



# Wayko - Lamas: a Quechua community in the Selva Alta of North Peru under change

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## Abstract

*The Lamistas, a native Quechua speaking group in the upper lowlands of the Amazonia, of north-eastern Peru were established during the Spanish Colonial Period as an ethnic group, that have maintained their culture and identity despite many changes in the Amazonian environment over the last thirty years. This paper describes their historical background and gives information on the environmental modifications due to policies of cattle ranching, timber extraction, and international demand on coca and cocaine production. The Lamistas have used different strategies for their survival which are observed in their settlement pattern and land tenure.*

## Keywords

*Landscape modifications, historical ecology, Lamistas, native group, agriculture, settlement pattern, land tenure.*

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## The northern Peruvian Amazonia

The forested north-eastern part of the Peruvian montaña or the selva, has been extensively occupied and exploited for thousands of years. Throughout this time people have been living in the Amazonia and created different cultural pressures on the resources. The Peruvian Amazonia covers an area of 814,737 km<sup>2</sup> corresponding to 63% of the country's territory. The population density is 2.5 pr km<sup>2</sup>, but is in fact as high as 540 pr. km<sup>2</sup> when calculating the population density in the cultivated areas where people actually live. In Lamas province (5,040 km<sup>2</sup>) the population density is 14.7 pr km<sup>2</sup> in the rural areas.

In the Pre-Hispanic period preceding 1532, the "selva alta", or the upper lowlands, was inhabited by many indigenous groups speaking different languages of which only very few remain today. Most lived in small, independent communities or in dispersed settlements relying on slash and burn cultivation and hunting and fishing that allowed for greater mobility through the region. The Spanish colonial policy forced groups to live together in nuclear settlements for christianization and collection of tribute. At this time environmental changes in the forests were moderate. However, in this century dramatic changes

have influenced the region severely and altered the environment from a forest to a more open savannah like landscape with scattered forested areas.

In the 1970s, the process of agrarian reform encouraged people from the highland departments of La Libertad, Amazonas and Cajamarca to migrate into the Amazonia to raise cattle and grow rice, sugarcane, and coffee. The so-called "colonos" were given free land and cheap loans to settle in the new areas to be colonized. The politicians created the myth of a land of milk and honey in the selva with an abundance of productive land and good possibilities for cattle holdings. Due to the high degree of deforestation during the last fifty years especially to promote cattle ranching in the Amazonia (c. 4 mill. ha) the actual coverage of pasture is some 500,000 ha with 350,000 head of cattle (Brack 1997).

The 1980s saw the appearance of several NGO's. Many of them had the best intentions for the rational exploitation of the natural resources, a higher standard of living for the inhabitants, and for attaining an ecological equilibrium. Unfortunately, most of them came with knowledge and ideas from other geographical regions, and no thorough study of the social and biological conditions was carried out before their words were put into action. They expanded

the agricultural area, to "push forward the agricultural frontier" as this "development" had been called. The result has been a further impoverishment of the soil, low productivity in agriculture and further introduction of large herds of cattle, which are the cause of major degradation of the soil. In fact, the only result of the NGO-work in the 1980s was the disappearance of large forested areas for agriculture and cattle. Large timber companies have cleared other parts of the forest to extract valued timber for furniture and housing construction, for both national and international markets. When they left, peasants moved in and settled down in the cleared land (Brack 1997).

In the 1980s and first half of the 1990s there came an increase in the demand of coca, as drug dealers encouraged local people to grow coca leaves and process cocaine paste for the international markets expanding in the USA and Europe. The coca boom also accelerated the process of colonization.

### The Lamistas and DIVA

Despite the drastic changes in the last fifty years, thirty groups are recognized as native communities in the Peruvian Selva with some degree of contact with the national society (Reátegui 1997). The Lamistas live in the upper Huallaga catchment near the Río Mayo in Peru and while they have maintained their native identity, they have developed new strategies in different scenarios for their survival and benefit.

The origin and history of the Lamistas are surrounded by many myths and have been the focus of a few investiga-

tions in the forties (Weiss 1949) and in the seventies (Frisancho 1975, Scazzocchio 1979). Intrigued by myths, ancient history and tales of a land of coca production, where drug dealers and terrorists had their hiding places in the forests, the DIVA project decided to study the Lamistas to illustrate how spatial relationship in settlement pattern, land-use, and strategical planning was altering under different stress situations.

DIVA (Centre for Research on the Cultural and Biological Diversity of Andean Rainforests) is one of the projects in the Danish Environmental Research Program, investigating regional patterns of biodiversity and habitats modified by human activity today, and conducting detailed studies of human perceptions and ways to use the environment. An important reason for choosing this region was the high degree of biological and cultural diversity and the fact that it was an area in conflict between a rapidly growing population and a fragile and highly diverse forest ecosystem. Anthropological fieldwork with participant observation and the use of questionnaires were combined with botanical plant collection and registration. The data, photos, video and the plant collections are found in the Universidad Nacional de Trujillo, in the Universidad Privada de Antenor Orrego, Trujillo in Peru and in the University of Aarhus and in the Ethnographical Collection of National Museum of Denmark.

### The history

The Amazon rainforests and the upper lowlands attracted the early Spanish conquistadors in their search for the gold

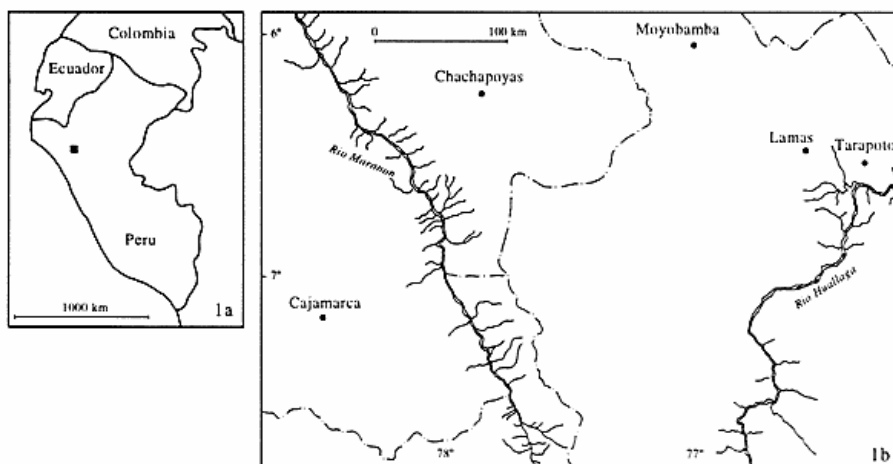


Figure 1: Map of north-eastern Peru showing the location of the principal towns.

of Eldorado; an allure later sought also by other European and North American travelers. In 1538, in the north-eastern region of Peru the first Spanish expedition with Alonso de Avarado and Juan Perez de Guevara journeyed from Chachapoyas to Moyobamba where they "discovered" the land they named Rupa Rupa but which can not be found on any maps, only the towns (Fig.1). In their following expedition, Alonso de Alvarado heard rumors of a royal Inca chief named Ankoallo who resided at a large lake, but none of the natives would accompany him to this location (Schjellerup 1997). Ankoallo, according to historical accounts was not of Inca decent but a leader of the Chancas, a group from the central highlands that the Incas had defeated in one their wars and who had fled into the forests. The region became known by the Spaniards as the land of the Motilones (the Shaven Crowns).

In 1560, Pedro de Ursua began his fatal voyage from Chachapoyas and Moyobamba and constructed a wooden Spanish ship on the banks of Río Mayo or Río Huallaga. The tragic outcome of this famed expedition is well known. Ursua was killed and Lope de Aguirre and a few survivors managed to travel on to the Río Amazonas, through to the Atlantic Ocean and returned to Spain (Bollaert 1861). In 1610 the corregidor from Chachapoyas, Juan Vargas Machuca, entered the "tierra adentro" (the interior lands) and managed to make peace with several of the native tribes, among them the Tabalosos. But his eagerness to move them into reductions was not rewarded: "... they cannot be reduced as they are not enough people, because each one lives among his fields with long distances apart, they are naked and poor people who do not have or wish to have more than what they need to eat and to drink, and this is not to the interest of Your Majesty" (Riva Herrera [1646-1655] 1899:93), authors translation.

In 1648, the Corregidor of Cajamarca Martin de la Riva Herrera had the same idea to go east. The result was four campaigns in the years 1653 to 1655, to the Indians: "infieles" (heathens).

The outcome of the first campaign by Riva Herrera was the foundation of two reductions: San Joseph de los Lamas and Virgen del Rosario (Tabalosos today) in the Province of the Tabalosos (Riva Herrera 1899:45), situated 40 km north of Lamas on the other side of Río Mayo. Why Riva Herrera named the village and the native groups he assembled in the village Lamas is not known. The dispersed native settlements once found among the native groups, were no longer permitted. The Spaniards did not have any

understanding of the native way of life. The leading chieftain Ojanasta, from the recently created Villa de Tabalosos and the chieftain Majuma from the likewise recently founded village Lamas, were able to raise up most of the Indian tribes on the eastern flanks of the montaña against the Spaniards, killing the missionaries and burning the newly erected churches. Punitive expeditions were sent out by General Riva Herrera and a stronghold was set up in Lamas with two bronze canons for defense. Ojanasta was caught and decapitated in 1654, and the allied tribes of the Tabalosos and the Lamas, the Amasifuén, the Coscabosoas, the Gibitos, the Cholones and the Payansos were subdued by the Spaniards (Figueroa [1661]1986).

Lamas was re-founded in October 10, 1656 as the Ciudad del Triunfo de los Motilones y Lamas, on top of a mountain. During the next centuries cotton became the most important tribute to the Spaniards. During this period Lamas became part of the Jesuit missionary domain, but after their expulsion in 1767 the area was transferred to the Franciscans. In the beginning, the local tribes were eager to have contact with the missionaries to trade knives, machetes and axes but when they had acquired the goods they fled into the forests to avoid being captured by the missionaries and forced to live and work within the missionary stations. In the eighteenth century, severe epidemics and punitive expeditions wiped out 50-75 % of the native population.

The native group, the Lamistas in Lamas, became a Quechua speaking group as did many of the people inhabiting the eastern upper lowlands of the Amazonian forest from Ecuador in the north to Peru in the south. The



Figure 2: Lamas town situated on the mountain in the background. Photo: Victor Quipuscoa.

Quechua language was the language of the Incas. They had forced their vanquished subjects to speak this language, but never managed to include the Amazonian lowlands in their empire. As the different Catholic missionaries following the Spanish invasion found the Quechua language useful as a *lengua franca*, they introduced it among the many tribes they tried to baptize and christen throughout Amazonia.

In 1857 Lamas was visited by the English botanist Richard Spruce who described Lamas as a village of some 6,000 inhabitants, situated near the top of a conical hill that reminded him of some "similar towns and villages in Valencia, as they are depicted in Cavanilles' History of that province of Old Spain" (Spruce 1908). The geographer Raimondi (1879) passed by in 1859 and described Lamas as the "Ciudad de tres pisos", the town in three floors. A name which it has held until present day.

### The present

Today Lamas is a provincial town with 9,000 inhabitants and capital of the province with the same name in the Department of San Martín (Bazan 1996). As mentioned by Spruce the town is situated on a mountain top contrary to other settlements in the area and located at about 730 to 850 m above sea level. The town is at 6° 25" southern latitude and 76° 31" western longitude (Fig. 2).

Lamas is situated on a spur to the main road, the "La Marginal de la Selva", some 40 km from Tarapoto. Tarapoto was the place of departure for traveling to Brasil on the Río Huallaga and is one of the fastest growing towns in the Amazonia today. The road La Marginal de la Selva is supposed to connect the Pacific Ocean with the Atlantic Ocean. The construction of the road began in the 1960s with no regard for environmental considerations as part of the national policies to encourage peasants from the mountains in the Andean cordillera to colonize the upper and lower Amazonian lowlands. It was opened in 1977.

Daily buses leave from Tarapoto to the capital Lima and arrive in three days passing by Moyobamba, Chachapoyas, and following the Pan-American highway from Chiclayo south to Lima. Along the road many new small settlements are appearing surrounded by fields with many cash crops such as sugarcane, coffee and cacao.

Lamas is situated in the ecological zone of "Zona Media (Altitudinal Premontano Tropical) - Húmedo" - Humid

tropical pre-montane forest (Onern 1985) with an average temperature of 25° C and an average rainfall of 2,000 mm. Most of the soil in the Lamas province is characterized as "arcilloso", clayish in a few places with "arena", sand and clayish sand.

Lamas town has grown considerably in the last decades due to the political winds and not least due to the coca boom of the 1980s. Today it is inhabited by many immigrants from the mountain departments of Ancash, La Libertad, and Cajamarca and from the lowlands, the departments of Amazonas and Iquitos. The population is made up of whites, mestizos (half white, half Indian) and those of Indian descent. The town is divided into nine quarters which still bear the names of ancient tribes such as the Suchiche and of personal names - the upper quarter is called Ankoallo after the Chanca leader (Fig.3).

In the lower, north-western quarter of Lamas, the community of the native Quechua speaking Lamistas is located in the quarter Wayku. This part of town is also divided into

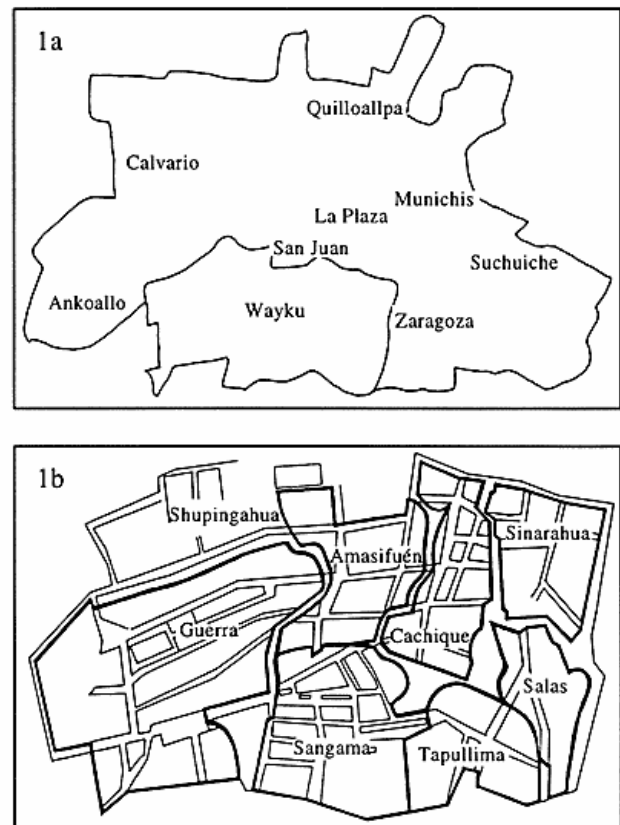


Figure 3: Map of the quarters in Lamas town.

sectors with one lineage in each sector who until lately were endogamous families - not permitted to marry into any of the other lineages. Until recently there were nine lineages: the Amasifuén, the Guerra, the Sangama, the Tapullima, the Cachiques, the Sinarahua, the Salas, (the former Tabalosos (Scazzocchio 1981:109) and the Shupingahua, but the ninth, the Ischiza, has left Wayko and is only found in some of the surrounding villages.

The settlement and land tenure patterns have changed throughout the area during the last centuries and new villages were founded in the Lamas province with the indigenous Quechua speaking groups on both sides of the Río Mayo, where large forested areas were still available for hunting and new fields. The Llacuash as they call themselves or Lamistas are found in a widespread area in the Lamas province and even further south of Tarapoto in the village of Chasuta. Due to an increase of population and because the mestizos and white people during the last century have little by little bought up the land around Lamas town, the Lamistas were forced to find other areas for their fields (Fig. 4). Most of the inhabitants today have obtained titles to the land not as individuals, but as common property, titles held in trust by the indigenous communities.

An interesting pattern was observed in the way that people from specific clans have gathered in the new colonies (Table 1.)

Scazzocchio (1981:109) mentions that the Quechua speaking groups chose to settle down in the forests where their ancestors lived: the Salas, the Ichuiza, the Satalaya and the Saboya in the direction of the Río Sisa, the Amasifuén south of the western side of the Río Huallaga central



Figure 4: Houses in the village of Aviación. Photo: Inge Schjellerup.

and the Sangama towards Chasuta and in the northern direction, although this pattern seems to be changing today.

Based on information from the Director of the school system in Lamas, the following villages are considered native villages with Quechua speaking inhabitants from Lamas:

South of the Río Mayo (placed in order from the south towards the north) Las Flores de Mamonaquihua, Bagazán, Vistoso, Vistoso Grande, Carañayacu, Nuevo Mundo, Santa Cruz, Santa Ana, Paniuy, Santa Miguel and towards the north of the Río Mayo (placed in order from the north towards the east) Ponazapa, Mishquiyaquillo, Palmiche, Pampamonte, Mishquiyaku, Chumbaquihui, Churuzapa, Pinto Recodo, Alto Pucallpillo, Morillo, Bella Vista, Shambuyaku, Alto Wamanwasi, Carachamayoc, Nuestra Señora de la Selva, Pamashto, Urcopata, Aviación, Chiriyaku, Chunchihui, Shapajilla, Chirapa, Shuchshuyaku, Aucaloma, Shambulco, Ahuashillo, Churuzapa, Shapumba and at the bank of the Río Mayo: Solo, Churuyaku, San Antonio, Las Flores, Maceda (in front of Santa Ana) and Pucasaca.

No map exists of the location of the Quechua speaking communities and no up-to-date list exists of these communities which is why we mention them here. In the DIVA project, we were only able to map most of the villages east of the Río Mayo, with the use of a GPS.

The local leaders in each village are called apus. They are elected every second year and are responsible for the local community. Today, the majority of the people from Wayko not only have a house in the Wayko quarter of Lamas town, but a second house and fields in the villages of

Village	Lineages
Panashto	the Salas, the Huaman, the Shupingahua
Urco Pata	the Amasifuén, the Pashanasi
Aviación	the Sangama, the Amasifuén
Chiriyaku	the Tapullima, the Sinarahua
Pachilla	the Amasifuén, the Cashique, the Pashanasi
Chiripa	the Sangama, the Cachique, the Tapullima
Chunchiwi	the Sinarahua, the Sangama
Morillo	the Sangama, the Salas

Table 1: Examples of clan majorities in Quechua speaking native communities in the Lamas province.

Morillo, Alto Wamanwasi, Aviación, Chiriyaku, Chunchihui, Chirapa and Ahuashillo located at a walking distance of 30 minutes to one day (Fig. 5).

The Lamistas or rather Llacuash as they prefer to call themselves, maintain their cultural identity within the national society and have established themselves as a distinct group with their own perception of their environment. Weiss (1949) writes that the white people or mestizos, who want to deal with them must learn Quechua as they do not want to speak or learn Spanish. The Lamistas were, and are acknowledged, as an ethnic group which constitutes a symbiosis with the mestizos in the *compadrazgo*, godfather system, of reciprocal services and protection. Earlier the presence and activities of the group were accepted because they were a very important element in the communication and transportation of goods. They functioned as carriers of goods over large distances before the introduction of vehicles. A young man would carry 60 kg to Moyobamba or Yurimaguas from Lamas, with a pack supported by a woven band across the head: a two to three days journey walking an average of 20 to 40 km per day (Weiss 1949) (Fig.6). Today the Lamistas or Llacuash supply Lamas with meat from wild animals, and are important chicken breeders. They also engage in other activities such as pottery making (Fig. 7) and weaving made on demand. Other income comes from the cultivation of cash crops such as coffee and pineapple and the fabrication of "chancaca", sugar loaves and *aguardiente* from sugar cane.

Two years ago when DIVA began research among the Lamistas, it was almost impossible to enter into Lamas and



Figure 5: Map of villages in the District of Lamas with Quechua speaking Lamistas from Wayko.

contact the people as a result of the coca boom. The region was known to be a hiding place for terrorists who along with the locals, had organized a network of information exchange and trade with drug dealers. Everybody was suspicious of each other, and working in the field interviewing the Lamistas and collecting plants was not easily accepted. Many people still had their coca fields outside in the other villages and did not welcome new visitors. In the meantime, thanks to better control with international aid from the United Nations, the price on coca dropped drastically from \$1,000 for a kilo to \$200. In the coca years the cultivation of many fields with traditional crops were left and hardly any young people attended school, as it was much easier to earn good wages outside school. Of course not everybody has left the coca cultivation. Coca fields are now found in the so-called protected forested areas further away from the cultivated areas in Cordillera Escalera and there has also been a recent introduction of growing opium.

The recent history of the Lamas people and their environment is thus a tale of many changes and opportunism due to the strong influences on the national and international level, but the Lamistas have maintained their principal subsistence activity as agriculturists supplemented with some hunting. They do not engage in cattle breeding as the mestizos. Surrounded and pressed as they are by the mestizo settlers they still practice slash and burn agriculture but with greater emphasis on growing crops for the market and are considered specialists in hunting. The pressure forces them to find new land each time further away from Lamas town. Many of their earlier cultural characteristics as endogamism within the clans, their settlement pattern, traditional house construction and interior furnishing, kitchen ware and other customs are changing.

Agriculture forms part of a supra-annual cycle which consists of three phases: clearing of the forest, cultivation, and fallow. Periodic fallow is necessary since the thin layer of topsoil (5 - 10 cm) is quickly exhausted or washed away. The cultivation period is normally 3 years and fallow periods from 3 to 5 years.

A Llacuash family has an average of three ha in use every year for agricultural production. Every field is a product of slash and burn agriculture where the land is cleared of most trees, burnt and left to putrefy in the fields. The only agricultural implement is the machete. A single field is shown with intercropping of maize (*Zea mays*) with



Figure 6: Lamista carrying a load of bananas, Wayko. Photo: Victor Quipuscoa.

common beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), cotton (*Gossypium barbadense*), sacha inchik (*Plukenetia volubilis*), peanuts (*Arachis hypogaea*), squash (*Cucurbita ficifolia*) and manioc (*Manihot esculenta*). Other fields may have banana plants (*Musa sp.*), in mountain rice cultivation, or maize with common beans, puspo poroto (*Cajanus cajan*), sacha culantro (*Talinum paniculatum*), michucsi (*Colocasia sp.*) and huitino (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium*). Important cash crops are coffee (*Coffea arabica*) and pineapple (*Ananas comosus*). The most common daily food is chicha, maize beer with green boiled banana and boiled common beans. A total of 88 crops are cultivated in the fields with the main emphasis on maize, beans and banana (DIVA, forthcoming report on Lamas). Contrary to other Amazonian groups who cultivate manioc as their principal crop, the Lamistas prefer maize introduced from the highlands. Maize is the most im-



Figure 7: Doña Carolina carries water in a traditional painted jar from a water hole to the house in Chiriyacu. Photo: Inge Schjellerup.

portant crop for the production of maize beer, chicha, which is consumed daily and during their most important feast in August for the Virgin of Santa Rosa.

Some of the Wayko Llacuash return to Wayko once a week with agricultural products such as bananas, beans and peanuts to sell in the market of Lamas or if they can afford it, they will take the products to Tarapoto where they can obtain higher prices. Others have hardly anything to sell and are mainly self sufficient. In one of the villages, Chiriyacu, we were told that when they were short of agricultural products they would catch any kind of bird for consumption (Fig. 8).

Coffee has been re-introduced after the turbulent years of the coca. In fact, before the coca boom the Lamas province was the major coffee producing region of Peru and many of the Lamistas are now engaged in coffee production as a



Figure 8: An old photograph from the ethnological museum in Lamas showing the traditional dancing costumes. The men still wear belts of desiccated birds for the Fiesta de Santa Rosa. Photographer unknown.

cash crop. The production of cotton is also being encouraged by an NGO as a cash crop among the Lamistas.

Traditional hunting activities have decreased in the last years due to the deforestation and uncontrolled poaching. Animals are now found several days away from the villages. There is still a high demand for meat from animals including "huangana" (*Tayassu pecari*), deer, and turtles.

The Lamistas are not the only Quechua speaking group comprised of several native groups united in the Spanish overseas possessions during the early Spanish colonial period, which have gained a name as an ethnic, cultural group living in a forested environment. We find the same pattern in Ecuador among the Quijos (Diva 1997) and the Canelos (Diva 1998). They all show cultural traces from

the highland and the lowland and each group has been able to maintain a specific, native identity within the national society. In the coming years the Lamistas in Wayko probably will leave their houses in their quarter in Lamas, yet returning for their patronal feasts and commerce. They will settle down in new villages, most of which will be dispersed settlements, and try to enter into the protected forested areas, as has been recently observed.

The Peruvian government has a national strategy for the management of natural resources within protected areas and national parks, but as a poorly functioning administration without sufficient education it is not able to control the vast protected areas. No attention is being given to the necessity of involving local communities in the management of a sustainable use of local resources (native groups have recently been included in the Ministry of Women's Affairs; they were not registered as native groups with recognized rights before). The office of the Ministry of Agriculture in Lamas is dependent on the office in Tarapoto - but in May 1998 it was in a state of confusion with no material and a lack of coordination among its offices. There is very limited knowledge on environmental issues. Permission for timber extraction is given to the native communities without considering who may be behind the extraction. Brack (1997) has suggested a strategy with four themes for a sustainable development of the Amazonia, where it is not necessary to "push forward the agricultural frontiers". The themes incorporate a social anthropological aspect, technology, the environment and the economy. Hopefully the national and international decision makers will concentrate their efforts for a better development of this part of the Amazonia as an urgent need exists.

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