4. Constructing food sovereignty

An *apacheta* is a stone cairn built over time by each passing traveller who marks his or her brief presence in the high altitudes with a small stone as an act of spiritual and symbolic homage to the Sacred Mountain and Mother Earth. In time, these substantial stone hillocks themselves transform the landscape, which acquires a new feature and a new Andean meaning.

A similar transformation, stone by stone, idea by idea, also occurred with the concept of food sovereignty when it was discussed in a multicommmunal event called the Summit on the Summit in Ayrumas Carumas. During four days in early June 2009 more than 400 Aymara and Quechua peasants from Peru and Bolivia, alongside various regional political actors and local authorities, celebrated a festival of mutual learning.

The four topics of the peasant summit were 1. Food Sovereignty, 2. Water and Climate Change, 3. Human and Landscape Health, and 4. Agriculture and Animal Production. A team of 20 community facilitators gathered together families – grandparents, parents, children – and helped to organise the research and deliberations.
What follows gives an account of two days of fieldwork in the communities of Chajana, Imata, Collpa and Ayrumas Carumas in the valley of the Rio Blanco. The results were visualised in mind maps, charts and figures and displayed in a gallery of knowledge at the municipal centre. These original hand-drawn food and farming knowledge charts formed the basis for presentations and discussions for an Action Plan for the Rio Blanco Highland Zone. On the fourth and last day the participants presented the plan to the local authorities and reinforced their decision to create and strengthen the White River Defence Committee (CODECA) as a civil society organisation.
The influence of natural indicators

Sun, rain, hail, the waters of the rivers and springs; winds, frost, earthquakes and volcanoes, clouds, and thunder; the Southern Cross, the Andean Cross, the Pleiades, rainbows, rivers, and animal behaviour – everything influences agriculture. Potatoes, ‘sweet’ and bitter, *cañihua*, quinua, and barley all grow differently in each community depending who interprets the indicators.

An elder from Chajana shows a map of the sky indicating the relationship between the Milky Way and the stars inside the Large Magellanic Cloud.
In the neighbouring community of Imata, besides observing the sky, people also pay attention to other indicators to foresee harvests.
They have observed other signs of change too, for example, in the last 30 years there have been unforeseen changes in the sky and on the earth. The permanent glaciers on the mountain peaks have shrunk while solar radiation is increasingly intense, rainfall has become erratic, hailstones larger and more destructive; there have also been longer frost periods, more storms, strong earthquakes and more frequent and severe floods.
There is also a shared sense of unease that the natural indicators are often random; efforts to reinterpret the natural signs are sometimes discouraging. Some say that yields are strongly affected by environmental contamination from agrochemicals and mines, the invasion of high-yielding varieties, and the substitution of traditional ways of animal husbandry and health with that of veterinary science. Another issue they were facing was the generation gap, with the wisdom of the elders falling into a vacuum, with youngsters not listening to their advice, preferring instead to imitate urban habits, especially with regard to food consumption.
**Our health depends on our seeds**

Women are in charge of caring for the seeds as an integral part of ensuring family health. They guarantee the quality and vitality of seeds during sowing, harvesting, classification, processing and conservation.

Eating the basic Andean foods – potatoes, both the ‘sweet’ and the ‘bitter’ varieties, quinua, *cañihua*, river fish and alpaca meat along with other crops that grow in the *chacra* – keeps families strong.

Eating seasonally according to the agricultural calendar also enables them to remain naturally healthy.
In the last fifty years, however, strong external influences have been changing Andean eating patterns, which has led to a higher incidence of ill health. Some families consume more rice, wheat flour, and soft drinks bought at the fairs or in the market. These families need medicine constantly.
The many uses and tastes of alpacas and llamas

The alpaca is an amazingly useful animal. Its skin provides *Yarink’a*, leather used to fasten roofs; from its tail one can make masks for the dance *Auqui Auqui*. Soup made with alpaca meat is consumed daily; sometimes, the meat is deep-fried and eaten as *chicharron*, or in the form of jerky, *chalona* and *charqui*, or roasted as *kankacho*. The fat, *llampi*, and the foetus, *cayuna*, are always used in the rituals to the *Apus*, the Sacred Mountains, and *Pachamama*, Mother Earth.

Naturally tinted alpaca wool is woven into jackets, blankets and vests that are used all year round. The sacks and ropes made of alpaca fibres are durable and the weaving tool *vichuña* that is made of alpaca bone lasts forever. A medicinal ointment is made from the heart and from the hoof, a rattle.
Similarly, many parts of the llama are edible and useful and fresh llama meat is sold in the market. The head is boiled for soup, the legs for making chalona and charqui; llama wool is used for heavy blankets, sacks, ropes, and slings. The foetus forms part of the water ceremony and to ask for permission from the Apus, llama fat is offered to Mother Earth.

The behaviour of alpacas is an indicator regarding the transitions between dry and rainy seasons.
The taste of alpaca meat depends on what they eat. They prefer certain kinds of pasture. If alpacas or llamas get sick, it is better to avoid veterinary drugs as they spoil the taste of the meat.
There are fewer multicoloured alpaca flocks now because the technicians have been breeding only white animals due to the influence of industry, which only wants white alpaca wool.
All participants acknowledged that Andean crops suffer from variable harvests. There are years during which yields are generally good, and bad years for tubers and grains. That is why it is so important to know how to interpret the natural signs, which give approximate correlations for farming, transmitted in dynamic and metaphorical messages. Moreover, each crop has its own lifespan: some varieties of potatoes can last many decades, if they have been properly cured before being placed in the storeroom.

Bitter potatoes are processed as *chuño*, if it is black in colour it is also called *tunta*, or *moraya*, if white. They are dried (desiccated) by harnessing the dramatic temperature differences between night and day during June–July.
Andean grains are also roasted and transformed into flour with the *ccona*, a manual grinder made of two stones. All these procedures are very labour-intensive, but proper preparation and storage ensures at least one year’s supply of ingredients for a family’s daily meals in the form of soups, or sweet and savoury porridge.

**The storeroom**

The storeroom is separate from the house. Here can be found *cañihuaco*, roasted and ground *cañihua, chuño, quinua, kiwicha*, Andean tubers, wheat and barley; each and every one of these products is subject to special treatment and rules. For example Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays are auspicious days to enter the storeroom; if you stick to these days, your food will last longer. If you enter on Tuesdays and Fridays your food will vanish without you noticing it. Grandmothers always kept food in woven baskets. While this advice is not adhered to too strictly, the observation of natural indicators for storing food and their respective rituals is still practised.
The storeroom as a wider concept includes three main spaces. One is ‘above’, the open spaces where one can forage for wild vegetables and fruits. This means that nature itself is also perceived as a food reserve, especially in the rainy season. A second area is near the home, where one stores Andean tubers and grains according to customary rules. This area suggests an extension of life from the fields. The rules for maintaining the storeroom as provider of food for longer periods of time are particularly known and applied by women. There is a third space to keep staples, like salt, sugar, rice, oil, and other products bought at the market. This place is very commonly ‘below’ and inside the house. Since these products are not from the fields they have a different type of life; some say this is food without spirit and keep it under their beds.
The kitchen

The kitchen is the place where the fruits of the fields are transformed into delicious meals. It is a microcosm of Andean society with its three types of kitchen. One is inside the home where the family gathers, the other is outside the house when the extended family and friends eat together, and the third is during the harvest, the **watia**, using soil to create an earth oven. In fact, all three use earth as raw material, which is also true for the clay cooking pots. Wood is carved into spoons.
Traditionally and still in general, women cook and are in charge of the hearth. They perform their role with great concentration without wasting anything, even the smallest and most wrinkled potato, the *chuño* that good wives can preserve for 10 or 20 years. A woman’s intelligence is demonstrated by how long she can feed her family from her storeroom without going shopping.

The daily cycle of food consumption is integrated into the rhythms of farming. Early in the morning, *cañihuaco*, freshly prepared with a cup of herbal tea or a substantial soup, will provide enough energy to work in the fields until the first snack made of *chuño* or roasted grains. Returning from the fields, at home there will be a soup or savoury porridge made of Andean grains for dinner.
Annual food cycle

In the Altiplano, every day people eat Andean tubers and grains transformed in local cuisine. There are two different food seasons. During the harvest there is abundance, and one can see the families gathered to eat in the fields, using the watia; sometimes this period overlaps with the Carnival festivities. There is also the seasonal diminishing of food, which coincides with the time of the main sowing. The critical months are October and November, a time of scarcity if the storeroom has not been well managed.

While the Andean diet appears to be monotonous, with its year-round consumption of tubers and grains, another picture emerges if one looks closer: there is a wide repertoire of dishes, with tasty ingredients and many different presentations.
Favourite dishes

The following list includes some of the favourite Andean dishes. Among them are potatoes with cheese and chilli sauce, *wallaqui*, fish soup with *chuño* and potato, *pesque*, a savoury porridge made with quinoa and milk, and quinoa soup.
Recipes
Alpaca Cracklings
Quinua Soup
T’impo Stew
Alpaca Heart
Special food

A birthday party or animal rituals such as mating ceremonies are celebrated with *kankacho*, roasted fresh alpaca meat. A new mother is served a salt-free lamb soup to regain her health and barbecues are very popular for saint's days or holidays. There is also special food eaten in honour of Mother Earth in August.

Some animals like the marmot are hunted and eaten strictly for medicinal purposes.

What children like

Baby food does not exist in the Andes. Babies, children and adults eat the same food, from the same pot. Children prefer fruits from the tropical forest and the coast such as watermelons, grapes, pears, pineapples, bananas and apples, as well as sweet quinoa porridge with milk, cold meats, eggs, cheese, potatoes, maize, and an edible white clay, *chajo*. 
Then and now

Historically, food from Peru’s different ecological zones was exchanged as part of the barter economy and ensured a diverse diet for those living in the Altiplano.

It is said that in the past, by eating Andean tubers and grains people would live to be 90 years old without getting sick. The life cycle was also embedded in social duties in the community until the age of 30. Now with the consumption of industrial food, young people want to get married at the tender age of 15 without fulfilling their community responsibilities, and are very selfish; at the age of 25 they already have grey hair, bad health and a shortened life expectancy.
Now their diet includes a lot of processed or agroindustrially farmed or sourced food such as rice, processed wheat (flour, semolina, noodles), sugar, oil, canned tuna, and evaporated milk that have slowly pushed back the consumption of staple foods of the Andes, like potatoes, quinoa, oca, mashua, barley, oats, broad beans. This has been occurring since the 1960s and it has had an impact on human behaviour and longevity.

**Different views**

In their visualisations of the future the men included some infrastructural improvements in rural life. The scene appears a little bit urban although the fields have a considerable presence but less diversity, like little monoculture fields. Modern technology displaces pastures with a modern irrigation system, there is reforestation in the high mountain slopes, and some man-made dams; cheese and yogurt are being made.
Women instead focus on the kitchen and utensils, and defending the pure water of the springs against mining interests. The animals and the fields are maintained as in the old times, very healthy and without agrochemical inputs, which have caused skin cancer and other diseases. For women, a future without environmental contamination is essential for food sovereignty.

A young man, 17 years old, expresses his ideas in terms of the continuity of a food chain that starts with the local seeds and continues with the nurturing of Andean crops and animals that are the basis for healthy, delicious and sovereign food.
Agreements

These different positions were debated on the third day, resulting in a declaration of principles and an intercommunal action plan supported by men and women, young and old, which recognises the importance of access to sufficient and varied food produced in their own fields.

They agreed upon following principles:

• Andean tubers and grains are food that keeps people from the Andes strong, healthy and happy.

• Alpaca meat is considered part of the diet along with lamb, guinea pig, chickens, pigs, as long they are taken care of by the families.

• Food that is eaten every day should be cooked in a natural way and that starts with clean pure water.

• Eating in the kitchen around the fire integrates the family in a natural and social life cycle with all its manifestations of reciprocity for the animated landscape as well the human community.

• Eating together supports the shared identity of the Aymara and Quechua people.

• Remembering traditions is a way to keep in touch with the ancestors and perpetuate a good quality of life.

The intercommunal assembly confirmed that food sovereignty is the right to determine the natural quality of food, and reflects a strong desire to maintain food traditions, knowledge and practices as well as the spiritual values attached to the food that comes from the fields. The following action plan contains that spirit of good living.

• Maintaining seed diversity as well as the diversity of animal races that are the basis of daily livelihood.

• Cultivating the fields with organic manure.

• Recuperating and transmitting to the children the wisdom of working in the fields as well as the ritual cycles.

• Valuing food that comes from the fields as well as from the wild and consuming them in quispiño, aku, firi, chaqo, and other customary dishes.

• Maintaining the purity of water sources, keeping them free of contamination because they are for human and animal consumption alike, that the Sacred Mountains provide as long as humans keep pure water flowing on the earth.
Recuperar la ritualidad/crianzas. 
- Valorar nuestros alimentos/chacra/anim.
- Volver a comer los alimentos silvestres.

Ritualidad

CUIDAR LA NATURALEZA.

Recuperar y valorar nuestros Costumbres.
Acciones

Alpaca.
Seguir manteniendo nuestra llama y alpaca.

Uana.
Seguir manteniendo nuestro chasqui.

Guinua.
Seguir cultivando nuestra variedad de quinoa.

Seguir cultivando nuestras variedades de cañihua.

Seguir consumiendo nuestros alimentos naturales.

Seguir haciendo las pegas de manantial para nuestros animales y para nuestras mismas.

Seguir manteniendo nuestras plantas de Yatay y jora para nuestra salud.

que los niños deben de comer frutas y verduras para mantenerse en buena salud.

mangana

plátano

mamonja

que los niños no deben de comer dulces ni galletas, lo cual es mal para la salud.

por nuestra Salud.
## Summary of the concept of Food Sovereignty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Dominant model</th>
<th>Food Sovereignty Model</th>
<th>Andean Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production priority</td>
<td>Agroexports</td>
<td>Food for local markets</td>
<td>First is food for the family, then the surplus is for the local market or for barter, which strengthens the local dynamics: llama caravans. Consumption of the harvest from the fields complemented by industrial goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop prices</td>
<td>“What the market dictates” (leave intact mechanisms that enforce low prices)</td>
<td>Fair prices that cover costs of production and allow farmers and farmworkers a life with dignity</td>
<td>Priority on complementarity, exchange of products, spirituality and knowledge between families, within the community and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market access</td>
<td>Access to foreign markets</td>
<td>Access to local markets; an end to the displacement of farmers from their own markets by agribusiness</td>
<td>Barter - exchange of products from different ecological zones and an opportunity to gain trust with different people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidies</td>
<td>While prohibited in the Third World, many subsidies are allowed in the US and Europe — but are paid only to the largest farmers</td>
<td>Subsidies that do not damage other countries (via dumping) are okay; i.e., grant subsidies only to family farmers, for direct marketing, price/income support, soil conservation, conversion to sustainable farming, research, etc.</td>
<td>Healthy and nutritious food crops are sold by the peasants at low cost to the urban population. The state should recognise their contribution to society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Chiefly a commodity; in practice, this means processed, contaminated food that is full of fat, sugar, high fructose corn syrup, and toxic residues</td>
<td>A human right: specifically, should be healthy, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and locally produced</td>
<td>Is a person and the weft of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to produce</td>
<td>An option for the economically efficient</td>
<td>A right of rural peoples</td>
<td>Requires knowledge or wisdom of nurturing nature, harmony with nature, deities and cultivating biodiversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the concept of Food Sovereignty</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hunger</strong></td>
<td><strong>Due to low productivity</strong></td>
<td>A problem of access and distribution; due to poverty and inequality</td>
<td>Exists mostly in cities, in rural areas only affects families without land, those who eat from the field to the table without storing. Also families who sell all their harvest to the market and have to buy food. Traditional storage enables a supply of food over years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food security</strong></td>
<td><strong>Achieved by importing food from where it is cheapest</strong></td>
<td>Greatest when food production is in the hands of the hungry, or when food is produced locally</td>
<td>We achieve food security by cultivating agro-biodiversity and consuming our local crops. Only export if we have surplus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control over productive resources (land, water, forests)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Privatized</strong></td>
<td>Local; community controlled</td>
<td>Is the Pacha (animals, mountains, stones, water, plants, rain, frost...), all what surrounds and nurtures us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to land</strong></td>
<td><strong>Via the market</strong></td>
<td>Via genuine agrarian reform; without access to land, the rest is meaningless</td>
<td>Respect for Mother Earth (Pachamama) and the territory of the peasant communities. The earth is a source of life for peasant families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seeds</strong></td>
<td><strong>A patentable commodity</strong></td>
<td>A common heritage of humanity, held in trust by rural communities and cultures; “no patents on life”</td>
<td>Is life, food, regenerating life, the mother which requires love and respect (ritual).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural credit and investment</strong></td>
<td><strong>From private banks and corporations</strong></td>
<td>From the public sector; designed to support family agriculture</td>
<td>Not used in the family agriculture, is only for festivals or to buy appliances. Creates bad feelings and menaces peasant families due to the bank guarantees (land).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Summary of the concept of Food Sovereignty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dumping</th>
<th>Monopoly</th>
<th>Genetically modified organisms (GMOs)</th>
<th>Farming technology</th>
<th>Farmers</th>
<th>Urban consumers</th>
<th>Alternatives: different worlds in this world, bio-cultural diversity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not an issue</td>
<td>Not an issue</td>
<td>Not an issue</td>
<td>The wave of the future</td>
<td>Industrial, moniculture, chemical-intensive; uses GMOs</td>
<td>Anachronisms; the inefficient will disappear</td>
<td>Workers to be paid as little as possible</td>
<td>Not possible/not of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must be prohibited</td>
<td>The root of most problems; monopolies must be broken up</td>
<td>Bad for health and the environment; an unnecessary technology</td>
<td>Agroecological, sustainable farming methods, no GMOs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guardians of culture and crop germplasm; stewards of productive resources; repositories of knowledge; internal market and building block of broad-based, inclusive economic development</td>
<td>Need living wages</td>
<td>Possible and amply demonstrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant families do not measure their production costs but see their crops as a medium to share with other families, relatives, (exchange potatoes or corn with wool, meat, fish or fruit).</td>
<td>Andean peasant society is based on diversity and reciprocity.</td>
<td>Not natural and horrible.</td>
<td>Based on wisdom, signs, secrets.</td>
<td>Are the rural families, which nurture life in reciprocity and complementary with the natural commons of deities, nature, seeds.</td>
<td></td>
<td>They should respect, value and consume healthy products, grown by the local communities.</td>
<td>Many worlds in this world, the diversity of cultures is life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Rosset, 2003 and the perspectives of the PASA networks of wise people.