

Juan Carlos Donoso, coordinator of COMPAS Ecuador

## 'Recovery and preservation of indigenous people's traditional knowledge is fundamental to wellbeing'

Juan Carlos Donoso works for Jatun Yachay Wasi, an Ecuadorian NGO that focuses on supporting women's groups to develop organic vegetable and herb gardens. Jatun Yachay Wasi is a new member in the Latin American COMPAS network.

### Who is Juan Carlos Donoso?

'I come from Chinchasuyo, north of Tahuantinsuyo in Ecuador, the land where the sun is always overhead. I work for Jatun Yachay Wasi, an institute dedicated to preserving traditional knowledge, where I have been a teacher of Andean livestock keeping for the last ten years. I am an agricultural engineer by training, with an understanding of local traditional medicine. I also teach in the Master's course on Agroecology and Endogenous Development at AGRUCO-UMSS in Cochabamba, Bolivia.'

### Is traditional knowledge valued in Ecuador?

'The indigenous population has fought for many years to gain more recognition, led by the confederation of indigenous nationalities of Ecuador. There has been progress: Ecuador now has a new political constitution, the foundation of which is a plurinational and pluricultural state. The seventh chapter of the constitution refers to *allin causay*, wellbeing; it states that the recovery and preservation of traditional knowledge of the original inhabitants is fundamental to wellbeing.'

### Why is it important to recover traditional knowledge?

'Providing education that is a blend of modern and traditional knowledge helps to equip

community leaders so that they can gain access to more important jobs.'

### To what extent is traditional knowledge accepted by *mestizos* - people of mixed Spanish and indigenous origin?

'I'll give an example. People living in the cities continue to use medicinal plants to cure illnesses, as they become aware of the damage caused by synthetic chemicals. At the same time, families face economic problems because they lack money. Traditional forms of medicine are now being integrated into some of the hospitals in urban areas; patients can therefore choose the kind of medicine they wish to use (conventional or traditional) according to their culture and their purse.'

### What role does Jatun Yachay Wasi play in higher education?

'We are one of the leading institutions providing this kind of alternative education. Most of our students are adults, some elderly; many of the indigenous students are *yacha* (wise or learned people), for example in the field of traditional medicine. Conventional homeopathic doctors also come to study with us to validate their own knowledge. Agronomy students come to learn about traditional technologies. The institute is likely to be granted university status soon, which will entitle us to state support.'

### What is the relation between Jatun Yachay Wasi and other organisations?

'We work jointly with universities and educational centres, contributing our knowledge and



experience to other traditional universities in Ecuador, in the form of study programme support. We work with non-governmental organisations too, especially those in the field of education. We are trying to set up school gardens, so that children not only get a good meal at school, but learn about farming too. A school farm can also be used in teaching mathematics, history, traditional medicine and language. Jatun Yachay Wasi cooperates with organisations working in the east of Ecuador, helping the indigenous communities to revive their integrated farming methods from a wellbeing perspective, so they can attain a varied diet and medicinal plants to prevent illness.'



For more information:  
[www.jatunyachaywasi.edu.ec](http://www.jatunyachaywasi.edu.ec)