

AIGACAA

Integrating Traditional Forms of Organization, Modern Technology and Commerce

(Bolivia) AIGACAA (Association of Llama and Alpaca Farmers of the High Andes) is an organization comprised of approximately 800 heads of households from *ayllus* (traditional Andean community structures) where the principal occupation is that of raising llamas and alpacas. AIGACAA has been functioning as an organization for over ten years. In June, Rene Pacasi, President of AIGACAA and Luis Ticona, the Administrator, were interviewed by SAIIC in Chuquiago, Kollasuyo (La Paz, Bolivia). They spoke of their successful experiences in community organizing.



Photo by Guillermo Delgado

AIGACAA is organized in a manner corresponding with and helping to maintain the *ayllu* structure, which is the original form of organization in our communities. The *ayllu* structure continues to exist in most of what is now considered Bolivia. When speaking of the *ayllu*, we are referring to the territory occupied by the community and the natural resources controlled by the people of that community, such as the llamas and alpacas.

The *ayllu* has a particular form of leadership, the maximum authority of which is the *jilacata*. It is not easy to become a *jilacata*, it is a step-by-step procedure. The *jilacata* holds this position for one year and is not elected by the Western system of voting. A *jilacata* must demonstrate good moral conduct and leadership abilities within the *ayllu* and becomes the authority as a result of proving these qualities.

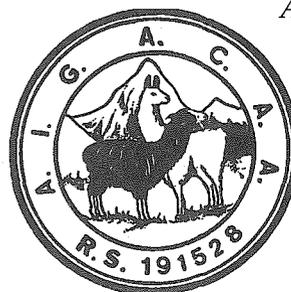
In the process of organizing AIGACAA, we analyzed various organizational structures. We have found that the imported models are not effective. We took a careful look at our own Indigenous forms of organization, which take into account our particular economic situation. We wanted to strengthen the economy of the *ayllu*.

One aspect of our workplan is to train members in methods to increase the production and quality of our animals. Since our organization is primarily concerned with livestock, we provide support by offering trainings to our members. We have an agreement with the University of Puno in Peru, which has been training many of our members as veterinary assistants and veterinarians. These scholarships require that these individuals return to their *ayllus* of origin to care for the animals of the community. AIGACAA also conducts literacy classes and craft workshops within communities.

AIGACAA was successful in obtaining permission from the Bolivian Minister of Agriculture for the commercial use of llama and alpaca meat. This was an important victory for our organization.

We collectively market the llama and alpaca wool which our members produce. Each head of household is paid in cash and trade for veterinary tools, medicines and syringes. We exchange the wool for objects of use to the members, because Bolivian currency is not used often within the *ayllus*. We use the *trueque* or barter system. The organization selects and processes the wool and is responsible for selling it to the weavers. We rent an industrial plant where we make yarn. One day, we would like to install a textile mill where the people who raise the llamas and alpacas will be processing the raw materials themselves. The present reality is such that the people providing natural resources and the people processing these materials are living in two different worlds.

Rene Pacasi is from the *ayllu* Chacoya, in the Pacajes Province. Recalling that there used to be many more alpacas and llamas in his region, Rene states that, "They say that people who are strangers to the region are purchasing the llamas and alpacas at a very low price. They are hunting them, killing them and driving them to extinction. They say that is why so many of them have disappeared. Before the agrarian reform of 1952, we were united, not divided. We worked in the *minka* (traditional work parties). After the agrarian reform, the land was divided and small land-holdings appeared. The distribution of land tore us apart. With the land parcelled out, each family could only raise a few animals. The *minka* is when families help each other out. I help them one day, and then they help me. We also have a ceremony for branding our animals and we will never lose this ceremony. We still do the *challa*, which is how we make offerings to *Pachamama* (Mother Earth). AIGACAA is helping us to rebuild our communities.



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