

Project Report

Publication of “Ñukanchik Pachamama Imashina Wiñarishkamanta/La Creación de Nuestra Madre Naturaleza”

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Background: Kichwa in Cotacachi

Cotacachi's 45 Andean communities are located along the slopes of the dormant Cotacachi volcano, approximately 80 kilometers north of Ecuador's capital, Quito, in the province of Imbabura. The communities' combined population is estimated to be 15,878 (UNORCAC 2007). Both Kichwa and Spanish are spoken within the communities, although the exact numbers of Kichwa, Spanish and bilingual speakers are unknown. Over the last few decades, an ever-increasing number of Cotacacheños have sought education and employment outside of their communities. This has resulted in greater income and increased opportunities for many for whom agriculture is no longer a viable livelihood activity. It has, however, additionally resulted in the loss of traditional beliefs and practices as reflected in changing dress and food preferences, religious beliefs, loss of interest in agriculture, and an evident decrease in the number of young people fluent in Kichwa and familiar with its accompanying oral tradition. According to UNESCO's 2009 assessment of endangered languages, an estimated 50,000 people speak the Kichwa of Ecuador's northern highlands, an area encompassing Cotacachi's communities as well as neighboring indigenous communities within the province of Imbabura.

According to UNESCO's nine criteria of evaluation¹, northern Kichwa is considered to be “definitely endangered”, meaning that children no longer learn it as their first language. Very few people in Cotacachi have knowledge of written Kichwa. Although a number of Cotacachi's community schools are, in theory, bilingual (Spanish- Kichwa), lessons are taught in Spanish and Kichwa is used primarily as a second language. Local schoolteachers express frustration over the lack of Kichwa reading material, which is complicated by the fact that Kichwa orthography recently underwent major revision, implying that only new publications are correct (Ministerio de Educación 2009).

During the summer of 2010, we worked to document legends of local landscape

¹ 1) Absolute number of speakers; 2) Intergenerational language transmission; 3) Community members' attitudes towards their own language; 4) Shifts in domains of language use; 5) Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use; 6) Type and quality of documentation; 7) Response to new domains and media; 8) Availability of materials for language education and literacy; 9) Proportion of speakers within the total population. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00142>

and native crop origins in the communities of Cotacachi. During that time, dozens of legends were recorded and transcribed for archive.

Objective

Our current objective has been to publish a selection of these stories in an illustrated bilingual (Spanish-Kichwa) children’s book for use in Cotacachi’s bilingual community schools. In doing so, we have hoped to encourage the active preservation of both local language and oral tradition among Cotacachi’s youth.



Picture 1: The origin of the prominent *Mama Cotacachi* mountain is explained in one of the legends.



Picture 2: Lake Cuicocha is also featured in the book.

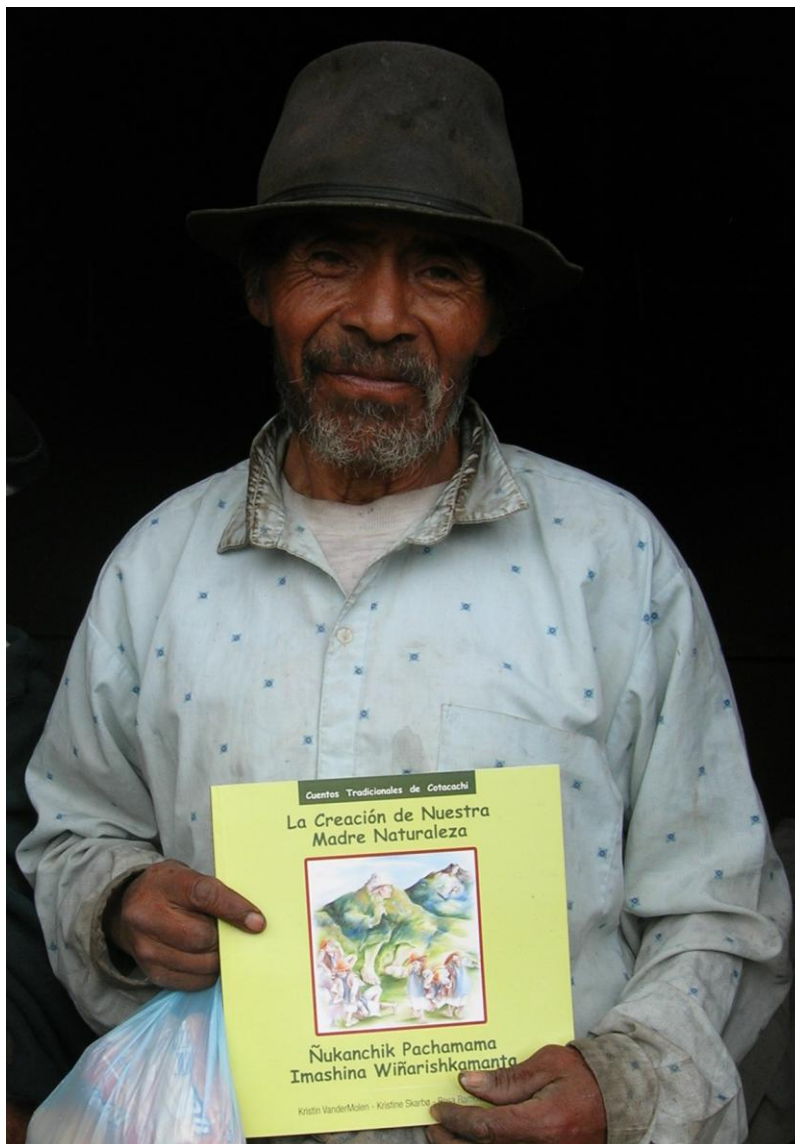
Project description

During May and June of 2011, a manuscript containing three legends was prepared for publication. The legends, which had originally been told in Kichwa, were translated into Spanish by our local research assistant and co-editor, Rosa Ramos. We then transcribed the translations, and used the transcriptions as the basis for the book. Rafael Guitarra, a local schoolteacher and Kichwa expert, translated the manuscript into written Kichwa. To produce the final manuscript, we worked collaboratively within our team and with external consultants to adjust word choices and sentence structures in both languages in an effort to maintain as much authenticity as possible, while also ensuring that the texts were grammatically and orthographically correct. We also worked with two talented local young artists to complete and digitalize the drawings for the book. Finally, the manuscript was assembled and a layout was agreed upon.

In August, the book was printed, and in September we arranged a book launch, coinciding with the start of the new school year. We personally handed formal invitations to teachers representing all 19 bilingual community schools in Cotacachi. Teachers were also encouraged to fill out an evaluation report about the book. The book launch was held in the “Casa de las Culturas” (Culture House) in the urban center of Cotacachi, and was attended by teachers, students, and representatives from local and regional institutions. The editorial team presented the book, explaining its background and objectives. During the presentation, translator and schoolteacher Rafael Guitarra gave a speech in which he suggested ways that the book can be implemented in the local curriculum. Speeches were

also given by the president of the Union of Peasant and Indigenous Organizations of Cotacachi (UNORCAC), and Cotacachi's mayor, both of whom supported the work leading up to the publication. The book received a warm welcome from the audience. During the following days, a total of 400 books were distributed among the community schools, and an additional 50 copies were deposited with local libraries, urban schools, and other institutions and collaborators. The remaining copies were stored with UNORCAC, and will serve as a repository as copies wear from use.

We were overwhelmed by the book's positive reception in Cotacachi, by children, teachers, and local authorities alike. It is our hope that the book will serve to stimulate learning and use of the Kichwa language, as well as perk children's interest in the rich cultural heritage and traditional knowledge held by the elder generation. We were encouraged to continue the work, and hope to be able to publish more stories in the future.



Picture 3: Elder José Manuel Diaz Piguango is one of the story-tellers contributing to the book.



Picture 4: Yoel and Yoselin Flores Ramos at the book reception.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the immense knowledge and generosity of Cotacachi's elders, and thank them for sharing these legends with us. We are also grateful for all support of the project, both locally in Cotacachi, especially from UNORCAC and from the institutions that made the book possible: the Gesellschaft für bedrohte Sprachen and the Anthropology & Environment Section of the American Anthropological Association for their financial support of the publication, and also the Firebird Foundation for Anthropological Research and the National Science Foundation for funding the our initial fieldwork in Cotacachi.

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