



# Ashaninka People of the Amazon Unite to Face Climate Change and Extractive Development

Francisco Piyako\* †; Benki Piyako\* †; Wewito Piyako\* †; Marishöri Najashi Samaniego Pascual\*; Jiribati Koshipirinke\*; David S. Salisbury †; Carolina Schneider Comandulli †\*

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†APIWTXA (Associação Ashaninka do Rio Amônia)

‡Department of Geography and the Environment, University of Richmond

\* Department of Anthropology, University College London



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## Introduction

We, the Ashaninka people of the lowland Amazon rainforest have united to confront the challenges of climate change, extractive development, invasive infrastructure, and other threats to our culture and territory. The consequences of climate change are more evident every day. All people must come together to confront this menace to the present and future of humans on this planet. As one of the most numerous indigenous peoples in the Amazon basin, an organized Ashaninka people have great potential to reach sustainability and social justice in our Amazonian forests, rivers, and homelands. Without the forest the rivers dry, the animals disappear, the oxygen diminishes, the air is fouled, and the plants dwindle. This poster shares our concerns in a rapidly changing world characterized by climate change and uncontrolled development. We hope you will join us in protecting our forests and rivers for our children and yours.

## People

The Ashaninka people represent one of the three most numerous Amazonian Indigenous groups with an official population of 98,768: 97,477 in Peru (INEI 2007) and 1,291 in Brazil (Siasi/Sesai 2012). This Arawak speaking people includes both the Asháninka and Ashéninka subgroups who live throughout eight departments in Peru and the state of Acre in Brazil. The majority are found in the departments of Huánuco, Junín, Pasco, and Ucayali. Lima contains less than two thousand Ashaninka living in the Districts of Chosico and Ate. Loreto Ashaninka include untitled communities along the Javarí River, Sarayacu District, and Alto Nanay District. (INEI 2010; IBC 2015). The remainder reside in Apurímac, Ayacucho.

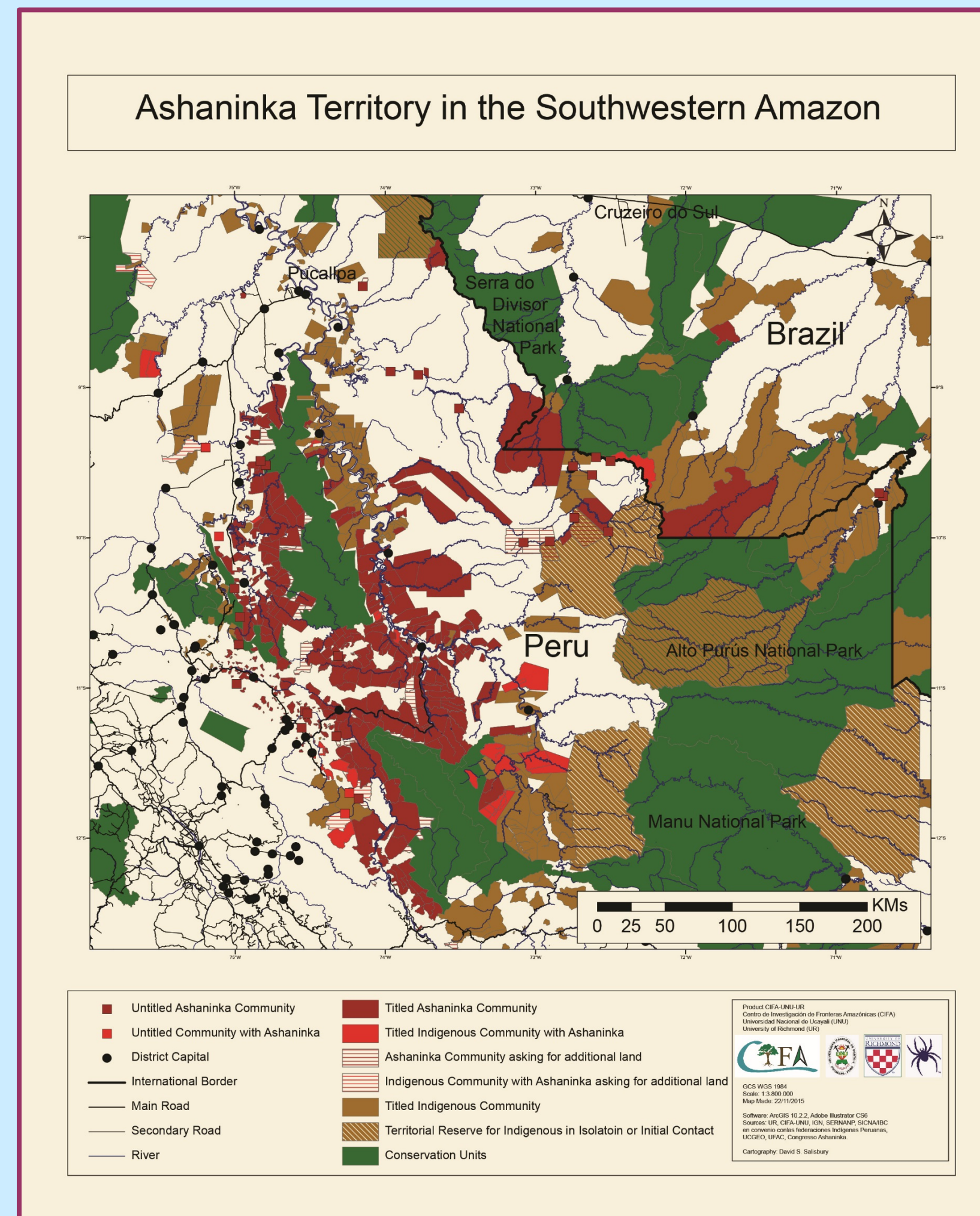
## Place

The Ashaninka live in 357 titled indigenous communities in Peru (353) and Brazil (4) (Figure 1). Together these titled communities cover 28,209 square kilometers of territory, an area larger than the country of Haiti. In 338 of these territories the Ashaninka (302) or Asheninka (36) are the most numerous ethnicity in their community managing 25,983 square kilometers of territory. While the average size of the territories managed by the Ashaninka is 7687 hectares, the size of the community territories vary from the tiny 14 hectare Peruvian community of Acompikipashiari in Ayacucho to the enormous 232,795 hectare Brazilian borderland community of Kampa Isolados do Rio Envira. The median community size is 2,062 hectares. The communities also differ substantially in their characteristics. In the Selva Central of Peru, many Ashaninka communities fall within a network of roads and colonist settlement projects, and have lost much of their forest cover and fauna. For example, in 2015 residents of the 170 hectare, 60 family community of San Miguel Centro Marankiari say, “In San Miguel, the only thing to eat are eggs and canned tuna. There is no forest. There is nothing.” Many other Ashaninka communities, such as those in the borderlands have over 40 times more territory with old growth forest and fauna still largely intact. One of the benefits of a united Ashaninka people is the ability of the Ashaninka on the frontlines of development to share their experiences with their cousins who still command large forest reserves and clean rivers. In addition to the 357 titled territories there are at least 31 Ashaninka communities seeking title.

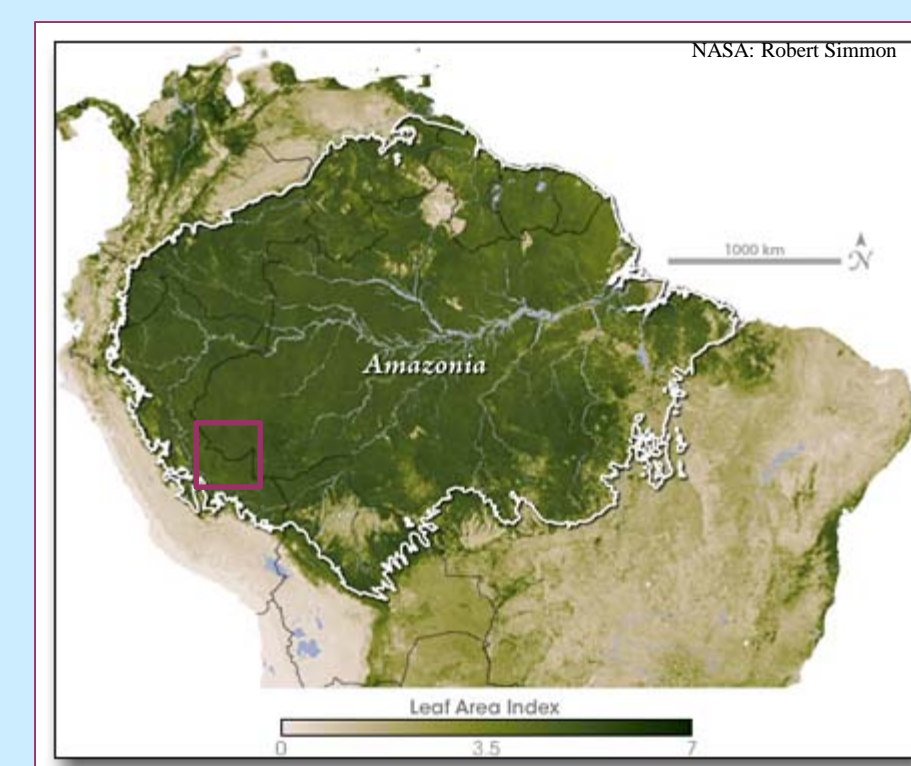
## History and Diaspora

The Ashaninka have lived in the *Selva Central* of Peru since before colonial times. The history of the Asháninka and Ashéninka subgroups is often understood through the narratives of resistance to outsiders or obstacles to development (Veber 2014). The Franciscan missionaries suffered heavy losses to establish missions in the Ashaninka homelands before the Ashaninka’s 1742 revolt expunged all missionaries, annihilated two military companies, and maintained over a century of resistance and independence despite repeated attempts to penetrate their homelands (Varese 1968; Weiss 1975). More recently, the Ashaninka faced multiple waves of terrorism which led them to form self-defense committees in the 1990s to bring peace to their homelands and Peru. Within the last century the Ashaninka have been squeezed by two development fronts, an agro-pastoral economy of colonists from the west and an expansive extractive economy to the east (Veber 2014). The Ashaninka people suffered under slavery (until the 1960s) and debt-peonage relations (still active in remote areas) within the *Selva Central* and the borderlands (Salisbury et al. 2011).

The Ashaninka diaspora resulted from the pursuit of natural resources and dramatically expanded the territorial reach of the Ashaninka people. Beginning with the rubber boom and continuing today, rubber *patrones*, slavers, and others, scattered a portion of the Ashaninka nation far and wide (mainly from the Ashéninka subgroup). Ashaninka reached Madre de Dios, Loreto, Lima, Brazil, and Bolivia, and left their descendants (Von Hassel 1905; Clark 1954; Bodley 1972; da Cunha 1976). Sometimes traded by their parents (Velarde 1905), sometimes enslaved by other Ashaninka (Fry 1907; Clark 1954; Varese 1968; Samanez y Ocampo 1980), sometimes led by their own strong men (Portillo 1905; da Cunha 1976; Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000), and sometimes enslaved or coerced by *patrones* (Clark 1954; Varese 1968; Bodley 1972), many of the current borderland Ashaninka have ties to this complex extractive diaspora (Pimenta 2002). Many took advantage of the expanded geographic knowledge of their forebears to travel from the *selva central* to the borderlands in search of relief from slaving parties, the violence of terrorism or to find better hunting grounds. Finally, in the last 15 years, a most recent wave of the Asháninka subgroup has sought territory in the Yurua and Purús basins to avoid violence, find resources, and take advantage of relationships with logging patrons.



Ashaninka Territory in the Southwestern Amazon



Ashaninka Territory in Amazon



Saweto leader Edwin Chota was killed in 2014 trying to title his land



Ashaninka youth learn to care for tree seedlings in order to reforest their ancestral lands in the Amazon rainforest



Organic gardening helps ensure food security and a sustainable future for the Ashaninka



Apiwtxa’s Francisco Piyako and Saweto’s Ergilia Rengifo were 2 of 137 representatives from 54 communities participating in the First Binational Congress of the Ashaninka

## STATEMENT OF THE ASHENINKA / ASHANINKA PEOPLE OF PERU AND BRAZIL

**Today, September 22, 2015, in the city of Pucallpa, united in the first Binational Congress for the Asheninka / Ashaninka People of Peru and Brazil, of we which we subscribe, we representatives of 54 indigenous communities and 24 federations and organizations, have come to testify to the world the unity of one of the largest indigenous peoples of the Amazon and express our concerns about what is happening to our identity, culture, territories, and the natural world.**

**On behalf of our culture and our common historic struggle we are united in the defense of our rights and we declare our rejection of:**

1. The exploitation of natural resources by oil, mining and logging companies and illegal loggers in and around our territories;
2. The violence caused in our territories by drug trafficking, and their impunity;
3. The corruption of local, regional and national governments that promote destructive activities in and around our territories and non-compliance with laws concerning indigenous peoples and the environment;
4. The discrimination and indifference practiced against Asheninka-Ashaninka peoples on the part of society;

**And so we propose:**

1. Legal security for our territories (currently with or without title) through compliance with national and international laws concerning indigenous peoples, such as the ILO Convention 169, Declaration of Indigenous Peoples of the United Nations, and others.
2. Proper management of Amazonian forests and waters with effective consultation with indigenous peoples of the Amazon
3. The strengthening of the Asheninka / Ashaninka organizations and authorities for a sustainable future with standing forest and clean waters that favors improved health of all generations.
4. An intercultural, bilingual and quality education based on the integration and protection of ancestral Asheninka / Ashaninka wisdom, science and technology.
5. Recognition of the Asheninka / Ashaninka sacred sites as part of our human patrimony and the the heritage of mankind, to be permanently protected and used as a tool for the education of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.
6. The commitment to support a meeting of the Asheninka / Ashaninka people each year to advance the objectives of the Asheninka / Ashaninka nation to the Amazon and the world.

## Livelihoods

The Ashaninka historically lived in relatively isolated mobile family homesteads in the uplands to best pursue hunting, gathering, fishing, and farming before relocating once resources diminished (Varese 1968; Denevan 1971; Hvalkof & Veber 2005). Larger communities became more common with the arrival of schools and titled lands which required a nucleated settlement pattern. Current Ashaninka communities are likely to provide agricultural products for sale, supply workers for wage labor in extractive pursuits (logging, resource collection), or create handicrafts in addition to subsistence farming, hunting, and gathering. Ashaninka located closer to road networks and urban centers rely less on their natural resources, which have often been overexploited, than the more remote Ashaninka who still have extensive forests and fauna. The Ashaninka have organized in part to see how the Ashaninka of different regions can learn from each other to obtain a better future. For example, the Ashaninka of Apiwtxa in Brazil have a demonstrated successful sustainable development plan and conservation history that led to a Brazilian Development Grant of 1.8 million US\$ to promote agroforestry management in the upper Yurua basin as a sustainable alternative to deforestation while strengthening territorial monitoring and control (BNDES 2015).

## Climate Change

The Ashaninka of the Yurua made the following observations about local climate variation (Han et al. 2013):

- Climate and weather increasingly unpredictable with abrupt changes: rain in the dry season and drought in the wet.
- Increased temperatures and sun intensity.

When asked to identify the three most important objectives to overcome the future challenges brought by climate change, the Ashaninka shared the following:

- Environmental education and climate change adaptation training in every community.
- Integrated sustainable natural resource management projects.
- Management of communal reserves (conservation and sustainability) in the Yurua region.

The entire workshop of six indigenous ethnicities (Asháninka, Ashéninka, Amahuaca, Chitonahua, Shipibo, and Yaminahua) and mestizo residents proposed the following priorities:

- Training and education on the conservation of flora and fauna.
- Projects focused on the sustainable use of natural resources.
- Transboundary interchange of technical training between indigenous peoples.

## First Binational Congress of the Ashaninka People

137 Ashaninka representatives from 54 communities and 24 federations from Peru and Brazil held the First Binational Congress of the Ashaninka People on September 21–22, 2015. The congress resulted in two signed declarations (one global and one Peruvian) stating the importance of the Ashaninka people to preserve the environment while identifying the principal threats to the Ashaninka culture, territory, and livelihoods as well as the forests and rivers of Amazonia. The workshop was led by representatives of the Brazilian community of Apiwtxa and the Peruvian organization ACONAMAC along with leaders from other organizations.

## Future

We, the Ashaninka, are committed to a sustainable and just future. To obtain our goals we have decided to organize across Peru and Brazil, and our disparate communities and territories to learn from each other and better face the challenges of climate change and uncontrolled development. We want to show that it is possible to have a development model that provides quality of life without planetary destruction. The union of the Ashaninka people is an opportunity to unite knowledges without discrimination. We hope that other people will unite with us to improve the Amazon and the world.

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