

Summary

The kellu-kellu (*Hymenoxis robusta*) is a poisonous weed that stretches along the high plateau from Peru to the north of Argentina. It grows among the grasslands causing the death of livestock, invading the zone's barley, alfalfa and quinoa and affecting the population's health. In the Bolivian plateau, the animal mortality rate reached 30% and around 80% of the land was affected by this plague. The situation became so bad that the inhabitants began to abandon their land in search of income opportunities in the cities. Looking at this situation, the NGO Agua Clara decided to act and made contact with the community presidents and the affected populations' local authorities, who began an analysis of the situation and the magnitude of the problem. The community response was immediate; the 773 families of the zone committed themselves to participate, first, in the search of a solution to this problem that had affected them for more than 50 years and in implementing it. This strategy, based in the knowledge of the locals themselves yet enriched with the technical assistance of the NGO, allowed for the development of an eradication model based in;

- The identification of the most problematic areas
- The collective work in the identified areas to achieve complete eradication
- The combination of mechanical and manual systems
- The non use of chemicals, considered highly contaminating and harmful to the environment

The technique adopted consists of removing the plant, mechanically or manually, after a period of rain and before it blooms – to avoid new seeds, and later to bury them. The lands should in no way be flooded or the extracted weeds burned, since this could allow for the reappearance of the plant. With this model, they began to plan the activities, a process that is carried out annually and begins with training workshops on handling grassland, medicine and veterinary products and marketing. Next, with the participation of the Agua Clara technicians, leaders and authorities of the community and producers, the surface area to be worked, how the work will be organized and the eradication method that should be used in each case are defined every year. As an example, for the current year, 4.5 hectares were established to be worked in a manual form and 2 in the mechanical form per plot.

Mejoramiento de pasturas y lucha contra el kellu–kellu, planta tóxica del altiplano boliviano.
(Pasture improvement and the fight against Kellu-Kellu, toxic plant from the Bolivian high plain)

Once the weed is eradicated and the area ploughed, the sowing of forage plants begins, which prevent the reappearance and spread of kellu-kellu.

This work methodology, based in the commitment and active participation of the entire community, allowed for the eradication of kellu-kellu, something that had been attempted for years without satisfactory results, with high costs and without involving the community.

By March 2006 close to 16 thousand hectares had already been recovered. Today, thanks to this program producers in the zone have been able to return to producing alfalfa, barley, meat and sheep's milk. Their new land is productive and allows for income generation.

As a result of the achieved outcomes, the "First Meeting on the problems of kellu-kellu in the Bolivian plateau" took place with the help of the authorities of Oruro¹ and at the request of the regional municipalities. In this meeting the policy design and strategies at the departmental level were proposed. Today this model already forms part of the region's public policies.

¹ A department of Bolivia, which is divided into 16 provinces