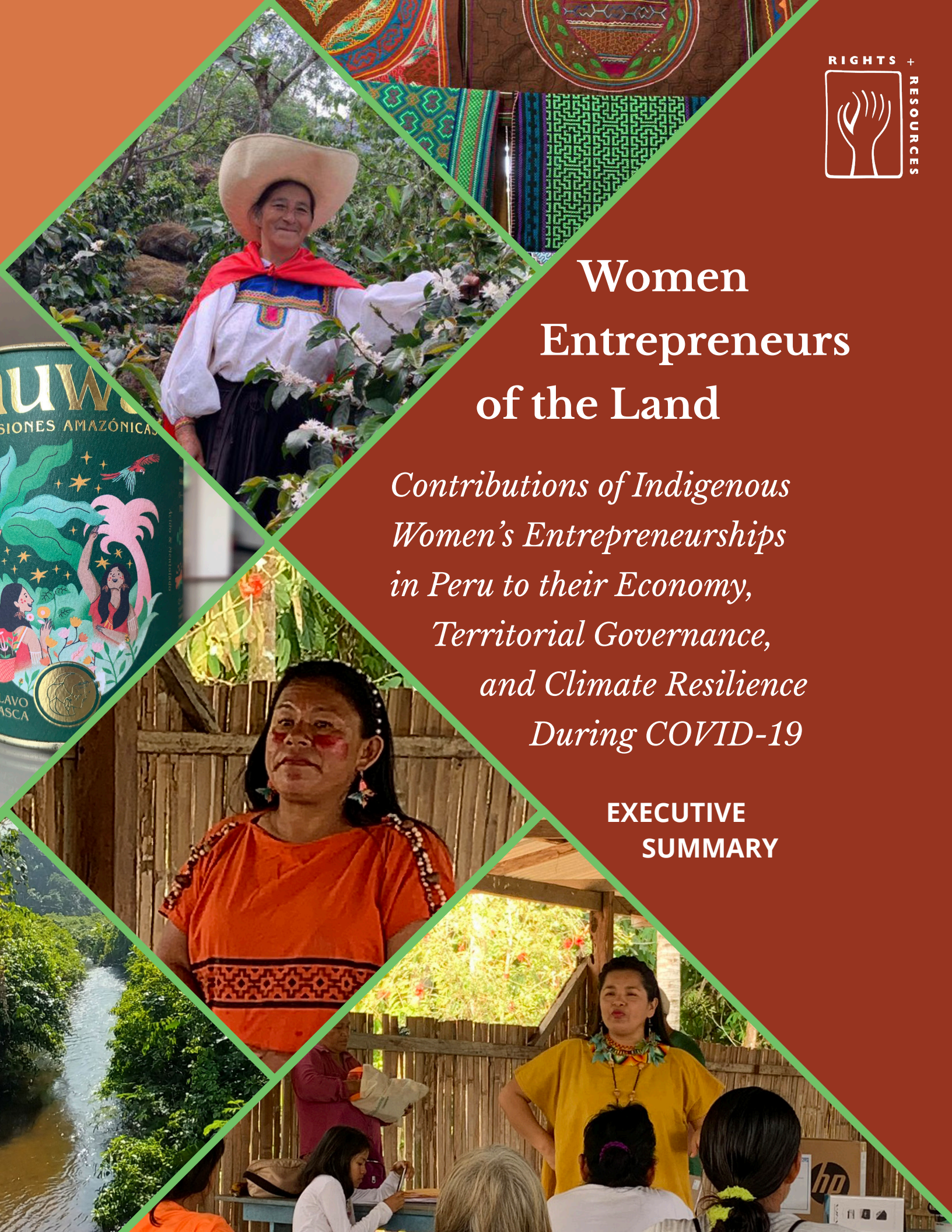


Women Entrepreneurs of the Land

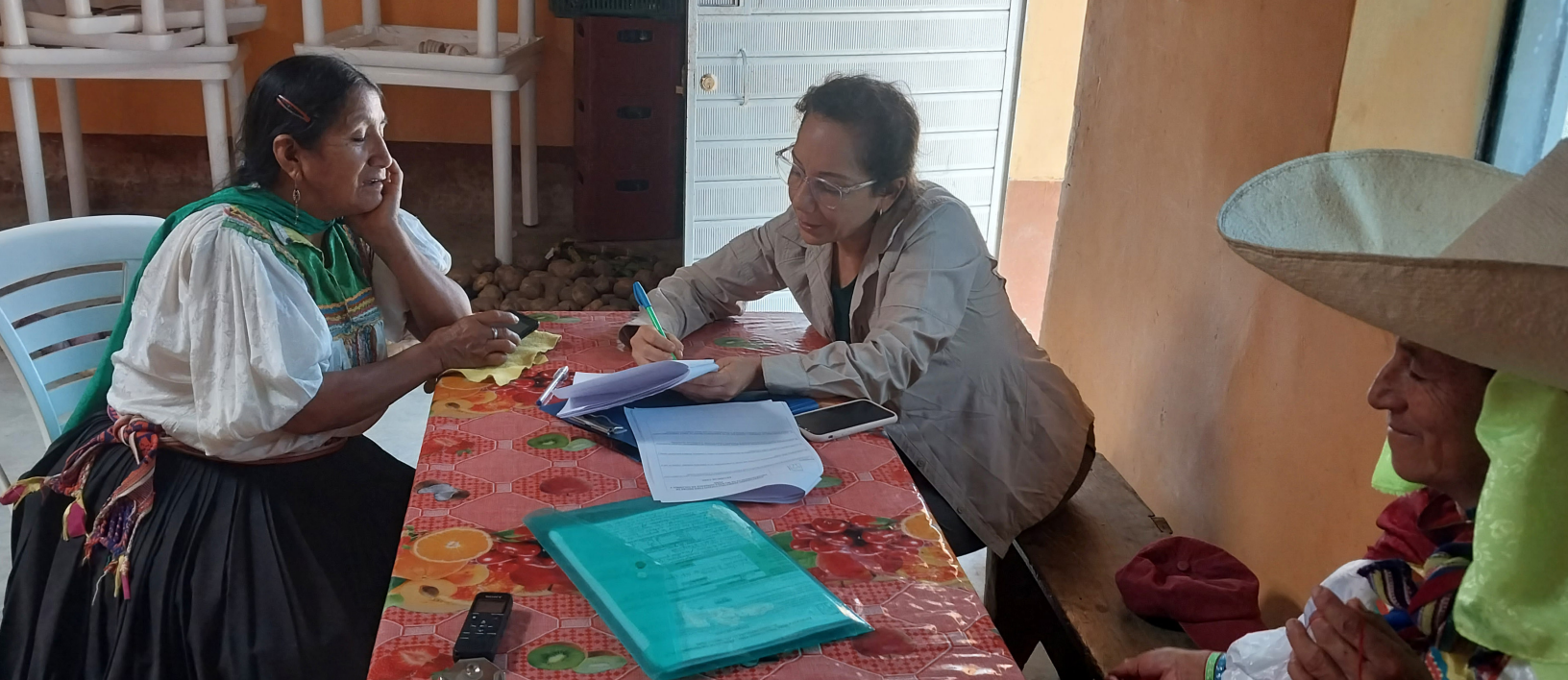
*Contributions of Indigenous
Women's Entrepreneurships
in Peru to their Economy,
Territorial Governance,
and Climate Resilience
During COVID-19*

**EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**



COVER PHOTOS (TOP TO BOTTOM)

► Weavings of the Maroti Shobo Association (AMS), photo by Zoila Aurora Cruz Burga; Women's Association of Coffee and Quinoa (AFCQ), photo by Zoila Aurora Cruz Burga; Nuwas Awajún Forest, photo by Zoila Aurora Cruz Burga; Leader of the Association of Women Entrepreneurs Ashaninkas Iroperanto Koya (AMEAIK), photo by Zoila Aurora Cruz Burga; Landscape community of Shampuyacu, San Martín, Peru, photo by María de los Angeles La Torre Cuadros; Members of AMEAIK, photo by Zoila Aurora Cruz Burga.



› The Women's Association of Coffee and Quinoa (AFCQ), formed by women producers, engaged in organic and/or transitional agriculture in the regions of Lambayeque, Cajamarca and Amazonas, Peru. Photo by María de los Ángeles La Torre Cuadros for RRI.

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The research in Peru was developed by: Zoila Aurora Cruz Burga and María de los Ángeles La Torre Cuadros

The following people provided valuable information for the development of the research: Elisa Canqui and Francisco Pérez

The following organizations contributed to the development of the research:

- › Women's Coffee and Quinoa Association (*Asociación Femenina de Café y Quinoa*, AFCQ). Department of Lambayeque, Ferreñafe Province, Cañaris and Salas Districts.
- › Nuwas Awajún Forest (*Bosque de las Nuwas*). Department of San Martín, Province of Rioja, Awajún district.
- › Maroti Shobo Artisanal Association (*Asociación de Artesanas Maroti Shobo*, AMS). Department of Ucayali, province of Coronel Portillo, district of Yarinacocha.
- › Association of Ashaninkas Iroperanto Koya Business Women (*Asociación de Mujeres Empresarias Ashaninkas Iroperanto Koya*, AMEAIK). Department of Pasco, province of Oxapampa, district of Puerto Bermudez.

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ABOUT THIS ANALYSIS

The Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) is a global coalition of over 150 organizations that supports the recognition of the collective land, forest and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, local communities, including the women and youth within these groups. Since 2018, the RRI coalition in Latin America has emphasized the importance of better understanding the roles the women in these communities play in their own economies, and how their entrepreneurship contribute to territorial governance, women's empowerment, and the strengthening of their leadership.

In recent years, the fundamental role of Indigenous Peoples' leadership and ancestral knowledge in the development of their economies and the survival of their Peoples has been increasingly recognized. Communities are organized to foster economies from an Indigenous perspective and meet at least two needs: food sovereignty and security and income generation. These economic initiatives are created based on their knowledge, ancestral practices, and their own forms of organization and administration.


In the ecosystem of these entrepreneurship, initiatives emerge and are led exclusively by women who, based on their knowledge and common interests, look beyond the attainment of income and food. **With their entrepreneurship, women foster and strengthen their leadership in the permanent search for survival strategies, rootedness, and, in particular, intergenerational knowledge as a strategy for the survival of culture, identity, autonomy, and territory.**

In 2023, the RRI coalition conducted the study, *Contributions of Indigenous Women's Entrepreneurships in Peru to their Economy, Territorial Governance, and Climate Resilience During COVID-19*, whose results are shared in the present document. The research was conducted in eight case studies: four in Colombia and four in Peru.

The purpose of this study was to analyze in detail the contributions of Indigenous women's entrepreneurship to local economies in Peru; the general enabling conditions and resilience factors within the communities that enable these entrepreneurship to overcome severe external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change; and the contributions of these entrepreneurship to the territorial governance of their communities.



► The Nuwas Awajún Forest, Shampuyacu community, Awajún district, department of San Martín, Peru, formed by women of the Awajún ethnic group and focused on natural and processed products, tourism and handicrafts. Photo by María de los Ángeles La Torre Cuadros for RRI



“Before, men did not respect women. Now there is peace of mind. There are men who did not want women to work. Now, if they have the support of their partner, they help each other with whatever is needed and with the care of the children.”*

—Member of Nuwas Awajún Forest, community of Shampuyacu, district of Awajún, San Martín, Peru

CONTEXT OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN OF PERU

The Indigenous Peoples of Peru, who comprise 55 ethnic groups and speak 48 languages, have origins that predate the establishment of the State, preserving their social, economic, and political customs.¹ With 25 percent of the Peruvian population self-identifying as Indigenous or native, these peoples, divided by law into native and peasant communities, are each governed by their own regulations. Native communities are those located in the low and high jungle regions while peasant communities are those located in the highlands. It is estimated that there are 8,562 recognized communities, of which 6,728 are titled.²

The situation of Indigenous women in Peru reflects significant inequalities. While they comprise 42 percent of the agricultural workforce, women face limitations in education, employment, and political participation. **Data from the Ombudsman’s Office (2019) indicate that 41 percent of young Indigenous women do not complete high school, and less than one-third have their own income, with most working in low-paying jobs.** Gender-based violence is also a grave concern, impacting 63.2 percent of the Indigenous female population. This highlights the urgency of addressing the underlying causes of these conditions, especially the economic dependence that places Indigenous women in vulnerable positions.


The four selected case studies address this problem and were chosen from previous studies conducted by RRI. Each of these entrepreneurship conducted their research after obtaining free, prior, and informed consent. The four entrepreneurship analyzed in Peru are associations; however, one of these seeks to become a cooperative.

The methodology consisted of field data collection through semi-structured interviews with members and leaders serving on each entrepreneurship’s board of directors, followed by systematization, analysis, drafting of a preliminary report, and validating and sharing the results in a participatory manner.

ENTREPRENEURSHIPS ANALYZED

The four case studies of Indigenous women-led entrepreneurship represent the Shipibo-Konibo, Awajún, Ashaninka, and Quechua Peoples located in the departments of Ucayali, San Martín, Pasco, and Lambayeque, respectively. The Maroti Shobo Artisanal Association (Asociación de Artesanas Maroti Shobo, AMS), Nuwas Awajún Forest (Bosque de las Nuwas), Association of Ashaninkas Iroperanto Koya Business Women (Asociación de Mujeres Empresarias Ashaninkas Inoperanto Koya, AMEAIK) and the Women’s Association of Coffee and Quinoa (Asociación femenina de Café y Quinoa, AFCQ) stand out as rooted in customs, language, and community connections. These entrepreneurs share the motivation of Indigenous women to improve their economic conditions and confront poverty and gender inequality. Their projects involve creating natural and processed products, tourism, and handicrafts.

Women's Coffee and Quinoa Association (Asociación Femenina de Café y Quinoa, AFCQ)


 Lambayeque Department, Ferreñafe Province, Cañaris and Salas Districts.


 Natural and processed products: coffee.


 74 Quechua members

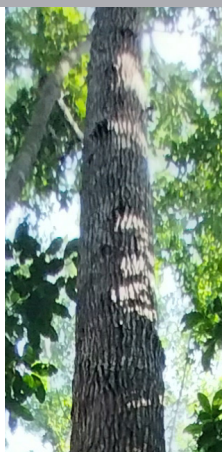


Nuwas Awajún Forest (Bosque de las Nuwas)

 San Martín Department, Rioja Province, Awajún District.


 Experience-based tourism, guided tours, sale of traditional foods, song and dance demonstrations. Natural and processed products: sale of infusions. Handicrafts, jewelry, paintings, etc.

 70 members of the Shampuyacu Native community



Maroti Shobo Artisanal Association (Asociación de Artesanas Maroti Shobo, AMS)


 Ucayali Department, Coronel Portillo Province, Yarinacocha District.


 Handicrafts, embroidered and painted looms, clothing, and jewelry.

 24 members of 12 Shipibo-Konibo communities

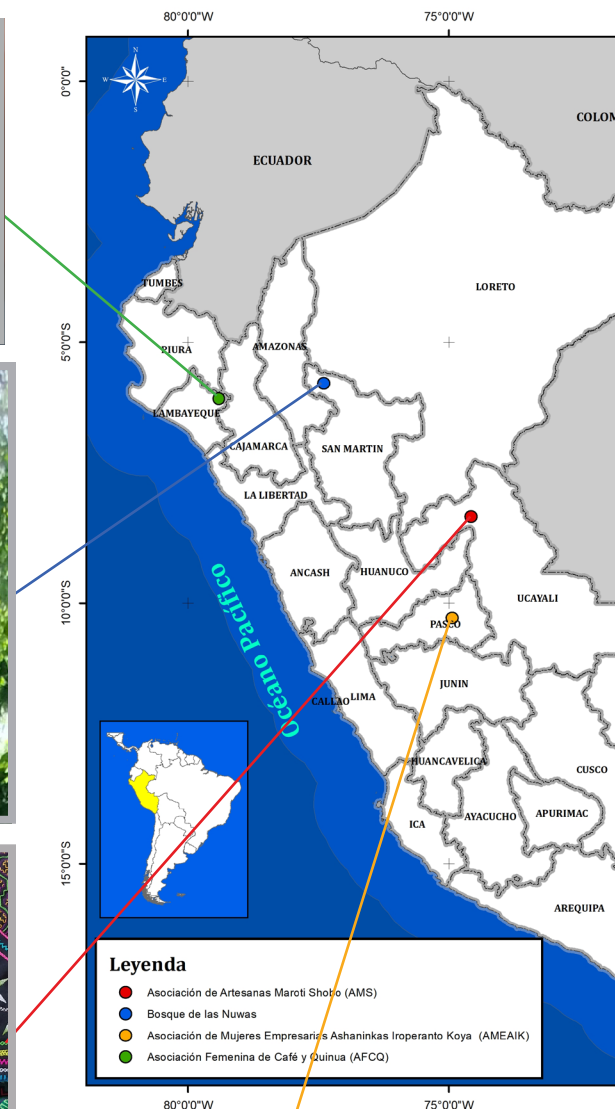


Association of Ashaninkas Iroperanto Koya Business Women (Asociación de Mujeres Empresarias Ashaninkas Iroperanto Koya, AMEAIK)

 Pasco Department, Oxapampa Province, Puerto Bermúdez District.

 Natural and processed products: banana flour, ginger, turmeric, jergón sacha, Dragon's Blood, copaiba oil, cat's claw.

 70 members from eight Ashaninka communities



The case studies encompass entrepreneurship as small as AMS, with 24 members, to larger projects such as the AFCQ, which has 74 members.

HIGHLIGHTS

- › **Economic contributions:** While their economies have improved, the income generated by these entrepreneurship does not cover all necessities, leading members to take on supplemental work, such as selling crops and small animals and occasional side jobs.
- › **External support:** The variety of sources and scales of external support across the case studies stands out. While AMS and AMEAIK have independent origins, Nuwas Awajún Forest and AFCQ launched with external alliances. The four entrepreneurship currently receive varying levels of support, from training and equipment donations to ongoing guidance, staff compensation, and digital promotion.
- › **Empowerment and leadership:** In addition to economic improvements, these entrepreneurship have supported Indigenous women's empowerment, consolidating their leadership in their groups and communities and supporting territorial governance.
- › **Good Living:** In analyzing Indigenous women's entrepreneurship, the concept of Good Living is highlighted as a network of values and priorities encompassing the individual, the family, the economy, and the community. Its interpretation in AMS emphasizes personal fulfillment and sharing at home, including aspects like good health, educational resources, and handicraft materials.

For Nuwas Awajún Forest, Good Living is understood as harmony and family unity, with mutual support and care for the environment at the community level. For AMEAIK and AFCQ, Good Living encompasses many dimensions, including the family, the individual, economic wellbeing and good health, emphasizing the joy in coexistence and active participation in family and community life.

- › **Social impact:** The entrepreneurship' social impact varies, reflecting unique adaptations to specific contexts. AMS, despite its urban location, projects its art at the regional and national level, impacting women's self-esteem and economic autonomy. Nuwas Awajún Forest empowers women in the public sphere, transforming gender dynamics and strengthening social cohesion. AMEAIK focuses on solidarity and mutual empowerment, involvement in community decision-making, and challenges gender norms. On the other hand, AFCQ generates personal-, family-, and community-level shifts by improving diets and economic stability and empowering women's participation in their communities.
- › **Creation of their own economies:** Within their own economies, these entrepreneurship engage in various activities, from the sale of handicrafts to coffee cultivation and marketing. Indigenous women diversify their income, contributing to their families' and communities' wellbeing.



› The Nuwas Awajún Forest, Shampuyacu community, Awajún district, department of San Martín, Peru, formed by women of the Awajún ethnic group. Photo by María de los Ángeles La Torre Cuadros for RRI.



► AMEAIK's strategy includes promoting environmental awareness to ensure the preservation of traditional forest-related knowledge. Photo by María de los Ángeles La Torre Cuadros for RRI.

They also stand out in preserving cultural traditions and ancestral knowledge, strengthening Indigenous identity, and promoting food security.

CONVERGENCES OF THE FOUR ENTREPRENEURSHIPS

The SWOT matrix displays the entrepreneurships' shared strengths such as their **commitment to legality and transparency, ongoing training and active leadership**. Each entrepreneurship's specialties reveal the differences among the four: AMS in artisanal recognition; Nuwas Awajún Forest in cultural preservation; AMEAIK in organic production and export; and AFCQ in access to international markets. Their opportunities and challenges suggest distinct paths for growth and sustainability, emphasizing the need for innovation and adaptability in future strategies.

Contributions to sustainable development: These entrepreneurships show a strong commitment to sustainable development, such as through handicraft production, agricultural diversification, or efficiency and profitability improvements. Diversification of activities is common, and women of these associations participate in events and collaborations to promote and sell products. They also seek institutional collaborations and receive training support, demonstrating broader network connections.

“Wellbeing means living with the family, visiting your farm in your community, helping with your children's studies, taking care of our land and protecting our territory.”*

—Member of AMS, Amazonian region of Peru

Contributions to economic empowerment and gender dynamic transformation: These associations not only benefit local economies by generating income and improving women's financial autonomy, but are also crucial to their communities' education, health, and general wellbeing, promoting gender equality. Each entrepreneurship takes a unique approach to primary income sources, and market competition varies. They use diverse strategies to improve their profitability with long-term vision, from virtual group sales to the creation of an Ecostore (*Ecotienda*, in Spanish). Despite their differences, all the entrepreneurships have proven to benefit local economies and exemplify how women's economic empowerment can transform gender dynamics.



“I have learned to sew, I am freer, I can say what I feel, not to be submissive as I was before. I learned to take charge. I am a brave woman.”*

—Indigenous woman of the Shipibo-Konibo people and member of AMS

Contributions to cultural identity preservation: All these associations demonstrate a strong commitment to preserving cultural identity and women’s connection with their territories of origin as part of their contribution to territorial governance. They participate in assemblies and decision-making for natural resource management, and their leadership is recognized in these processes. Even though they face specific challenges within each entrepreneurship, such as gender equity in land distribution, they all show a significant commitment to territorial governance.

Adaptive capacity: Resilience is manifested in adaptability, community collaboration and the pursuit of innovative solutions. Despite their challenges, the entrepreneurships use common strategies, including crop diversification, reforestation and collaboration with external organizations. Each of them adapts specific strategies in response to climate change and pandemics such as COVID-19.

CONCLUSIONS

The methodology adopted for the study of Indigenous women-led entrepreneurships in Peru and Colombia was collaborative, comprehensive, and adaptive, allowing for a deep and contextualized understanding. Ethnic and geographic diversity was reflected in the case studies, encompassing the Shipibo-Konibo, Awajún, Ashaninka and Quechua peoples in Ucayali, San Martín, Pasco and Lambayeque.

These entrepreneurships in sectors such as natural products, tourism and crafts, rooted in customs, languages, and communities, emerged to improve economies and address poverty and gender inequality. Their participatory approaches and diversity in size reflect their adaptability to local challenges.

Even though these entrepreneurships improve economies, they do not meet all needs, leading women to supplement their income with additional activities. Good Living is interpreted uniquely in each entrepreneurship, encompassing personal, family, and economic and community values. In addition, members’ diverse ages highlight the preservation of traditional knowledge.

The entrepreneurships not only generate income, but also preserve cultural traditions, strengthen the identities of Indigenous Peoples, and support community wellbeing.

These projects support personal empowerment, challenge gender norms, and contribute to territorial governance. The SWOT matrix reveals specific strengths and challenges, with a shared commitment to legality, transparency, and environmental conservation. Despite their challenges, these entrepreneurships demonstrate resilience through strategies such as crop diversification and collaboration with external organizations.

The Indigenous women interviewed in this study face the shared social obstacle of persistent male chauvinism. Their contributions to sustainable development, gender equality, and territorial governance position entrepreneurships as strong examples of female economic empowerment with impact at the local and regional levels.



► The members of AMS belong to 12 Native communities of the upper, middle and lower Ucayali and reside in the district of Yarinacocha, where they migrated to improve their quality of life. Photo by María de los Ángeles La Torre Cuadros for RRI.

NOTES

* To preserve the anonymity of those interviewed, names have been omitted from the quotes shared in this document.

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