

TRADE IN VICUÑA FIBRE

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSERVATION AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS



International
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Trade in Vicuña Fibre

Implications for Conservation and
Rural Livelihoods

About the paper

Once overhunted and on the brink of extinction, the vicuña species (a small member of the camelid family) is thriving again in South America's Andes region.

The decision to grant usufructory rights to communities to shear and sell vicuña fibre increased their economic incentive to sustainably manage and protect the species. As a result, vicuña populations have recovered and trade has grown by 78% since 2007, which is generating income for Andean rural communities and textile-processing sectors. This study maps the value chain, assesses the factors that have helped the species recover, and identifies current challenges facing the vicuña fibre trade, including the distribution of benefits and threats to conservation.

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Foreword by ITC

The recovery of the vicuña species in South America is a conservation success story.

Before 1980, this animal of the camelid family was almost extinct due to overhunting. The decision by the Peruvian government in 1980 to give communities the right to shear and trade vicuña wool has helped the species's population to recover across South America's Andes region. It has also helped to improve rural livelihoods across the region, especially for women who play a central role in the animals' capture and wool processing.

While the vicuña story in South America is an encouraging one for conservation and trade, the Vicuña Convention has identified challenges that remain in this industry, including the equitable distribution of benefits. Vicuña is the most expensive speciality fibre in the world, yet local communities' share in the value chain remains low due, in part, to limited value addition taking place in source countries.

This report sheds light on the unique vicuña value chain, from how the species is conserved and managed by smallholder farmers and livestock owners in the Andes, to how luxury fashion brands in Italy use and market this exclusive wool. As such, the report underscores how markets link some of the most economically-vulnerable people in the world to sophisticated service industries and wealthy consumers.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) designed this study in the context of its support to Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). I would like to thank the CITES Secretariat and Parties and the UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) for their invaluable contributions to this publication.

I look forward to this work contributing to further discussions among CITES Parties and other stakeholders on how models of legal trade incentivizes the sustainable management of wild flora and fauna, while considering ways in which natural resource value chains can benefit the rural poor in developing countries.



Arancha González
Executive Director
International Trade Centre

Foreword by CITES

The trade in the fibre sheared from the emblematic vicuña, a camelid species inhabiting South America's Andes, is considered a success story of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The mechanisms of CITES promote the vicuña's sustainable use through legal trade.

CITES recognizes in its preamble that, '... peoples and States are and should be the best protectors of their own wild fauna and flora.' This notion has been embraced by the countries that raise vicuñas, foremost by Peru, as well as by Argentina, Bolivia and Chile. Through a well-regulated trade, giving local communities an incentive in conserving the species, the vicuña has come back from the brink of extinction to a healthy population once again.

For these achievements, the countries involved have to be commended. This report prepared by ITC highlights this exemplary work and how it was achieved. However, it also highlights the current challenges the species and the trade face and how they may be overcome. CITES can contribute to tackling these issues by providing scientific advice and guidance on matters related to the trade of this species in general.

As Chair of the CITES Animals Committee, it is my firm belief that CITES can and will play its role in supporting the range states of this beautiful species in achieving the long-term conservation of vicuña and the promotion of local livelihoods for many generations to come.



Matthias Löertscher
Chair CITES Animals Committee
Head CITES Management Authority Switzerland

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