



## Village Earth Shipibo Project Information Sheet

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### Overview

The Shipibo and Conibo are two similar culture groups making up one ethnolinguistic group of the Panoan family located in the Ucayali Region of Peru's Amazon basin. Their culture has persisted for more than one-thousand years, some suggesting that they may have reached over 50,000 people before the European conquest. Their population was greatly reduced in the early twentieth century to less than 3,000. Today, these numbers have climbed to around 40,000.

The Ucayali Region, inhabited by the Shipibo-Conibo, has immense diversity, both biologically and culturally. As part of the Amazon River basin, the Ucayali River forms an integral part of the headwaters of the Amazon River system. The Amazon basin stretches from the foothills of the Andes to the shores of Brazil, making it the largest watershed in the world and contains nearly one-fifth of all the freshwater on Earth. It is home to almost 60% of the world's remaining tropical rainforests, but is also experiencing the world's highest deforestation rate (3-4 million ha per year). Peru is one of the world's twelve "megadiversity" countries, claiming some of the highest levels of species, especially endemic species, on the planet. However, it is estimated that nearly one species goes into extinction every hour. And these majestic rivers and forests sustain the livelihoods of the many indigenous people that call this area home.

Traditionally the Shipibo hunted and fished for subsistence, however, declining animal and fish populations in the Ucayali basin due to outside pressures have forced many of the Shipibo into agricultural-based subsistence. Negatively influenced market prices and the over-exploitation of natural resources are making it increasingly difficult to survive. Because of dwindling supplies of resources, some of have turned to tourism and other non-traditional ways to make a living.

### History of Village Earth's Involvement

Village Earth began working with the Shipibo in 2005 when it accepted the invitation of the [Inti Wayna foundation](#), a Peruvian NGO, and others to make an initial visit to eight communities in the region. In participatory workshops in January of 2005, villagers from the Shipibo-Conibo group expressed a strong desire to begin a sustainable development initiative based on self-determination and ecological sustainability.

In January 2006, Village Earth and the Inti Wayna Foundation returned to hold a 5-day regional workshop for Shipibo participants interested in creating a community-based documentary film. Throughout the workshop participants were given free reign to use the sound and camera equipment as they collectively worked to create their own documentary film. The film, titled "Paromea Ronin Bakebo" Shipibo for [The Children of the Anaconda](#), was then edited and premiered in the native community of San Francisco in the Yarinacocha district. The film illustrates the visions and hopes of the Shipibo people, who struggle to protect their way of life and natural resources against threats from outside interests encroaching upon their lands.

In January 2007, Shipibo leaders asked for the return of Village Earth to hold another regional organizational workshop. After a very successful strategic planning process the Shipibo participants came up with a one year plan of action that will really begin to mobilize and organize the Shipibo for greater regional unity. At the conclusion of the workshop, a Transitory Committee was democratically-elected

amongst the participants to hold an Indigenous Tribunal in June. This June event will be the follow-up to this workshop and it is Village Earth's great honor that the Shipibo have asked Village Earth to return and co-facilitate this historic event. The Tribunal will be a gathering of Indigenous leaders from all 120 Shipibo communities, as well as other regional indigenous groups, to discuss their own alternative plan for "A Better Ucayali".

## The Future

The Transitory Committee is currently mobilizing regional indigenous leaders to organize the June 2007 Indigenous Tribunal event. 480 leaders are estimated to attend this event representing around 40,000 indigenous peoples throughout the Ucayali region. All parties involved hope that this will be the key event in mobilizing and organizing the region to begin the process of a truly community-based, sustainable form of alternative "development" - to empower the region toward active self-determination.

The Shipibo people realized that only by working together at the regional level will they ever really be able to implement their own vision for the future based on the values and wisdom of the majority indigenous population of the region. Some of the specific objectives as written in their project plan are as follows:

- To bring together leaders, authorities, students, technicians, and indigenous professionals of the region to search together the true development of the indigenous population with a united organization with strategic allies both national and international
- To inform and motivate the Jefes (chiefs) of the communities about the importance of cultural revival and the care for their lands
- To achieve the participation and commitment of the Jefes and leaders of the indigenous communities to form a work group for environmental conservation and sustainable development
- To strengthen the communication channel between indigenous and foreign organizations for the development of their communities.

The organizing committee writes, "In the last 50 years, the Amazonian cultures have been suffering from an aggressive Western acculturation. The [Peruvian] government underwent a neoliberal political shift without considering the consequences upon the indigenous peoples. Many indigenous peoples were forced to leave their cultures as they migrated to the big cities in search of a better opportunity." The objective of the Tribunal is so "that the communities be the protagonists of their own development, and the local, national, and foreign authorities take care of and support us in our own program of development."

Five themed expositions will be presented during the Tribunal:

1. The Role of the Jefes
2. Indigenous Reality
3. The Political Situation
4. National Political and Economic Reality
5. United Communities

At the end of the event, there will be an election of leaders to form the new grassroots regional organization of indigenous peoples.

This is such an important event for the future of indigenous self-determination throughout the Peruvian Amazon. Village Earth is currently seeking funds to support the Shipibo in their efforts at regional organization in Peru's Amazon Basin.

For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.villageearth.org/pages/Projects/Peru/index.php>  
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