



# Strengthening **dialogue networks on land inequalities** in Ecuador (EQUITERRA)

Ecuador's new Constitution - promulgated in 2008 - states that "nature or Pachamama has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structures, functions and processes". The Republic of Ecuador is thus the first country to recognise nature as having inalienable rights equivalent to human rights and to grant it specific legal instruments and public policies. Nevertheless, the country's economy remains dominated by an extractivist model that is incompatible with peasant agriculture, which still provides 60% of the country's food production. One of the major challenges facing smallholder farmers and indigenous people relates to access to land and water.

## General presentation of the project



### General objective

To contribute to the strengthening of democracy in Ecuador through social inclusion, civil society participation and poverty reduction in rural areas.



### Specific objective

To enhance the participation of family farmers' organisations at local and national and multilateral levels for the implementation of policies and mechanisms to reduce inequalities in access to land within Ecuadorian agriculture.



### Intervention strategy

To equip small-scale farming communities with the necessary skills to defend their legitimate right to access land. The strategy is structured into three pillars:

- Conducting studies on land policies, to highlight barriers (urbanisation, speculation, etc.) drawing on the experiences of communities.
- Training leaders of farming communities and technical staff on land governance challenges.
- Enabling indigenous farmers' organisations to participate in consultation forums, within the framework of public policies such as the activation of the National Land Fund (which promotes democratic access to land, social justice and food sovereignty).



### Expected results

- R1. Production and dissemination of information to social organisations on land access inequalities, and their relationship with poverty, focusing on marginalised groups such as rural women, with an emphasis on related public policies.
- R2. Capacity building of social organisations and local authorities, through a training process focused on the relationship between access to land and poverty.
- R3. Advocacy for the implementation of land access policies, with particular attention to rural women and youth, as well as indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubio people.



### Partners

AVSF in partnership with the Ecuadorian NGOs CESA, FEPP and the Research Centre on Ecuadorian Agrarian Issues (SIPAE).



### Timescale

39 months (2019–2022).



### Budget

EUR 700,000 (financed by the European Union).

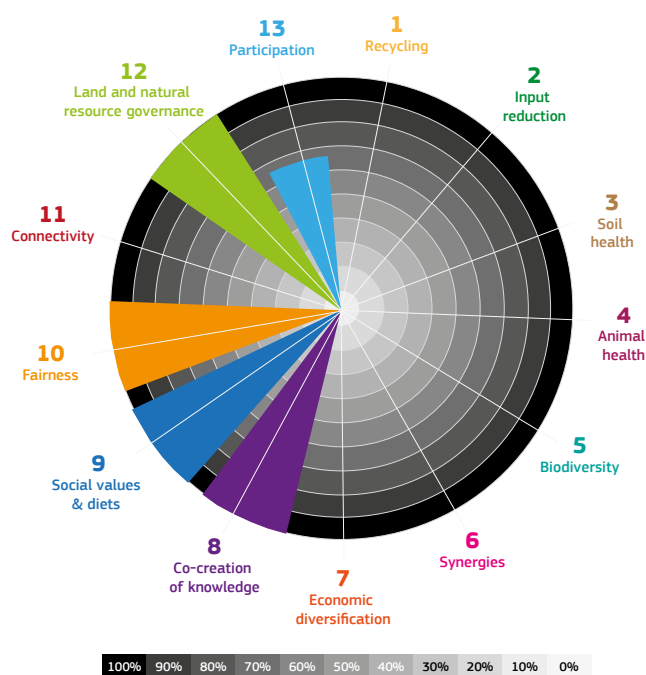


### Intervention area



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## Agroecological classification of the project according to the 13 principles of the HLPE



### 3 Soil health

The principle of soil health is not applicable to this project.

### 4 Animal health

The animal health principle is not applicable to this project.

### 5 Biodiversity

The project supports a subsistence farming model based on the diversity of productions and lifestyles.

### 6 Synergies

Although not explicitly mentioned, the enhancement of synergies within the agroecosystem is implicit in the project's approach. The agricultural model supported by the project respects agroecological principles, in particular, that of valorising synergies within ecosystems.

### 7 Economic diversification

The project indirectly strengthens the resilience of ecosystems and local populations. By lending more political weight to small-scale farmers' organisations and securing land tenure, the project may help build up the resilience of minorities or marginalised groups.

### 1 Recycling

The project does not aim to support agricultural practices. This criterion is therefore legitimately not addressed.

### 2 Input reduction

The project promotes peasant agriculture, in contrast to a so-called "extractivist" agriculture, which relies heavily on synthetic inputs and intensive water use. The latter, mainly oriented towards cash crops, is characterised by high land concentration (5% of landowners hold 52% of agricultural land, while 60% of smallholder farmers own only 6.4%)<sup>1</sup>. By defending marginalised groups' access to land, the project promotes a peasant agriculture system aligned with the 2008 Constitution, which is centred on the rights of nature (*Pachamama* and *buen vivir*, both mentioned in the preamble) and on the organic laws on food sovereignty, agricultural biodiversity, water resources conservation, environmental protection, etc. In light of these policies and the values upheld by the project's stakeholders, it can be assumed that the project supports an environmentally friendly small-scale farming model and, therefore, indirectly meets the criterion of synthetic inputs reduction.



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<sup>1</sup> SIPAE (2019).



## 8 Co-creation of knowledge

The project approach is based on co-creation and the sharing of knowledge. The project's methodological approach is rooted in participatory research, which takes into account the cultural specificities of the populations and their social structure. By initiating a continuous exchange between smallholder farmers and indigenous associations, the first stage of the project involves generating new information on land tenure at local level, including through case studies. The exchange of knowledge and experience informs a comprehensive analysis of inequalities in access to land. Information asymmetry generates numerous inequalities that benefit large farms and companies with legal advisors well-versed in navigating policy complexities and negotiating with institutions. The project therefore aims to raise awareness among grassroots organisations, as well as regional and local authorities, about legislation in force and public policies relating to rural land. These exchanges are a prerequisite for the co-construction of an advocacy strategy for equitable access to land. The project also plans to offer training on agricultural issues and land rights to organisations representing marginalised groups or minorities. This training will be followed by sessions to exchange experiences on land management mechanisms such as individual ownership, collective use and leasing. These sessions will take place within the country and abroad.



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## 9 Social values & diets

The project is committed to promoting the law on agrobiodiversity, which affirms agroecological principles, and the law on food sovereignty, which is defined as “*the right of each country to maintain and develop its capacity to produce its own food, an essential factor for food security at national and community level, while respecting agricultural and cultural diversity*”<sup>2</sup>. By strengthening the rights of indigenous peoples and creating spaces for political dialogue that give them a voice, the project contributes to defending the right of people to live, in accordance with their culture and traditions.

## 10 Fairness

The project clearly strives to promote the implementation of land rights policies, in particular to guarantee equitable access to land for women, rural youth, and indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubio people.

## 11 Connectivity

The project indirectly implements a connectivity approach. It promotes a small-scale farming model that emphasises local food production, in contrast to the agro-industrial system, that monopolises most of the agricultural land for export crops (bananas, coffee, cocoa, etc.). Despite the challenges in accessing key natural resources, especially land and water, small-scale agriculture accounts for more than 60% of the country's food supply, thereby guaranteeing its food security and sovereignty. The project seeks to strengthen self-sufficiency of rural populations in determining their own way of life.

## 12 Land and natural resource governance

The project focuses on protecting the rights of minorities and marginalised groups to secure fairer access to land. One of the key elements of this initiative is the support provided to competent executive and legislative authorities for land issues. This includes backing the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger, a group of members of the National Assembly that works to advance the right to food in Ecuador, with a particular focus on legislation related to land access for farmers. The project also seeks to foster dialogue between parliamentarians and smallholder farmers' organisations advocating for fair access to land, by organising local dialogue forums. It also supports the operationalisation of the National Land Fund, which was created by the 2016 Rural Lands and Ancestral Territories Act. The Fund supports the implementation of social policies by democratising access to land, eradicating rural poverty, promoting social justice and strengthening food sovereignty. Finally, the project provides for the organisation of national meetings within the framework of the Earth Forum to strengthen political dialogue around the implementation of all legal instruments that promote equitable access to land, food sovereignty and agrobiodiversity.

2 Definition of Via Campesina.

## 13 Participation

The project seeks to improve the active participation of smallholder farmers' organisations in local and national multilateral forums to ensure that relevant laws are applied. Its ultimate goal is to reduce inequalities in access to land and to act on the structural causes of poverty and marginalisation of farming families in Ecuador. To achieve this, it places land reform at the heart of Ecuadorian legislative policy. The project informs social organisations about the different forms of inequality and their link to land issues and supports them in formulating advocacy campaigns. It reinforces the self-determination and autonomy of smallholder farming communities by championing different forms of access to land, including the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to community-based land governance. By promoting multi-stakeholder exchanges, the project encourages a shared commitment to tackling inequalities in access to land.

### SUCCESS FACTORS/CHALLENGES

Principles 8 to 13 (with the exception of principle 11) are strongly reflected in the project. By contrast, principles 1 to 7 cannot be assessed, as the project does not involve direct support for agricultural practices. That said, it supports a smallholder farming model that can be seen as contributing indirectly to several agroecological principles.

- ✦ The project contributes to the implementation of public policies and the enforcement of laws recognising the inalienable rights of nature.
- ✦ Its primary objective is to reduce inequalities in access to land by strengthening active participation of farmers' organisations in policy dialogue.
- ✦ The project champions a model of agriculture and lifestyles that respect the environment.
- ✦ The project upholds the principle of food sovereignty enshrined in the Ecuadorian Constitution.
- ✦ The project works explicitly to defend the rights of minorities to preserve and live in accordance with their culture and traditions.



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