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ALEXANDER RICE

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# Northern Pastaza Kichwa (Ecuador and Peru) – Language Snapshot

Alexander Rice  
*University of Alberta*

<b>Language Name:</b>	Northern Pastaza Kichwa (also Bobonaza Quichua, Canelos Quichua, Pastaza Quichua)
<b>Language Family:</b>	Quechuan
<b>ISO 639-3 Code:</b>	qvz
<b>Glottolog Code:</b>	nort2973
<b>Population:</b>	18,000-20,000
<b>Location:</b>	Ecuador (Pastaza province), Peru (Loreto department)
<b>Vitality rating:</b>	EGIDS 6b Threatened (Ethnologue)

## Resumen

El kichwa del Pastaza Norte es un idioma quechua que se habla en Ecuador (provincia de Pastaza) y Perú (departamento de Loreto). Los hablantes de esta lengua provienen de varios grupos étnicos y se encuentran hoy en ciudades, comunidades rurales y comunidades apartadas en la selva amazónica. Es un tema de debate de cómo un idioma quechua llegó a la zona noroccidental de la Amazonía y requiere mayor documentación y trabajo descriptivo, tanto lingüístico como etnográfico. Aunque existen investigaciones lingüísticas sobre esta lengua, faltan estudios en morfosintaxis y fonología. A pesar de que hay miles de hablantes del Kichwa del Pastaza Norte, la lengua está en riesgo de desaparecer en el futuro debido a la actual falta de transmisión intergeneracional.

## Summary

Northern Pastaza Kichwa is a Quechuan language spoken in the Pastaza province of Ecuador and the Loreto department of Peru. Speakers belong to multiple ethnic groups and live in cities as well as rural and remote rainforest communities. The presence of a Quechuan language in the north-western Amazon has incited much debate about the ethno-linguistic history of the area; however, more documentary and descriptive work of the language is needed to better understand its past. Description of the language thorough in certain topics but not detailed enough in others. While there are thousands of speakers, Northern Pastaza Kichwa is at great risk of becoming critically endangered in a short time due to a lack of intergenerational transmission.

## 1. Overview and Cultural Context

Northern Pastaza Kichwa<sup>1</sup> (endonym: *runa shimi*, lit. ‘human language’) is a variety of Quechua, spoken in the Ecuadorian province of Pastaza and the Peruvian department of Loreto along the Pastaza, Bobonaza, and other rivers and tributaries (Figure 1). All research to date has focused on the speakers in Ecuador and very little is known about the speakers in Peru. To my knowledge virtually all speakers identify as either Roman-Catholic or belonging to other evangelical Christian denominations, even in the remotest communities. They do however, retain pre-Christian shamanistic practices and beliefs.

Northern Pastaza Kichwa speakers live in a variety of economic contexts. Many today live in the same circumstances as those prior to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, practising subsistence agriculture, hunting, fishing, and foraging in the rainforest. With development in the Pastaza province many speakers now participate in market-oriented subsistence strategies including commercial agriculture and eco-tourism, other speakers live in cities and participate in wage-labour employment.

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<sup>1</sup> The spelling of ‘Kichwa’ is a controversial subject (see Limerick 2017). To date, most of the literature on Quechua varieties in Ecuador uses *Quichua* (an older spelling using Spanish orthography conventions). *Kichwa* is a more recent spelling brought about by Ecuador’s standardisation of its Quechua languages. I use ‘Kichwa’ out of respect to indigenous language activists involved in those language planning and policy efforts, and while many of the Northern Pastaza Kichwa speakers with whom I work are ambivalent about this standardized variety they do seem to prefer the use of <k> to spell this term, using either *Kichwa* or *Kichua*.



Figure 1. Recognized Kichwa varieties in Ecuador (Aschmann 2006).

A full scale version of this map is on page 195.

## 1.1 History

Quechuan languages originated in central Peru around 200 CE (Muysken 2019: 22) and eventually split into two major groups, Quechua I and II (Torero 1964), the latter is thought to have spread from Cuzco throughout the Andes in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, by the Inca Empire.<sup>2</sup> The II-B branch (to which Northern Pastaza Kichwa belongs, see Figure 2) represents the varieties that went north as far as Ecuador and Colombia. When the Spanish took over the Inca Empire they made use of the status of Quechua as the major lingua franca to Christianise the Indigenous populations (Adelaar & Muysken 2004: 182-183).

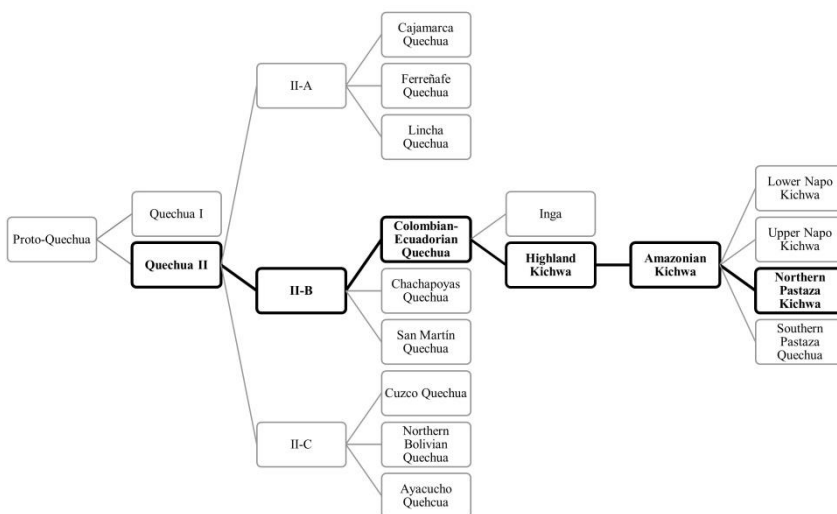


Figure 2. Northern Pastaza Kichwa within the *Quechua* language family, partially based on Torero's (1964) classification.

<sup>2</sup> 'Inca' is an exonym, what we now called the 'Inca empire' was called *Tawantinsuyu* by contemporary Quechua speakers (Torero 1984).

While there is much debate concerning how and when Quechua gained a foothold in the north-west Amazon,<sup>3</sup> the prevailing hypothesis maintains that the Spanish took the Inca-derived Quechua with them as they established missions along the rivers running eastward from the Andes into the territories of other Indigenous languages (Muysken 2019: 60-66). The Quechua that was taken down the Bobonaza<sup>4</sup> and other rivers in present day Pastaza became what we now call Northern Pastaza Kichwa.

The most important factor in establishing Kichwa in the area was the fact it filled the linguistic vacuum left after the Indigenous demographic decline due to waves of violence, disease, and slavery brought by colonisers (Muysken 2011). The survivors shifted to Kichwa as they migrated to Spanish missions or formed new communities (Muysken 2019: 51). In particular, speakers of Zaparoan languages<sup>5</sup> were devastated by events like the Rubber Boom (Reeve 1993; Wasserstrom 2017)<sup>6</sup> and the survivors joined Kichwa speaking communities and/or joined Kichwa speakers moving into their depopulated territory which was later bisected in 1995 when Peru annexed much of the region after a short military conflict with Ecuador. Because of this, speakers of Northern Pastaza Kichwa on both sides of the border identify with multiple ethnic groups, such as the Kichwa, Zaparo, and Andoa nationalities (Figure 3).<sup>7</sup> Other speakers ethnically identify only with their local communities.

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<sup>3</sup> Some argue that some form of Quechua was already present in the north-west Amazon prior to the expansion of the Inca (cf. Carpenter 1982: 36; Stark 1985: 181; Heggarty & Beresford-Jones 2013: 404).

<sup>4</sup> The first Spanish mission on the Bobonaza was established in Canelos in 1561 (Pierre 1889: 105).

<sup>5</sup> Sápara (also known as Zaparo [ISO 639-3: zro], endonym: Kayapi) has only a handful of remaining speakers (Viatori 2003; Michael, Beier & Bowser 2014) and Andwa (also known as Andoa [ISO 639-3: anb], endonym: Katsakáti) is likely dormant.

<sup>6</sup> Kichwa, Chicham, and Zaparoan speakers living between the Curaray and Bobonaza rivers were affected early on by the slave raiding and disease, but starting in 1895, the epicentre of the Rubber Boom in Ecuador shifted northward to the Napo river basin and the Indigenous populations there bore the brunt of the devastation (Wasserstrom & Bustamante 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Northern Pastaza Kichwa is also spoken as a second or third language by speakers of adjacent Indigenous languages, principally Achuar-Shiwiar [Chicham, ISO 639-3: acu] and Wao-Tedeo [isolate, ISO 639-3: auc].

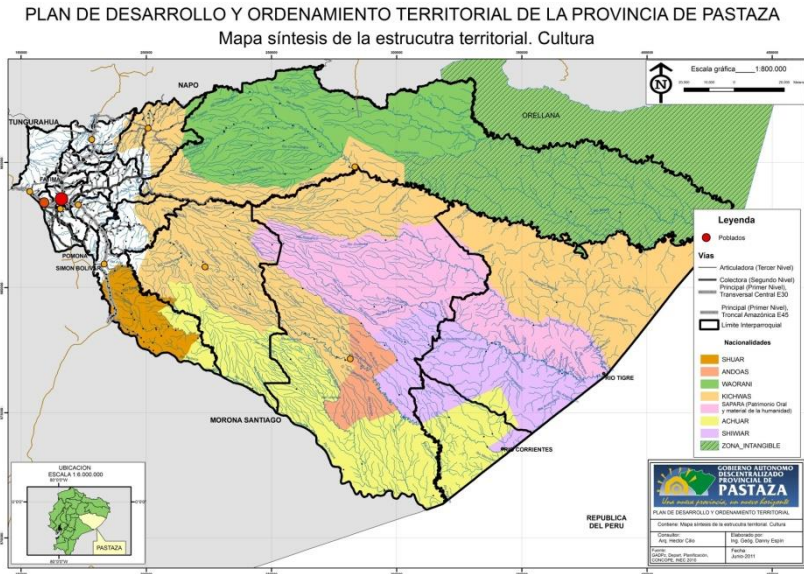


Figure 3. Indigenous territories in Pastaza, Ecuador (GADPz 2011a)

A full scale version of this map is on page 196.

## 1.2 Vitality

Estimations of speaker numbers and vitality status vary. Eberhard, Simons & Fenning (2020) rate Northern Pastaza Kichwa as ‘threatened’ and give a figure of 10,000 speakers (8,000 in Ecuador, 2,000 in Peru). Moseley (2010) classifies Northern Pastaza Kichwa as ‘definitely endangered’ and gives a figure of 30,000 speakers. The estimate of 18,000-20,000 comes from census reports from Ecuador (INEC 2010) and Peru (INEI 2007).

Regardless of the number of speakers, the vitality of Northern Pastaza Kichwa is in a potentially precarious state due to a lack of intergenerational transmission and could become critically endangered in a few decades, as is the case for Upper Napo Kichwa (Grzech, Schwarz & Ennis 2019: 131-132). Observations from the author and other researchers during fieldwork and community events (Figure 44) in urban and rural communities indicate that adults under 30 and especially youth prefer to use Spanish. However, it is not known if this is the case in the more remote communities. A focused assessment of intergenerational transmission and vitality is sorely needed.



*Figure 4. Northern Pastaza Kichwa speakers at a Catholic confirmation ceremony in Canelos, Canelos, Pastaza, Ecuador. Photo © 2019 Alexander Rice*

Ecuador and Peru have numerous varieties of Quechua,<sup>8</sup> all of which exist in a subordinate diglossia with Spanish. In Ecuador only a single Quechuan language (Kichwa) is officially recognised. State-sponsored attempts at revitalisation were geared towards uniting the varieties under a standardised variety called Unified Kichwa. These efforts included: multiple attempts at creating a standardised orthography, official recognition of Kichwa in the Ecuadorian constitution (ANCE 2008), publishing an official Unified Kichwa dictionary and grammar (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador 2009; 2010), and instituting an Indigenous language bilingual education program (EIB) for Unified Kichwa.<sup>9</sup>

From my fieldwork observations, speakers of Northern Pastaza Kichwa appear to be unaware or ambivalent about Unified Kichwa and the EIB.

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<sup>8</sup> Many researchers now recognize at least two Quechuan languages in Ecuador: Highland Kichwa and Amazonian Kichwa (Gómez Rendón 2008: 196; Haboud 2010: 196; Grzech, Schwarz & Ennis 2019; Muysken 2019). Northern Pastaza Kichwa is a variety of Amazonian Kichwa. Peru also tends to lump all their Quechua varieties together into a single language despite having an even greater diversity of Quechuan varieties.

<sup>9</sup> For a more complete overview of Ecuador's language policy regarding Kichwa and its reception, consult King (2002), Wroblewski (2012, 2014), Haboud (2017), and Limerick (2017).



Recent research has shown that the teaching of Unified Kichwa in the EIB schools actually contribute to the loss of all varieties of Kichwa in Ecuador because children are taught that the local varieties spoken by their parents are incorrect, which creates a linguistic wedge between parents and children and encourages both to shift to Spanish (Hornberger & King 1996; Grzech, Schwarz & Ennis 2019).

## 2. Previous research

Some of the earliest documentation and description of Northern Pastaza Kichwa were from Dominican missionaries (León 1930) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1965 Orr & Wrisley (1981) produced a dictionary of Kichwa spoken in the Ecuadorian Amazon and divided it into three distinct varieties.<sup>10</sup> Orr (1962) describes comparative phonology, Orr (1978) is on morphology, and Orr (1991) is a short pedagogical grammar. There is linguistic-anthropological work by Whitten (1976, 1978, 2008) and Nuckolls (2003, 2004a, 2005), and the language has also featured in Muysken (2011, 2019) on comparative historical and typological research. To date, most of the modern descriptive work comes from Nuckolls, who has focused on:

- ideophones (also called ‘sound symbolic adjectives’) – see Nuckolls (1990, 1992, 1995, 1996, 2001, 2004b, 2006, 2010a,b, 2012, 2014a, 2016, 2017);
- evidentiality and pragmatics – see Nuckolls (1993, 2008), Nuckolls & Swanson (2014, 2014b), Nuckolls, Swanson & Spencer (2015, 2018), Nuckolls & Swanson (2018)
- phonetics, phonology (Nuckolls et al. 2016), and morphology (Nuckolls 1983).

Rice (2018) is on syntax, however more descriptive work is needed.

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<sup>10</sup> Orr and Wrisley named them Bobonaza Quichua (Northern Pastaza Kichwa), Tena Quichua (Upper Napo Kichwa [ISO 639-3: quw]), and Loreto Quichua (Lower Napo Kichwa [ISO 639-3: qvo]).

### 3. Documentary record

Nuckolls (Nuckolls 2010c) is an archive of audio recordings and transcriptions from much of her fieldwork; she has also published an online video corpus of ideophones of both Northern Pastaza Kichwa and Upper Napo Kichwa (Nuckolls et al. 2018). Nuckolls and Swanson have several hours of stories, songs, and interviews on their respective *YouTube* channels (Nuckolls; Swanson), most of Swanson's the videos have transcriptions and translations.<sup>11</sup> I have archived four hours of Northern Pastaza Kichwa audio-visual material with *ailla* (Rice 2019a) and *flacso* (2019b).<sup>12</sup>

### 4. Current research

Nuckolls, Swanson, and I all remain engaged in documentation and description of Northern Pastaza Kichwa. Nuckolls & Swanson (2020) is the first volume of a pedagogically-oriented grammar; a second volume is in progress. At the time of writing, I am working on three projects involving gesture use, grammatical relations, and Northern Pastaza Kichwa use on social media. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, Nuckolls, Swanson, and I continue to work with Northern Pastaza Kichwa speakers remotely.

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<sup>11</sup> In the form of subtitles.

<sup>12</sup> Depositing still in progress at time of writing.

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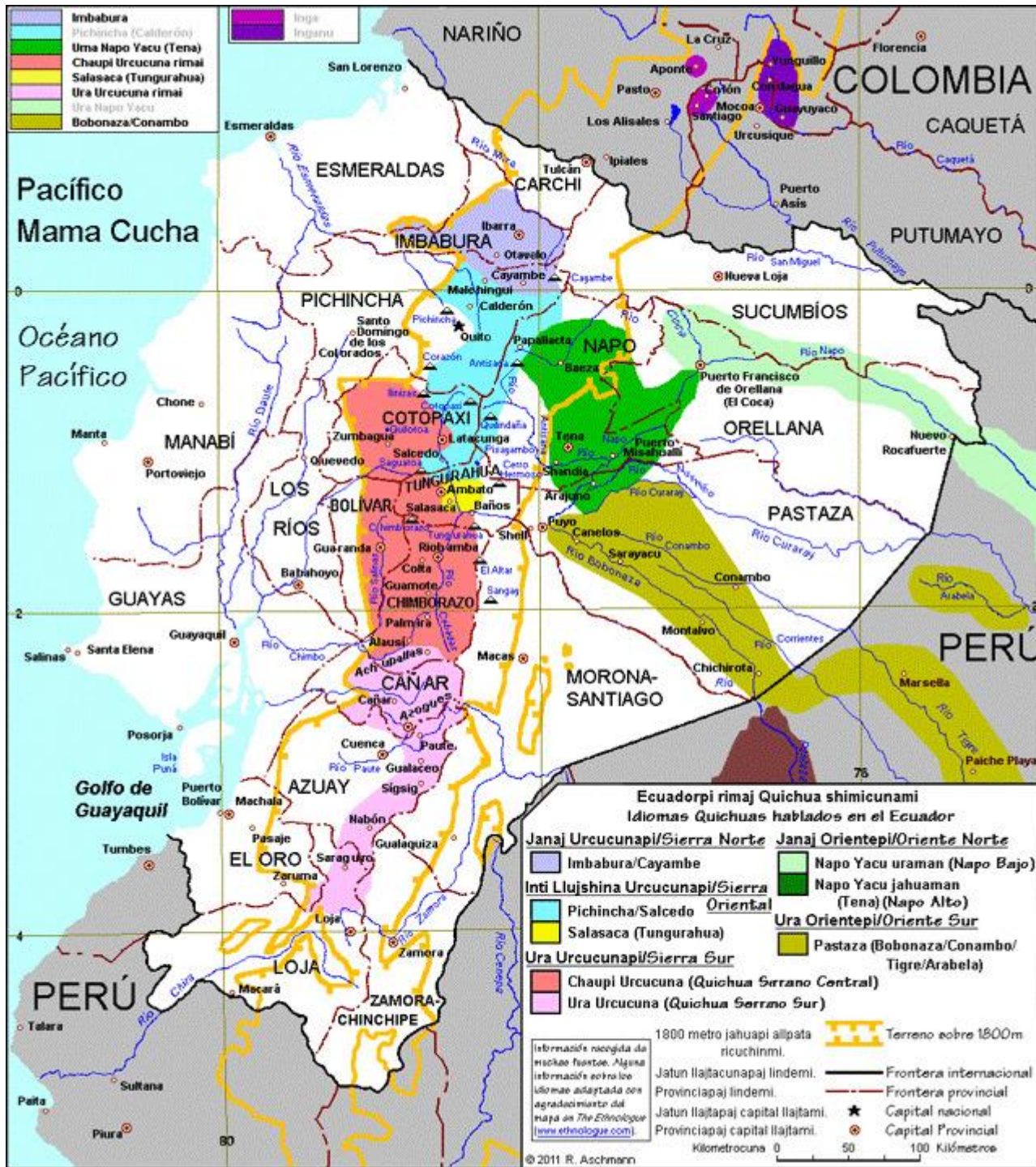


Figure 1. Recognized Kichwa varieties in Ecuador (Aschmann 2006).

This is a full scale version of a smaller map on page 183.



# PLAN DE DESARROLLO Y ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA PROVINCIA DE PASTAZA

## Mapa síntesis de la estructura territorial. Cultura

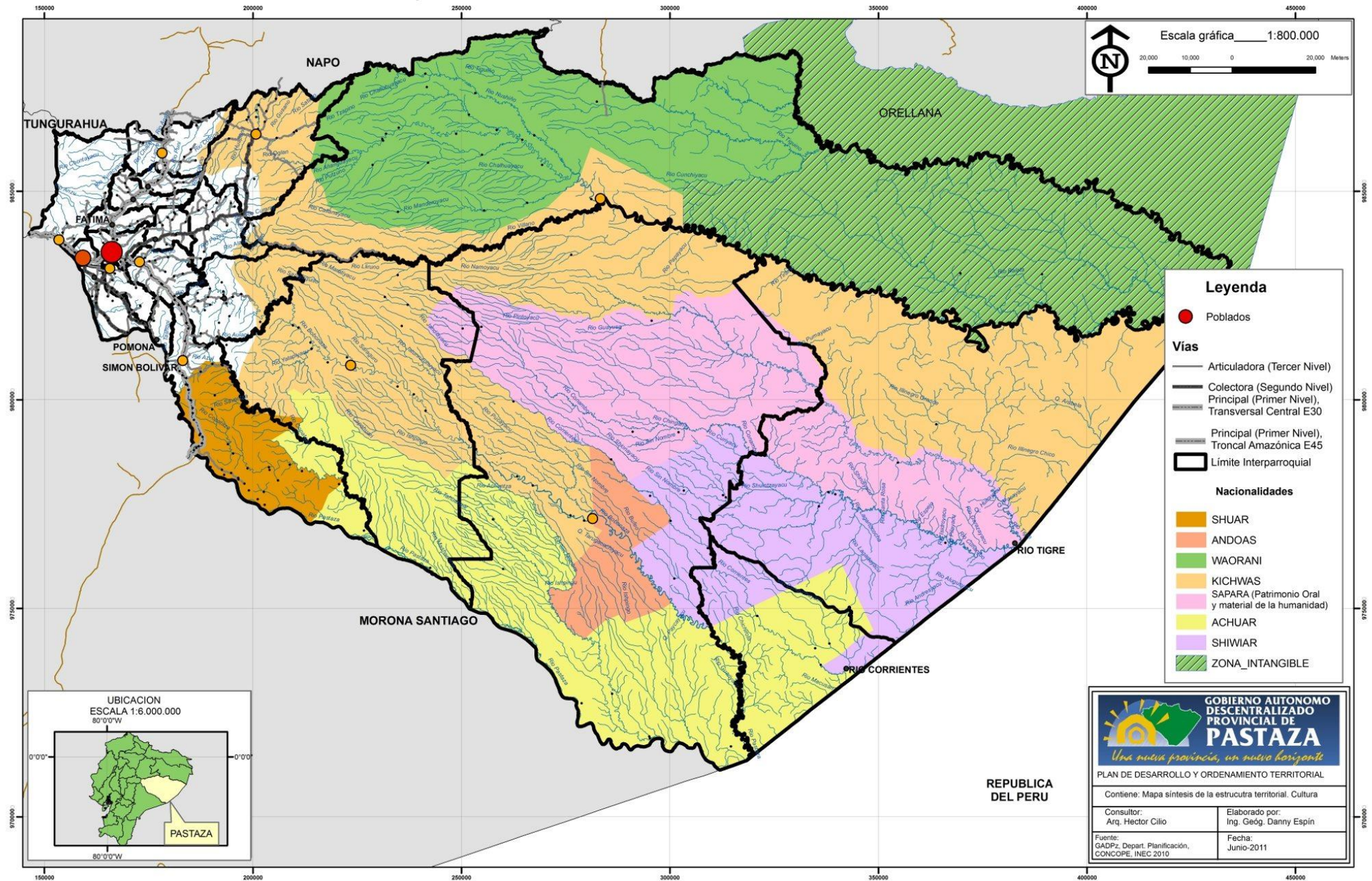


Figure 3. Indigenous territories in Pastaza, Ecuador (GADPz 2011a). This is a full scale version of a smaller map on page 186.