

Ethno-Development Among the Jalq'a

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The Jalq'a are an Andean ethnic group scattered among 30 communities in the remote, rugged mountainous area in the Chuquisaca region of south-central Bolivia. Families eke out a living from farming and pasturing and earn supplementary income from low paying work in the city. Since 1986, this subsistence economy has changed for a growing number of female weavers (now reaching 380) and their families. Together with a Bolivian organization, Antropólogos del Sur Andino (ASUR), and support from the Inter-American Foundation, Jalq'a's community organizations have begun a revival of a unique textile tradition. The Jalq'a's animal motifs are singular among the weaving traditions of thousands of Andean communities; their *ajsus* or women's overskirts depict a dreamlike world of stylized creatures (condors, monkeys, foxes, lions, bats and cows) in reversible images.

In the past, outside commercial pressures eroded handicraft standards, and foreign dealers bought up the remaining fine textiles in Jalq'a communities. In addition, drought damaged pasture lands causing a drastic drop in the wool supply.

The weaving revival began as an economic development strategy to reverse the decline in their folk art and to increase cultural self-esteem among the population, creating a base for social change. Weavers together with ASUR have now organized weaving workshops, purchased raw material, acquired dyes, opened a store in the city of Sucre and held exhibits in museums to promote their work throughout Bolivia. As a result, the market demand in Bolivia for their *ajsus* has grown rapidly. The Jalq'a have learned bookkeeping and administrative skills for their burgeoning enterprise through ASUR's multicultural community educational program. Organizational and business know-how are as essential to their ambitious future programs as are recovery of weaving skills and the maintenance of a strong sense of ethnic identity.

Their weaving revival has an innovative method of using color photographs of Jalq'a pieces attained from private collections. Jalq'a families use the photographs as guides to recover their rich repertoire of cultural motifs, as they weave for the new community enterprise together in their outdoor patios. They have been successfully creating weavings for sale from these traditional models and drawing inspiration from them for new pictorial compositions.



A Jalq'a weaver from the community of Potolo in the province of Chuquisaca, Bolivia, weaves on her upright loom in the shade of the enramada (arbor) in the patio of her home.

Photo by Olivia Cadaval