Bringing economic, environmental, and food security to the Andean region remains a major global challenge despite decades of research and development initiatives undertaken by hundreds of organizations. Today, more than 60 percent of the rural inhabitants of the Andes—a vast and diverse mountain system that stretches 7,000 kilometers from tropical Venezuela to temperate Chile—still live in poverty; less than half have access to health services, safe drinking water, and sanitation; and one child in nine fails to reach his or her first birthday.

While specific problems may vary from place to place, the stresses resulting from population pressure, soil erosion, nutrient loss, extreme weather conditions, political violence, and market marginalization are among the most common constraints to the social and economic development so sorely needed in this dynamic region of the world.

**Goals.** CONDESAN was born in 1992 when CIP convened a group of scientists determined to find an effective mechanism through which to solve the closely related problems of rural poverty and natural resource abuse in the Andes. The underlying vision of CONDESAN—now operating as a dynamic consortium of nearly 50 organizations actively working in the Andes of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina—is based on four principles.

- Natural resource management and rural poverty are multidisciplinary themes that can best be handled by a consortium of institutions.
- The impact of quality work in the Andean region can be reinforced best through the creation of an electronic information exchange and sharing mechanism (InfoAndina).
- The fundamental issues of poverty and resource management require more local and political alliances that must involve nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners, regional universities, producer groups, and municipal governments.
- Rather than creating yet another organizational infrastructure, the Andean research and development consortium should work as a virtual entity through its partner members.
The consortium is hosted by CIP in Lima, Peru. Its mission is to facilitate research on crosscutting, trans-Andean topics that are based on six themes: preserving natural resources, conserving biodiversity, increasing productivity and commercial viability, improving economic and environmental policies, building local capacity, and enhancing communication and information sharing.

**OUTPUT.** Some of CONDESAN’s regional themes include:

- Andean watershed characterization and development: learning to quantify environmental externalities
- building strategic alliances between producers and entrepreneurs: bringing capital to the rural Andes
- strengthening MSc programs in natural resource management: bridging the gap between agronomy and ecology
- regional Paramo project: including the commons in village land management planning
- conserving Andean root and tuber germplasm: from collection to marketing

CONDESAN is also working at seven benchmark watersheds (10,000 to 100,000 hectares) located in a broad expanse from Venezuela to Argentina. Some of the research/development programs currently underway include:

- **Pueblo Llano and Gavidia (Mérida, Venezuela):** working to balance high-input potato production with sustainable development
- **La Miel (Manizales, Colombia):** managing the Florencia cloud forest bioserve and developing profitable alternatives in the buffer zone
- **El Angel (El Carchi, Ecuador):** creating a sense of common wealth and promoting rural prosperity along an irrigation canal
- **Cajamarca (Peru):** building micro-watershed management plans with municipal authorities
- **Mañazo (Puno, Peru):** increasing incomes in a new irrigation district; from water management to marketing Andean products
- **Humahuaca (Jujuy, Argentina):** promoting conservation of agrobiodiversity in marginal lands, and preventing natural disasters through watershed interventions

- **Candelaria (Cochabamba, Bolivia):** evolving from prospecting for biodiversity to earning profits with Andean root and tuber crops

**INFOANDINA.** Reliable information can be among the scarcest of the resources available to the farmers, municipal officials, development workers, and researchers upon whom the success of CONDESAN depends. This situation is quickly changing through what collaborators refer to as the cornerstone of CONDESAN: InfoAndina, a mechanism that has helped consortium members establish e-mail connections, produce electronic newsletters, and launch web pages. This Spanish language communications network currently includes 1500 subscribers, mostly from Latin America. In addition to producing InfoNotas and highlights from the global Mountain Forum discussion lists, InfoAndina also hosts electronic forums that often attract up to 500 participants.

**MEMBERS.** CONDESAN is constituted by a total of 75 members: NGOs, Andean university members, national agricultural research systems and international research centers.

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