

What happens when you turn your back on hamburgers?

Student examines developments after SFSA hand-over

Once an initiative is running well, the Syngenta Foundation will withdraw at some point. But what happens when we are no longer there? Swiss student Nora Hurcik wanted to find out. Her particular example: *Qorichacra** in Peru. Nora sent us an interim report on her recent research there.

The Syngenta Foundation offered me the opportunity to evaluate its *Qorichacra* initiative in the Andes as part of my Master's thesis. This was a chance not to be missed, and a good reason to choose the Foundation as thesis partners.

The Foundation launched *Qorichacra* in 2010, and remained involved until 2015. The main partners were *Arcos Dorados* (the McDonald's franchisee in Latin America), and the local NGO *Centro Bartolomé de las Casas* (CBC). Local smallholders from communities around Cusco participated. The initiative aimed to improve their income by creating access to new markets. The main focus was on cooperation with McDonald's and other restaurants and hotels in this popular tourist region. The partners helped to build greenhouses for salad vegetables, and provided farmers with the technical know-how to become successful suppliers to lucrative but demanding customers.

The Syngenta Foundation has not been present in the region since handing over the initiative. A number of questions remain, which I intend to answer in my master's thesis. How has the local situation changed? Do smallholders still use greenhouses to grow their produce? How has the co-operation with McDonald's developed? What lasting effect has *Qorichacra* had on the farmers and their communities?



View from the route out to the villages

Before my visit to Peru, I investigated in depth both *Qorichacra* and the topic of Impact Evaluation. I examined various methods of Impact Evaluation, and soon discovered that this topic is highly controversial. It would fill an entire PhD! How can impact be measured? I concentrated on the less complex theories. The choice of theory to be used in my thesis remained undecided, as it would depend mainly on the results of my research in Peru and the data collected.

I boarded my flight to Peru with mixed feelings, and without knowing what to expect. Before I left Switzerland I tried to organize interviews with project participants, but received few replies and was soon forced to conclude that Peruvians are less keen on advance planning than the Swiss! I thus had no choice but to embark on an adventure, and to see what could be arranged on arrival. Before my departure I discovered by chance that Markus#, an old acquaintance, had emigrated to Cusco ten years ago, where he works for an NGO. This contact proved to be a great asset, as he offered to find interpreters for my interviews and accompany me on village visits.

I found the Peruvians to be uncomplicated and spontaneous. On the first day, the CBC Director gave me a contact in the community of Huillcapata, and I was soon able to organize a visit to see Juan, a former project participant. I was keen to see what awaited me – how had the situation in the community developed since 2015?

Markus and I were greeted warmly by Juan#, who immediately took us to see his greenhouse. He proudly showed us the vegetables, strawberries and flowers grown by his family. This was followed by an inspection of his private succulent collection, which he maintains as a hobby. Juan told us that his family also keeps animals, and took us to a door behind which music was playing. It led to a stall for cavys (guinea pigs) who, Juan assured us, like to dance to music. Finally he showed us the cows kept by his father. Juan is personally more interested in plants, and is dedicated to caring for the greenhouses.



Juan's succulent collection

I conducted a short interview. Juan seemed to have the technical aspects of cultivation well under control, but no longer had cooperative agreements with McDonald's or any other restaurants. Other nearby families had also ceased to act as suppliers to McDonald's.



Juan's greenhouse

Juan claimed that the community had a poor opinion of the chain. He would be prepared to work with other restaurants in future. I asked Juan if he would have time to fill in a questionnaire, but he had to visit the market with his father to help sell their produce. I gave him several questionnaires with a request to distribute them locally, and we agreed to meet again at a later date for their collection.

On the same day we also spoke with other farmers. As most smallholders were at work, the community seemed deserted, but we were fortunate to meet a farmer standing beside his greenhouse. We asked if we could look inside, and after some hesitation he showed us the renovation work in progress. I held a short interview with him, revealing that his greenhouse was financed not by the Syngenta Foundation, but by another organization. The farmer told us that many families in his community of Chita Pampa no longer grow produce in greenhouses. These families couldn't afford to replace the greenhouses after seven years, and technical know-how was often lacking. Financial assistance from the community was available for the construction of greenhouses, but as the recipients were determined by lottery, help often went to the wrong families. The



Greenhouse renovation

farmer also mentioned a serious problem with the plastic used for the greenhouses: The community didn't know how to dispose of it properly. The farmer then took me to meet Carlos#, a resident of the same village and a former *Qorichacra* participant.



Carlos and his roses

Carlos has specialized in the production of roses, and is the only member of his community to do so exclusively. His business seemed to be booming. I held an interview with him and we inspected his greenhouses. He was in the process of building two new ones, and expressed his gratitude to the Syngenta Foundation for making his dream come true.

A question of perspective? Views and numbers differ

The visit to the second farmer made me wonder if the project had achieved any lasting results. A few days later I mentioned this to Adrián#, an anthropologist, agronomist and former CBC staff member. He disagreed with the second farmer's statements, and maintained that the construction of greenhouses was no longer expensive. He showed me his price calculations, and estimated that a farmer building a greenhouse should be able to recover the investment costs after one year. Adrián also pointed out that plastic building materials can be disposed of by existing recycling companies. He stated that *Qorichacra* had transformed agriculture in Peru, and over 2000 greenhouses had been built in the Cusco region. He had, however, quickly realized that cooperative agreements with McDonald's would not work under the given circumstances.

In the course of my visit I spoke with other Syngenta Foundation stakeholders, and received considerable positive feedback on the *Qorichacra* project. I also visited *Huancaro*, the largest market in Cusco, where both Juan and Carlos sell most of their produce.

Huancaro, a local market in Cusco



On the last day before my return to Switzerland I was extremely fortunate to speak with the Sustainability Director of *Arcos Dorados*, and to interview the restaurant manager in Cusco. I learned that four *Qorichacra* families are still supplying McDonald's.

Research in Peru gave me the opportunity to learn about the country and its people, and to make many new contacts. I am looking forward to evaluating the collected data over the next few months, and finding out whether the project resulted in lasting benefits for the participating families and their communities.

(Original version in German).

*Here's more about *Qorichacra*: <https://www.syngentafoundation.org/qorichacra-vegetables-and-value-10000-feet>

(Name altered)

See what another undergraduate studying our work found out in Kenya:

<https://www.syngentafoundation.org/news/recent-news/sometimes-it-all-runs-clockwork>