

Sumak Kawsac Sacha Allpa: the territory of the Kichwa People of the Anzu River beyond the protection of the forest

As an autonomous people from the Ecuadorian Upper Amazon, they organize their community life under the principles of the Sumak Kawsay. At the same time, they are undergoing a renovation and strengthening process in their organization to be able to fully exercise their rights. Their main concern is to protect their territory: their forest, their water, and their ways of life in harmony with their surroundings.

By Alfredo Vitery Gualinga - August 1st, 2021.

The ancestral Kichwa People of the Anzu River live in the forest where the river begins, at the foot of Llanganates National Park. Located in the Ecuadorian Upper Amazon, the Ayllu people make up six communities with 1,300 inhabitants. They regard the forest where they live as the *Sumak Kawsac Sacha Allpa*. “Our *Sumak Allpa* is a territory with diverse worlds and diverse lives. The *runa* from the Anzu are Ayllu of such lives,” say the *yachac wuarmi* (the women of knowledge) from the Gavilan community.

As many other Amazon indigenous peoples do, the Kichwa People of the Anzu River live as a communal society with their own vision of the *Sumak Kawsay*, their own culture, their own knowledge and wisdom. At this moment, their main concern is to protect their forest, which means the same as protecting their lives –now endangered by the settler-state-corporative-extractive front. This front moves forwards like destructive pandemic waves threatening humanity, devastating the *Sumak Kawsay* of the diverse worlds in the Amazon forest.

The *Sumak Kawsay* vision for the protection of the Amazon forest

The *Anzu Runa* (the Anzu people) defend, control and protect their territory and their communal forest from the *Sumak Kawsay* perspective. This resisting philosophy of life is based on four basic principles:

- The *Sumak Allpa*: the principle that rules the management of communal property made up of diverse worlds, where there is abundance and variety of life.
- The *Sumak Ayllu Llacta Kawsay*: it rules the life of the *Sumak Kawsay*'s communal society and directs the proper functioning of the Ayllu community, in constant balance and interaction with all living beings in nature.
- The *Sumak Mirachina*: it guides the management of the *Sumak Kawsay*'s communal economy, based on the daily exercise of solidarity among the Ayllu.
- The *Sumak Runa Yachay*: the principle that directs the administration of ancestral knowledge and wisdom in the creation and continuation of the *Sumak Kawsay* society, with an intergenerational cross-cutting and innovative approach.

These principles organize community life and contribute to the cohabitation of the Ayllu community, interacting with the diverse habitats of the ancestral lands in a balanced way.

The *Sumak Allpa* approach

The Anzu Yaku communities understand the *Sumak Allpa* as the ancestral territory that is part of the vital space of *Sumak Kawsay*. It is made up by the *Sumak sachá* world (the world of the forest), the *Sumak yaku* world (the world of water) and the world of the *supay* (the world of protector beings of the forest and water). Social order in the *Sumak Kawsay* is only possible within the *Sumak Allpa*. This perception is based on their own communal visions that are related to their origin and history, their vision of life as a community, their cultural vision, their economic vision, and their vision regarding politics and the exercise of rights.

First, the historical vision refers to the vital space inherited by our ancestors and forefathers: the land where our grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers, and mothers lived; where we live; where our children will live as part of the *Sumak Allpa*. It is the space of life our resisting Ayllus fought and still fight for in view of the colonial occupation that has invaded our lands, forests, and rivers.

Second, the vision of life as a community understands the *Sumak Allpa* as a home for every life, a home for our communities. It is the land where we live as Ayllu in the communal society of the *Sumak Kawsay* together with every being of the world of the forest and the world of water. The *Sumak Allpa* is where the *supay* live, protecting the forest, rivers, lakes, and mountains and making the abundance of life possible. It is our *Sumak Kawsak Sacha Allpa*.

Moreover, the cultural vision is soil for our ancestral roots and it identifies us as *Anzu runa*: our culture, language, art, symbols, songs, rituals, myths, and the *kallari Kawsay* (ancestral customs and traditions), that nurture our spirituality and values of the *Sumak Kawsay* as well as our cosmivision. The *Sumak Allpa* is the source of *Sumak runa yachay*, it is our learning space to acquire the knowledge and wisdom passed on by our ancestors so we can live like them, in *Sumak Kawsay*. It is our space for communal and intercultural living, free from racism and without *mutsui* (poverty).

Additionally, the *Sumak Allpa* refers to the communal economy of the *Sumak Kawsay* in the form of the land that is cultivated together with our mother *chacras* (small farms) that feed each Ayllu during generations. These fertile soils provide us with food and medicine for the *Sumak Kawsay* of our Ayllu. The forest, the rivers, the landscape, the air, the worlds of the *Sumak Sacha*, and the worlds of the *Sumak Yaku* are the heritage of our communal economy. In our territory, we practice *minga*, the solidarity economy of the Ayllu in the communities, using our own knowledge and wisdom, which allows us to live autonomously.

Finally, the political vision means that the *Sumak Allpa* is our territory in the *Sumak Kawsay*; it is our world of life, where we exercise our right as an autonomous and

self-determined people. It is the territory where we govern ourselves as an Ayllu society based on our own thoughts of life according to our communal vision of the *Sumak Kawsay*. It is the space where our economic, social and political system is articulated, reproducing the Kichwa people and perpetuating our continuity.

The *Sumak Allpa's* agenda as collective administration

The Anzu communities live by these group of principles and visions for the elaboration of their *Sumak Kawsay* plans (life plans). They practice collective administration at different levels: their communal territories and forests, the social communal organization based on the Ayllu, the solidarity economy, and their knowledge and wisdom.

The *Sumak Allpa's* agenda is created collectively by the Ayllu of the communities using the knowledge and wisdom of the *Sumak runa yachay*, and conceptualizing with their own language the different components and contents of the *Sumak Allpa*. Moreover, it relies on the vision of the *Sumak Kawsay*.

The process of the elaboration of the agenda is conducted by the *yachac runa*: those who know the forests. These elderly people share their wisdom with the young ones regarding how the integral fabric of the *Sumak Allpa's* life works in its own natural scenarios.

The knowledge of the forest allows us to deepen our understanding of the dynamic interaction processes that exist among the diversity of life that coexist in the *Sumak sacha* and the *Sumak yaku*, that is, the world of the forest and the world of water. Additionally, it makes it possible to comprehend and get to know the genuine habitats where the worlds of the *supay* are visible: the protector beings that are in charge of the caring and permanence of the *Sumak kawsak sacha*.

Towards exercising the right to ancestral land

The implementation process of the land management agenda is strategically important for the Kichwa People of the Anzu River. Apart from encouraging the conservation and

protection of communal forests more efficiently, it aims at consolidating the integral administration of their ancestral land around a vital space of realization and complete exercise of their right to self-determination as an autonomous people. In this sense, its purpose is to strengthen the effective control of their ancestral land heritage and to proceed to the sustainable exploitation, use, and management of the natural resources and natural communal goods found in their communal territory, ensuring the *Sumak Kawsay* of the Ayllu and communities.

In order to be up to this great current and future challenge, the Ayllu and the Kichwa People of the Anzu River communities are going through a process of renovation and organization strengthening, generating their own governing as well as political, institutional, and technical managerial capabilities. Moreover, they are strengthening their technical capabilities regarding management and land governing, they are developing initiatives to boost the economy of the *Sumak Kawsay*, and they are determined to innovate and activate the potential of different ancestral knowledge and wisdom.

In order to move forwards steadily in this new process of construction and implementation of the *Sumak Kawsay's* agenda, their priority is to promote a wide program of education and guidance for new generation of leaders, as well as communal experts aiming at specializing young people in those fields of knowledge that are essential for integral self-management of communities with an intergenerational perspective.

In this way, the Ayllu and the Kichwa People of the Anzu River communities plan to fully exercise within their territory all the rights they fought to obtain and that are now acknowledged in the Ecuadorian Constitution as well as in international agreements.

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