United Nations
Convention to Combat Desertification

Inclusive Drought Planning: from guidelines to action

Putting GESI into practice – virtual exchange, 2 September 2025

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Background

- UNCCD Secretariat issued a call to identify examples of the essential role played by women in sustainable land management in drought-prone locations and regions so that their initiatives may be duly valued, expanded, and replicated
- A total of 87 case studies were received
- An Independent consultant curated them
- Review committee selected the 35 most innovative and effective

Combining science and ancestral approaches: Indigenous women addressing water insecurity in Peru through traditional water planting and harvesting

In the community of Quispillaccta (3860 meters above sea level), in Ayacucho, Peru, local glaciers were an important source of water, but they had melted. A great diversity of seeds had been lost, pastures were dry, and the community was experiencing severe water and food insecurity.

The 6 Machaca Mendieta sisters migrated to the city to **study agricultural engineering**, then returned to their farming community with degrees in hand, to support their community and address the severe water shortages.

The Machaca Mendieta sisters **reclaimed indigenous Quechua culture and knowledge** to address water scarcity and revive their community's relationship with nature, highlighting the importance of embracing traditional wisdom in the face of environmental challenges.

After **long conversations with the yachaqs (wise men),** they initiated the Asociación Bartolomé Aripaylla (ABA Association) to revert to the traditional practice of “Water Nurturing”, “Rainwater Breeding” or “Rainwater Planting and Harvesting.” This practice involves constructing a system of *qochas*, or rain ponds, in natural depressions that function as a network to retain and store rainwater and enhance groundwater recharge.

“Rainwater Planting and Harvesting” is a low-cost solution to maintaining a permanent water flow during the dry season. The lagoons are built in natural landscapes that are already shaped like reservoirs minimizing the need for excavations and using only natural materials. To maintain water resources**, local plant species known as “mothers of water” are planted around the lagoons.**

To date, 188 new springs (*qochas)*, benefiting thousan of people. Water recharge of aquifers in the fi microbasins of the Pampas and Chikllarazu rive increased by more than 54% between 1986 and 2013.

The lagoons have a considerable positive impact on agricultural and livestock activities of the communities and small local producers.

In addition to enhancing water availability, the lagoons host a diversity of birds and different plant species tha provide food and forage and have a **ritual and medicin use**.

The ABA Association also supports communities with agriculture and nutrition, soil recovery, livestock management and controlled grazing in line with tradition practices. These practices have been developed collectively with local communities since 1994 and hav been **passed on to young people** as “Community Extensionists for Sowing and Harvesting Rainwater”.

Young people are mobilized at the national level to support their communities in constructing *qochas* and support other regions, such as Guatemala and Costa Rica.

In communities like these, droughts are a constant threat, and **women play essential roles** in sustainably managing the land. They exercise authority in caring for the land and the community, actively participate in decision-making, and contribute their invaluable knowledge.

Women are crucial in protecting and distributing irrigation water to the family. In prolonged drought or episodes of increased water demand, **women become guardians of water**. They regulate the distribution of water to prevent theft and ensure its correct use.

In line with traditions, they act not only as authorities but **also as ritual figures who maintain a sacred relationship with water.**

Key GESI elements

Intersectional approach – *identify which groups of women are most impacted*

Technical scientific training for women

Understanding the role of women in drought management – *historically, at present, and evolving for the future*

Consider the complementarity of ancestral practices and the newest science

Engaging with men, especially in local leadership roles, to bring them on board

Gender-inclusive consultations with the local communities

Engaging with and empowering youth – *male and female*

Solidarity with other drought-affected communities

Thank you

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