

Exploration of a National Botanic Garden, Perú – Report of a Scoping Study

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Submitted to CONCYTEC and the British Council, Perú, 28 February 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rationale: Why establish a national botanic garden of Perú?

Around the world, national botanic gardens deliver significant benefits for their countries:

Economic return on investment – National botanic gardens generate financial returns. For example, it has been estimated that for an annual investment of £8.5M (37M sols), the Royal Botanic Garden of Edinburgh returns some £52M (228M sols) to the economy of Scotland (a leverage of more than 6 times) each year.

Tourism – Botanic gardens around the world attract 500 million visitors per year. Tourists add additional value by spending in hotels, restaurants, etc. For example, each year, 2.5 million visitors to the Greater Philadelphia Gardens spend an additional \$37 million USD.

Enjoyment/recreation/health – National botanic gardens offer a ‘green’ destination for citizens; while relaxing, they also learn about their country’s biodiversity.

Education – An important role of national botanic gardens is education of its citizens, children and adults, so that they become aware of their country’s biodiversity and its uses.

Scientific investigation – National botanic gardens maintain systematically studied collections of plants. Research identifies: a country’s biodiversity resources; sustainable uses (for example, in food, medicine or novel natural products); and ways to conserve biodiversity.

Participation on the international stage – A national botanic garden promotes visibility of the country as an international peer, addressing responsibilities as a signatory to international biodiversity and sustainability conventions. International networks provide opportunities.

National pride – National botanic gardens promote awareness of a country’s biodiversity and its contributions, as part of a national identity. Peruvians can be proud of their extensive plant biodiversity and the many ways in which plants are connected to their culture.

Background

Awareness of the benefits a national botanic garden could provide for Perú has been growing, with the civil society JBNL having been a particularly strong voice advocating for such a garden over many years. To create further forward movement, a ‘scoping study’ was commissioned by CONCYTEC and the British Council in the autumn of 2019 for external UK experts to explore the potential for a national botanic garden of Perú. The core objective has been to make recommendations toward a subsequent formal Feasibility Study. Multiple Peruvian perspectives were gathered through site visits and interviews with fifty people in November, along with a stakeholder workshop in February. Analysis also considered good practice for botanic gardens, internationally and particularly in the UK. Conclusions and recommendations are offered for consideration, as Perú approaches its *Bicentenario*.

Key conclusions

A fundamental conclusion from the scoping study is that the concept of a national botanic garden for Perú has met with a positive reception from across multiple perspectives. It is seen as a good idea, that is right for Perú at this time. A national botanic garden is worthy of further investigation, through a formal Feasibility Study.

Biodiversity and its conservation are recognised as important to Perú. Certainly, individuals and organisations involved in botany, uses of plants, and the environment are positive. For some, the goal arouses real passion. In addition, even the private sector has shown interest; for example, surveys returned by CONFIEP members identify multiple positive features for a national botanic garden. Support from multiple angles will strengthen the national botanic garden, initially and also in long-term resilience. The positive interest shown from multiple perspectives is a vital resource for the development of a national botanic garden of Perú.

Recommendations

Necessary components of a national botanic garden

1. A clear consensus view has emerged such that we recommend that the Feasibility Study be framed with a multi-dimensional national botanic garden as the goal; it should include research, collections/conservation and education/awareness-raising. In terms of related infrastructure, the scoping study identified: research space (laboratories); collections (Herbarium, live collections, seed banks); education facilities; elements for entertainment/enjoyment/tourism; conference and teleconference facilities.
2. The scale, nature, physical infrastructure and costings for options for each element will need to be developed by the Feasibility Study. Staff requirements will need to be explored along with options developed during the Feasibility Study.
3. The Feasibility Study should investigate models for how these elements could be put together and also the garden's size. (For example, the city-based Royal Botanic Gardens of Edinburgh is @ 28HA.) Location is of course a key issue. It is likely that a working group, alongside the Feasibility Study, will need to explore (and/or capture) location opportunities as they arise.

Optimising capacity

4. There is an impressive array of related expertise and activity in Perú, albeit currently fragmented. To optimize Perú's capacity, we recommend that the Feasibility Study offer ways of facilitating collaborations and achieving complementarity of the national botanic garden with other Peruvian institutions, universities, research stations, herbaria, museums, gardens, etc. We recommend that the Feasibility Study explore variations on a 'hub and spokes' or 'hub and network' model to take advantage of the extensive, though fragmented, expertise in Perú. This model met with wide approval in interviews. Whatever the nature of the 'hub', this would allow a full 'national botanic garden initiative' to include as 'spokes' the many dedicated organizations in Perú that do important related work and to facilitate synergies across them. In terms of reaching large and diverse audiences, creating synergy with multiple partners, tourism and ready international connectivity, it is likely that the national botanic garden itself will need to be a new entity in Lima. However, within Lima and across Perú, the 'national botanic garden' initiative in its broadest sense (e.g. a 'Biodiversity Institute of Perú') should be a robust network that facilitates interactions, sharing and development of new opportunities. This would be a 'win-win-win', not a 'one winner takes all'.
5. We recommend that the Feasibility Study embed exploration of international connectivity (e.g. with the UK) as offering opportunities across multiple dimensions, including research and good management practice. For instance, there are opportunities to develop genuine research partnerships with UK institutions, that could benefit Perú. On the more administrative side, good practice could be shared on, for example, compliance with international statutes and regulations regarding biodiversity.
6. A message that emerged forcefully from the stakeholder workshop is that a national botanic garden of Perú could be internationally unique and nationally important if it brought together knowledge of the nation's plant diversity with understanding of its cultural diversity. An example would be to highlight various foods and other uses from around the country. We recommend that the Feasibility Study be framed to promote a unique Peruvian identity for the national botanic garden.

Securing the benefits

7. The diverse nature of potential allies requires a diverse body, such as an independent Board, that will promote and sustain engagement across them all. We recommend that the Feasibility Study investigate models for a multi-player, independent Board that includes (and engages) multiple perspectives while also providing continuity and resilience in the face of political changes. This blend of autonomy with accountability was identified repeatedly in interviews as critical for sustainability – and can be seen in other countries' national botanic gardens.
8. The Feasibility Study will of course need to consider potential funding sources (initial and long-term) for the full garden and/or its elements.
9. An initiative which aimed too low and did not strive for excellence would be vulnerable. Interviewees ranging from civil organisations to tourism to research effectively advised: 'If you're going to do it – do it right!' We would strongly encourage the Feasibility Study to take excellence as its starting point. A vision of an outstanding national botanic garden for Perú will open doors to opportunities nationally and internationally. This will promote effective capacity as well as tourism and important partnerships within and beyond Perú. Of course, costings and practicalities will need to be detailed and later decisions will need to be taken as to options. But, the excitement of an ambitious vision of excellence will engage partners and commitment, and even funding, in ways that an overly modest scenario will not.
10. Through its visits, questions and workshop, our early study helped to, as it were, 'seed' the idea of a national botanic garden in some minds and 'water' the concept in other minds already thinking along those lines. Whether part of the Feasibility Study per se, or a parallel process perhaps implemented by a working group, we encourage a continuity of dialogues and actions to help commitment to the national botanic garden flourish