

My name is Sonia Quispe Tito, I come from the community of Choquecancha, in the district of Lares, in the Región of Cusco, Peru. I am speaking to you in Quechua, which is the language of my ancestors, my heritage and my community. I am an indigenous woman and a smallholder farmer. Most of us in the communities rely on farming to sustain our livelihoods, thus, the women have a very important role in agriculture and in the food and nutrition security of our households and communities. All the varieties of cultivars we have are under our responsibility, making us the guardians of seeds. We also care for our wild species and ensure that these species, that are the fruits of Mother Earth, are preserved, used carefully and in a sustainable way.

I am a mother of three children, and as all mothers, I am worried about the world my children will inherit. Today I want to share with you some of the experiences of my community, including the threats we are facing; especially as women. In recent years, we have noticed changes to our Mother Earth: the rain patterns are very unstable and sometimes destroy our seedlings and our crops. The temperatures are rising and due to this, we have more and more pests and diseases, and we are now seeing some that we did not have before. As a consequence, our communities have to sow our potatoes higher and higher, and the prosperous yielding of our crops has weakened. We have observed that the nutrition and health of our communities is threatened: the introduction of unhealthy processed foods has made our people sick and we see younger generations are not learning how to cook our traditional meals with the natural foods that we grow. Our men, husbands, sons, and brothers, now migrate to the cities to find higher paying jobs and we, the women, are left in charge of our farms, our families, our livestock, while also needing to find ways to feed and care for our households and communities. As we are experiencing changes which are endangering our livelihoods, we feel often neglected by public institutions and by the policies promoting the conversion of our traditional seed systems for those favoring corporate seeds, and chemical inputs that endanger our food security and well-being. In this context, we must always be adapting and innovating.

Luckily, we behold a treasure: we have preserved our heritage, our traditional knowledge, and we are using it to adapt to the new conditions. Even though we are less educated than men and some of us don't write or read, we have the most important role in the family: we are in charge of feeding them every day. We keep our traditional social practices, like participating weekly in the local barter market, allowing us to obtain products that don't grow on our own land (like fruits, cocoa, and coffee). In the program in which we participate, Sowing Diversity= Harvesting Security, we work to cherish this knowledge and maintain it alive in the community by transmitting it within all generations. We also learn to innovate and link our traditional knowledge with new technical skills and knowledge to better adapt. In farmers' field schools, we women, do participatory plant breeding to select and improve corn and potatoes so that they are resistant to pests, diseases and climate events. We make registries of wild food plants of the areas and are developing recipes based on these plants to return the health back to our children our communities.

As women, in order to work on these goals, we have been creating strong alliances between us, with community authorities, municipalities, other NGOs and institutions, and we share our concerns with them. These collaborations don't stop at the borders of my community

or of Peru, and this is why I am with you today: I have met with other indigenous farmers from many other countries both on their visits to Peru and also when I participated in the CBD last year in Mexico; we all share similar stories, the same fears, and this is why we feel we need to create alliances as indigenous people, so we can raise our voices stronger together. This is a call for collaboration and action I am launching today to you all: NGOs, public institutions, and the private sector. You have the power to engage in actions that will see a world less affected by climate change and global disorders. This year you will discuss the promises you made in the Paris agreement, of transparency, funding, collaboration with developing countries and you have to keep your word. It was also decided to create a platform for the exchange of experiences and sharing of best practices of local communities and indigenous peoples on adaptation to climate change. We advocate strongly for the implementation of such a platform and of other initiatives recognizing the role indigenous women have to play in this common fight against climate change.



Sonia Quispe Tito



Sonia is native of the community of Choquecancha, in the region Cusco, Peru. She lives there with her family on their farm. She is considered a leader in her community for her commitment to biodiversity conservation and her participation in different activities and collectives that aim to conserve plant genetic resources and the traditional knowledge associated with them. She belongs to the local handicraft collective, participated in the formation of the local gastronomy collective, aiming to conserve local biodiversity and traditional food and nutrition-systems through the promotion of biodiverse diets consisting of local plant species (NUS) high in nutritional value; and finally, she is involved in participatory plant breeding training and in the development of breeding methodologies. Because of her commitment and position as a community leader, in December of 2016, she was elected to attend the Conference on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Cancun, Mexico, where a side-event was held explaining the advances of the Sowing Diversity = Harvesting Security (Oxfam Novib) program.