences of perception, which in this case were due to epistemological dimensions of

the exchange. Such moments of the evidence of differences are crucial to translate into a research agenda – topics to be followed up jointly.



The alpaca networks arrived at this point with the differences about the origin of colours. For wise men and women it was due to the water sources, or *ispallas*, whereas for the scientists the phenomenon is explicable through the concentration of melanin in the hair.



The endemic fish of Titicaca is related to the *pukara*, a concept and a space in the lake that explains the ongoing regeneration of the local species. It is a sacred source of life that needs to be devotedly taken into consideration. For the scientists, repopulating endemic fish is a matter of establishing a well-administered germplasm bank. Surprisingly enough a shift

occurred, a wise man was then claiming the intervention of the state, to declare the *pukaras* as sanctuaries in the lake, untouchable spaces, whereas the scientist proposed a bottom-up approach, that is communities should repopulate the lake species by taking matters into their own hands.



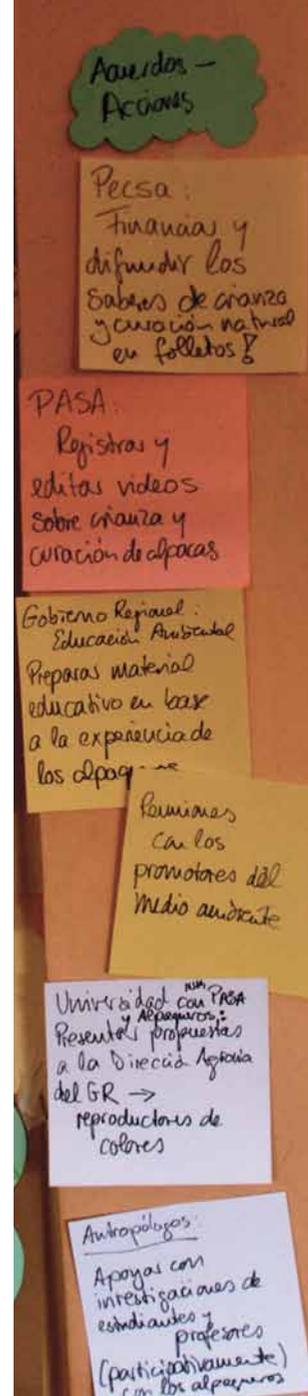
Research commitments

The closest to an agreement of collaboration was the invitation from the scientists to the wise men and women to hold a lecture at the University. They also were looking forward to publishing and disseminating the topics presented by the networks. The representatives of the Puno regional government proposed to declare Ayrumas Carumas as an officially recognised Ecological Community, which will help to support the communities to cultivate their traditional knowledge and to defend the sanctity of the environment.

As usual there were many development proposals without a direct relationship to the topics.

Assessment

Observers and scientists who gave their opinions about the dialogue recognised the learning and the respectful ways in which it took place.



Evaluation

After three months, the wise men and women gathered in Chucuito again to compare the phases of the process and to learn more about the dialogue experience.

Before: This evaluation evidenced the importance of a gradual step-by-step preparation to clarify how the wisdom dialogue would be carried out, in a way that was completely different from the classically asymmetrical relationship between professional development workers and rural people. The ongoing opportunities to meet peer wise men and women gave them a sense of familiarity and security; having different topics to focus on stimulated authentic learning.



During: The dialogue itself took different routes. In Ayrumas Carumas, the wisdom network divided into subgroups having its own dynamic of stimulating reflection. The community members, authorities and children actively took part in the presentations.

The endemic fish topic was a mass event of more than three hundred persons, including community members, schoolchildren, teachers, government officials, visitors, and observers. All attended with great expectations. The handful of wise men and women who had been preparing for the process were overwhelmed by community members who thought trout fingerlings would be distributed. Local authorities elaborated petitions to the government officials.

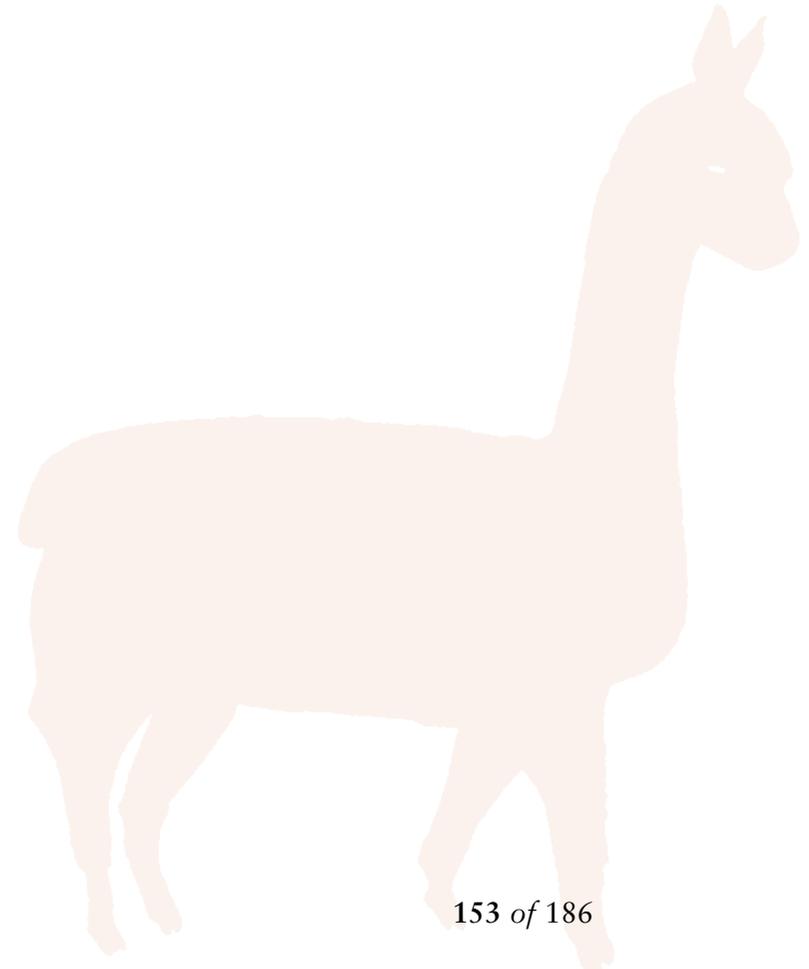
In the case of the potato network, there was the linguistic coincidence that both scientists and wise men and women could speak Aymara, which took them on a joint spiritual journey; yet they had opposing views on potato diversity.

In the case of the Alpaca and Llamas Network there were just a few visitors and a very large number of wise men and women who were unprepared.

After: All four networks affirmed the accomplishment of their goals and looked forward to what was coming next.

Follow up

One commitment that was clearly followed up was an appointment to settle the differences over *aynocas* and the nurturing of diversity during a subsequent encounter in February when the potato flowers would be blooming.



Methodological appraisal of the wisdom dialogues

Favourable factors:

The mutual acknowledgement that the partners in dialogue are knowledge subjects.

The use of continuous visualisation during the whole process involves all, helps interactivity, contextualises experiences, contributes to identifying the content and the meaning of knowledge.

The core of a dialogical relation is the chance to construct, deconstruct, agree and recreate as a group the contents or themes approached. The partners are full of experiences, ways

of thinking, feeling and meaning by which knowledge and action make sense to the knowers.

Joint reflection among scientists and wise men and women brings about a transition through wisdom routes that has not been explored and breaks the intellectual barriers to empowerment.

Having sensorial intelligent and emotional experiences elicits synergy in the wisdom dialogue.



Unfavourable factors:

A mass event, impersonal atmosphere, full of official discourse, degrading culture to folkloristic shows.

Confused expectations, roles, agendas, far from the wisdom exchange that should occur in the dialogue.

Allowing the distortion of the process by giving space to political demands or developmentalist projects.

Forgetting that part of the dialogue is to set up a common research agenda that is meaningful to both partners.



The revitalising impact of the Wisdom Dialogue

The dialogue has enriched the lives of wise men and women as they proudly admit. The personal, face-to-face encounters with the scientists confirmed to them that their knowledge is multifaceted and ritually powerful. At the same time it is practical, such as their observations on natural indicators, nurturing potato diversity, reproducing alpacas of many colours, knowing how to call the rain, chasing away hail and cooking and eating what is produced in the fields and the lake.

The Andean farmers feel very encouraged that they had meaningful encounters with the scientists and established friendships. They were surprised by the high number of male



scientists, whereas in the communities most knowledge is shared between men and women, with the exception that women are the guardians of seeds and food storage. Wise men and women realise that their knowledge is not private property, it cannot be sold, bought or stolen. Understanding and sharing is what mobilises them to continue the wisdom dialogues. 'We have learned from our wisdom. We have recalled how we were before, now we will not forget what we are and that is how we want to continue to be in the future.'

The wisdom dialogues stimulated ideas and feelings, opened up divergent points of view and put into a new time perspective the meaning of producing healthy, tasty and sovereign food.



Refino

Distritos

Papas

Compartimos entre Varones y Mujeres

es práctico y observador de señas

no vendemos nuestro, ni robamos el saber de otros

ni nos dejamos robar nuestros saberes

quechuas y aymaras vamos a cocinar juntos chaula-thumpa (Mayo) y dibujar todos los pasos y el valor nutricional Julia

8-9 de Mayo Saivino va a traer Papa de alpaca, queso y cauabari con el papito Maiz. Vidto x Raymundo Saivino

¿Cómo vamos a fortalecernos como sabios?
11am

quechuas y aymaras vamos a cocinar juntos chaula-thumpa (Mayo) y dibujar todos los pasos y el valor nutricional Julia

8-9 de Mayo Saivino va a traer Papa de alpaca, queso y cauabari con el papito Maiz. Vidto x Raymundo Saivino

Registrar con dibujos y videos saber de aynas y compartir con nuestra comunidad aymara
(H de Febrero)
(Presentación)

Compartir entre los Sabios/sabias entre los quechuas el saber de los señas en dibujos
(Agosto - Septiembre)
(Antena)

Intercombinación de Saberes entre quechuas en el Señalaky/Macha Salki ch. (Agosto) Otro video (3 días completos) (Mila)

Hipólito quiere compartir las diferentes del ritual de la pachamama con Severino en Agosto.

en Raqchi, partio por la Martina + Simona Haremos dibujos (Hipólito)

Sección y Papa

Sección y Papa

Video Aynas 2012

Video Papa, chaula thumpa Mayo 2012

Video Trucos Aymara Saivino - Saivino 2012

Video Señalaky Raqchi Salki ch. Aynas 2012

Video Señas Apóstol 2012

