

Josefina Tunki. Courtesy of Nature
and Culture International

Cultivating Just Resilience

Collective creation of the Tarímiat Pujutaí Nunka Reserve in Morona Santiago

Case Study Database

A compilation of good practices and lessons learned to bring innovative
subnational solutions to global problems

Introduction

The conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity is fundamental in facing current environmental challenges, especially in regions of high natural and cultural richness. In Amazonian territories, sustainable resource management not only protects nature, but also safeguards the livelihoods of the communities that have inhabited these spaces for centuries. The establishment of conservation and sustainable use areas represents a key strategy for balancing environmental protection with sustainable development, especially when it is done with the active participation of local communities in decision-making and the recognition of their rights over the territory.

Special Collection

This case study is part of a special collection developed within the framework of Regions4's work on Subnational Just Resilience, with the support of the Government of Scotland. Its objective is to identify, highlight, and analyze experiences led by regional governments in the Global South that exemplify approaches and actions integrating environmental sustainability with social and/or economic justice. Each case is analyzed based on Just Resilience criteria (available [here](#)).

Just Resilience criteria addressed:

1.1.1.; 1.1.3.; 1.1.5.; 1.2.1.; 2.1.1.;
2.1.2.; 2.1.3.; 2.1.4.; 2.2.1.; 2.2.2.;
2.2.5.; 3.1.2.; 4.1.1.; 4.1.2.; 5.2.1.;
5.2.3.

Project summary

The Tarímiat Pujutáí Nuñka Reserve, one of the largest nature reserves in the Amazon region, was created in Morona Santiago, Ecuador. Its name, which in the Shuar language means "territory for well-being", reflects the deep connection between the indigenous communities and their environment.

This achievement is the result of an extensive participatory process of conservation and environmental management, promoted by the provincial government in alliance with four indigenous organisations (FICSH, NASHE, NAE and PSHA) and supported by Nature and Culture International.

Through 21 meetings – workshops, meetings and assemblies – and with the participation of 893 people, a normative framework was collectively developed that integrates the indigenous cosmovision and financial mechanisms for sustainability while strengthening community participation and environmental protection.

Key information

Location: Morona Santiago, Ecuador

Focus areas: Just resilience; protected areas

Created in: 2022

Sustainable Development Goals addressed:

SDG 10, 13, 15 and 17

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets addressed:

Targets 1, 2 and 3, 8 and 11

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The province of Morona Santiago is located in the Amazon region of Ecuador, in the south-central part of the country. With an area of 23,875 km², it is made up of 12 cantons and 59 parishes. It is bordered to the north by the province of Pastaza, to the south by Zamora Chinchipe and Peru, to the east by Pastaza and Peru, and to the west by Tungurahua, Chimborazo, Cañar and Azuay.

Morona-Santiago is a province of Ecuador located in the Amazon region.



The province is home to some of the greatest biological diversity in the country. Its vast territories covered with native forest, its wildlife corridors and its wealth of fauna and flora make this region a crucial point for environmental conservation. A total of 40.9% of the provinces in the territory is dedicated to conservation, distributed among the National System of Protected Areas, protection forests and other forms of sustainable use areas. This diversity of natural spaces allows for a rich variety of ecosystems, ranging from dense tropical rainforests to cloud forests and páramos. However, despite its ecological relevance, the territory is facing increasing environmental pressure. Deforestation is proceeding at worrying rates. Between 1990 and 2020, more than 340,000 hectares of forest have been lost, at an annual rate of 1.4%. This situation is driven by agricultural expansion, livestock farming and natural resource exploitation. In addition, climate change has impacted the region with a 12% increase in temperature and a 32% reduction in rainfall between 2001 and 2020, affecting the stability of ecosystems.

In response to these threats, the provincial government of Morona Santiago (GAD Provincial Morona Santiago) has prioritised environmental conservation in its territorial planning, promoting sustainable development strategies and the creation of protected areas. It is in this context that the need arose to establish the Tarímiat Pujutáí Nunka Reserve, a space for ecosystem conservation, biodiversity protection and the recognition of the territorial rights of indigenous peoples.

The creation of the Tarímiat Pujutáí Nunka Reserve is backed by a strong regulatory framework that guarantees environmental protection and the rights of nature and local communities.

Regulatory framework

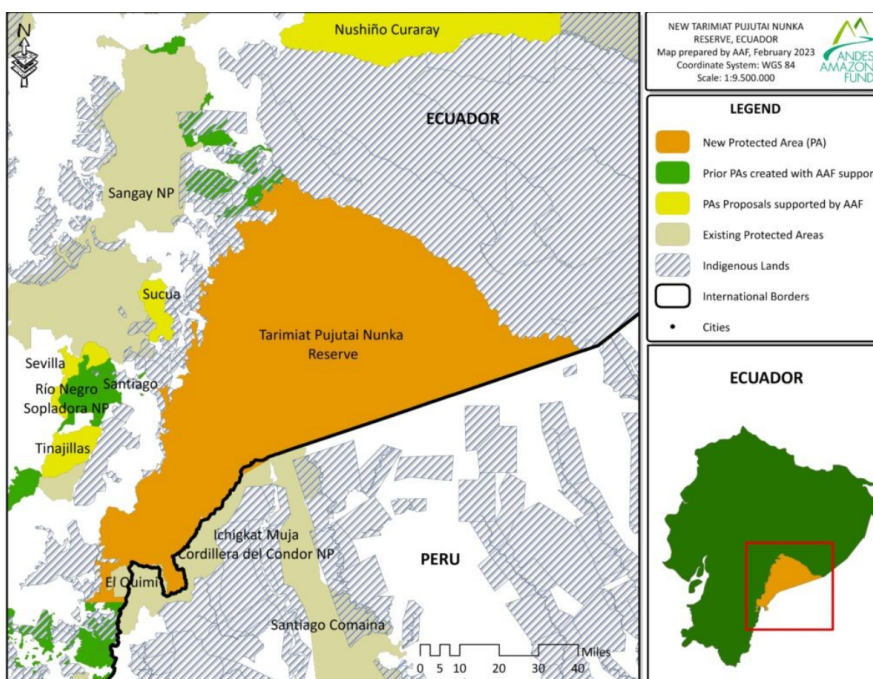
The foundation for the creation of the Tarímiat Pujutai Nunka Reserve can be found in the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, Article 14 of which recognises the right of the population to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment that guarantees sustainability and good living (Buen Vivir / Sumak Kawsay). Furthermore, the Constitution grants nature its own rights and establishes that the State must guarantee its conservation and restoration. It also recognises the role of the Amazonian provinces as essential territories for environmental balance and gives provincial governments responsibility for development planning and environmental management.

In terms of specific regulations, the Organic Code for Territorial Organisation, Autonomy and Decentralisation (COOTAD) establishes that provincial governments must lead environmental management within their jurisdiction. Likewise, the Organic Environmental Code grants the decentralised autonomous governments (GAD) the power to implement forest and biodiversity conservation and management plans. Finally, Ministerial Agreement 083 of 2016 allows for the creation of conservation and sustainable use areas (ACUS), promoting environmental management based on the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

Importance of the Tarímiat Pujutai Nunka Reserve

The establishment of this nature reserve responds to the need to halt deforestation, recover degraded ecosystems and ensure the sustainability of natural resources. The remaining ecosystems in Morona Santiago, including the Eastern Andes, Kutukú, Shaimi and Cóndor mountain ranges, are essential for water regulation and the conservation of vulnerable species. These spaces also play a vital role in the well-being of local communities, whose culture and way of life are deeply linked to the territory.

The Tarímiat Pujutai Nunka Reserve is a fundamental piece of connectivity and conservation, as from north to south it connects the Amazonian forests of the provinces of Pastaza and Zamora Chinchipe, thus completing an area of approximately 4 million hectares. From east to west, it connects with the Andes mountain range and the Amazonian plain of Peru. According to data from the Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition, the area's vegetation cover is in a very good state of conservation. In addition, within the Tarímiat Pujutai Nunka Reserve is the Kutukú-Shaimi Protection Forest, which is part of the National System of Protected Areas.



The Territory of Life and Ancestral Use “Tarímiat Pujutai Nunka”.

The reserve is shown in orange. Other protected areas appear in tan and green, and Indigenous Lands are marked with stripes.

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Several ethnic groups coexist in the Tarímat Pujutáí Nunka Reserve, including the Shuar, Achuar and mestizo. The Shuar nationality is the largest, with approximately 110,000 individuals. Their official language is Shuar, part of the Chicham language family, and their culture is based on a strong connection with nature, although in recent times they have faced acculturation processes. The Achuar nationality, meanwhile, is an ancient people settled on the border between Ecuador and Peru. Their life revolves around hunting, fishing, small-scale farming and gathering in the tropical rainforest. Their worldview is deeply linked to the forest and the spiritual figure of the Arutam. The mestizo ethnic group represents approximately 46.58% of the population, mostly concentrated in Macas, Santiago de Méndez and Sucúa.

Prior to the creation of the reserve, eight municipal governments in the province already had conservation and sustainable use areas (ACUS), which were created and managed locally. While there are challenges to overcome, it is also necessary to diversify the sources of support to boost and financially sustain these initiatives. In this context, the design and construction of the provincial area had to be carried out with the active participation of social organisations and indigenous peoples, including local governments and central state institutions, as well as conservation partners. Only through an articulated management with different actors of the territory and strategic allies is it possible to establish a functional space for the sustainable development of the province.



Yaupi River. Courtesy of Nature and Culture International.

KEY ACTIVITIES AND INNOVATIONS

Construction of the draft ordinance

The first step was to identify the key stakeholders in the process. An alliance was established between GAD Provincial Morona Santiago and four indigenous organisations in the province: the Interprovincial Federation of Shuar Centres (FICSH), the Shuar Nation of Ecuador (NASHE), the Achuar Nationality of Ecuador (NAE) and the Shuar Arutam People (PSHA). This initial phase ensured that indigenous peoples had a voice in the construction of the regulations that would govern their own territory.

With the support of Nature and Culture International, a draft ordinance was prepared incorporating technical criteria for conservation and sustainable use. This preliminary document was presented to the Governing Councils of the four indigenous organisations, who carried out a first review to include their contributions before it was shared with the grass roots.

The Provincial Chamber of Morona Santiago approved the document in the first debate, allowing it to be transferred to the Legislation Commission for detailed review. This step was essential to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements and to lay the groundwork for the next process: pre-legislative consultation with indigenous communities.

Pre-legislative consultation with the communities

Between October 2022 and January 2023, a pre-legislative consultation process was carried out that included 21 events in total, including technical workshops, coordination meetings and territory assemblies. This effort ensured the participation of 893 people, representing diverse indigenous communities, and allowed the consultation to be truly inclusive and representative.

The consultation process took place in three key phases:

- 1. Validation with the Governing Councils:** Prior to taking the consultation to the grass roots, the document was reviewed with the leadership of the indigenous organisations to ensure that it adequately reflected their collective values and rights.
- 2. Grassroots consultation:** Multiple assemblies were organised in different territories where the ordinance was presented in detail, allowing community members to give their opinion and propose modifications.
- 3. Incorporation of adjustments:** After collecting feedback from communities, the document was adjusted to reflect their concerns and priorities.

Tarímiat Pujutai Nunka Declaration.
Courtesy of Nature and Culture
International.



Ordinance amendments

One of the most valuable aspects of this participatory process was the possibility of adapting the document to the reality and worldview of the indigenous communities. Among the most relevant changes that have been incorporated are the following:

Terminology: The communities stated that terms such as “conservation” and “sustainable” did not adequately represent their cosmovision, because the principles of sustainability are based on the use of renewable and non-renewable resources and polluting substances, and this does not align with the cosmovision of the Shuar nationality. As a result:

- NASHE requested that “conservation” be replaced with “life” to better reflect its relationship with nature.
- PSHA asked to change “sustainable” to “ancestral”, highlighting its traditional link to the territory.

Financial sustainability mechanism: A trust fund was established as a tool to guarantee permanent funds for the territory’s conservation.

Assigned budget: It was proposed that GAD Provincial Morona Santiago allocate 10% of its annual budget to the ordinance’s implementation, thus ensuring its long-term viability.

Figura 1. Proceso para la creación del Tarímiat Pujutai Nunka



Figure 1: Process for the creation of Tarímiat Pujutai Nunka

- Identification of areas of importance for nature conservation and local cultures
- Socialization with key players, communities, peoples and nationalities, GAD, others
- Design of technical document and ordinance
- Pre-legislative consultation with peoples and nationalities
- Processing and adoption of ordinance - creation of ACUS

A model of participatory management

The creation of the reserve represents a model of inclusive governance that brings together the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and modern science. The active participation of communities was key to ensuring the acceptance and legitimacy of the project.

In total, in the pre-legislative consultation process for the draft “Ordinance Establishing the Tarímiat Pujutáí Nun̄ka Conservation and Sustainable Use Territory in the province of Morona Santiago”, 21 events were held with different stakeholders from the 4 representative organisations of the Shuar and Achuar nationalities of the province. Thus: Two meetings with the Governing Councils of the four organisations for the revision and validation of the document. Six meetings with the Governing Councils to define the methodology and prepare the pre-legislative consultation in the territory. Thirteen assemblies in the territory to develop the pre-legislative consultation with the grass roots of the organisations.

During the whole process with the four organisations in the province, 893 people participated, including both men and women. It is important to note that the processes in the territory were developed with the support of people from the nationalities in question and who were designated by the organisations. They were in charge of translating the articles of the document into their own languages as the review of the document progressed.

Similarly, the questions asked in their own languages were translated into Spanish for the speakers and the answers translated back into their own languages, thus ensuring a better understanding and facilitating the collection of their contributions.

Challenges such as the harmonisation of different visions of how things should develop, coordination between institutions and the adaptation of the regulatory framework to local realities were overcome in a few months. Thanks to the commitment of all actors involved, the reserve not only protects the biodiversity of Morona Santiago, but also strengthens the territorial rights of the communities and promotes a model of long-term sustainability.

Other conservation initiatives within the Tarímiat Pujutáí Nun̄ka Reserve

The Tarímiat Pujutáí Nun̄ka Reserve includes several complementary conservation initiatives, such as those areas that are part of the SocioBosque Programme. Within the territory, 153,799.61 hectares have been identified under this programme, which reinforces protection efforts. The establishment of Tarímiat Pujutáí Nun̄ka does not affect the existing SocioBosque Programme agreements, but complements them and provides them with a new legal shielding mechanism.

How does the project promote just resilience in the territory?

We define Subnational Just Resilience as a conceptual and operational framework that enables the development of climate and ecosystem adaptation and transformation strategies in the face of environmental and climate shocks in an equitable and inclusive manner. Based on the principles of environmental justice, community participation and multi-level governance, just resilience seeks to ensure that climate and biodiversity responses not only integrate the needs and capacities of the most vulnerable communities, but also address the root causes of vulnerability, such as poverty, discrimination and lack of access to resources, by creating just, inclusive and sustainable solutions.

Checklist of principles and criteria for Just Resilience available [here](#)

1. Social Equity and Inclusion

Does the action specifically address the needs of communities? Are attempts being made to reduce existing inequalities rather than reinforce them? Criteria addressed: 1.1.1.; 1.1.3.; 1.1.5.; 1.2.1.

The Tarímat Pujutáí Nunka initiative demonstrates a strong commitment to equity and inclusion by prioritising Shuar and Achuar indigenous peoples in the management of their territory, ensuring their active participation in the construction of the ordinance. The pre-legislative consultation process involved 893 people, including both men and women, and allowed their observations to be incorporated, which reinforces the legitimacy and representativeness of the initiative. In addition, the participation of indigenous organisations has ensured that the legal recognition of the territory responds to their needs and worldview, strengthening the autonomous and sustainable management of their resources.

The participatory approach has also ensured that the voice of communities is heard and reflected in project design, promoting more inclusive governance. The recognition of cultural diversity and the integration of ancestral knowledge in the ordinance consolidate a conservation model that respects and values traditional knowledge. These elements contribute to laying the foundations for equitable and sustainable land management, aligned with the principles of just resilience.

2. Participatory Governance and Decision-Making

Did the affected population participate meaningfully in the decision-making process? Are the governance structures transparent and accountable? Criteria addressed: 2.1.1.; 2.1.2.; 2.1.3.; 2.1.4.; 2.2.1.; 2.2.2.; 2.2.5.

The process was carried out in a framework of participatory governance, with multiple workshops, technical meetings and assemblies in the territory. Indigenous communities were consulted through their representative institutions and adjustments were made to the ordinance according to their comments.

That the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), respecting the internal deliberation procedures of each organisation, was applied is particularly noteworthy. An effort was also made to reflect the worldview of indigenous peoples by accepting changes in terminology.

3. Fair Distribution of Resources

Are funding mechanisms accessible to all communities, including those with fewer resources, and does the action prevent financial burdens falling disproportionately on disadvantaged groups? Criteria addressed: 3.1.2

The document presents the trust fund as a key mechanism for financial sustainability, and the proposal to allocate up to 10% of the general budget of the provincial government to the running of Tarímiat Pujutáí Nunka is an important step forward.

4. Intergenerational Justice

Does the action consider the long-term impacts on future generations? Is there a strategy for sustaining resilience over time? Criteria addressed: 4.1.1.; 4.1.2.

The objective of the ordinance is to ensure the conservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of ecosystem services in a territory of cultural and ecological importance. The management of the area includes the promotion of sustainable practices and respect for the traditional uses of the territory, in line with principles of ecological and social balance. In addition, communities will have a key role in the management of the area, which reinforces the integration of environmental protection with social welfare.

5. Social, Economic, and Ecological Sustainability

Does the action promote sustainable environmental practices while addressing resilience? Where possible, is priority given to nature-based solutions? Criteria addressed: 5.2.1.; 5.2.3.

The territorial conservation approach and its legal recognition can contribute to long-term sustainability, protecting the territorial rights of future generations of the Shuar and Achuar peoples. However, the focus of the process is not on the specific involvement of young people in the planning and implementation of the conservation unit.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about this project, contact us by email at info@regions4.org to schedule an informational meeting, clarify your questions, and receive support for the implementation of similar projects.



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ABOUT REGIONS4

Regions4 (formerly known as nrg4SD) is a global network that exclusively represents regional governments (states, regions, and provinces) in UN processes, European Union initiatives, and global discussions on climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable development. Regions4 was established in 2002 at the World Summit in Johannesburg and currently represents more than 40 members from 20 countries across 4 continents. Through advocacy, cooperation, and capacity building, Regions4 empowers regional governments to accelerate global action.

For more information, visit: www.regions4.org
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