

Intercultural awajún governance model to strengthen inclusive public management in a local government in Amazonas, Peru

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Abstract

To design an intercultural governance model for the Awajún people aimed at strengthening inclusive public management in a local government in the Amazonas region of Peru. An applied, descriptive, quantitative study with a non-experimental, cross-sectional design was conducted. The population consisted of key actors linked to local public management and intercultural affairs; a non-probabilistic sample of 60 participants was selected, including Awajún leaders, public officials and members of civil society organizations. Data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire, validated by expert judgment and a pilot test. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to characterize three dimensions of inclusive public management: strategic planning, policy implementation and program evaluation. In the dimension of strategic planning, 47% of respondents perceived the level as good, 40% as fair and 13% as low. For policy implementation, 53% rated it as good, 37% as fair and 10% as low. Program evaluation was the weakest dimension: 27% considered it good, 50% fair and 23% low. These findings reveal partial progress in planning and implementation, but substantial shortcomings in evaluation and in the systematic incorporation of intercultural criteria and Awajún participation. On this basis, an intercultural Awajún governance model was developed, structured around three dimensions intercultural strategic planning, participatory implementation and culturally relevant evaluation organized into four phases: awareness-raising, participatory diagnosis, co-design and implementation, and intercultural evaluation. The proposed model offers a concrete pathway to strengthen inclusive public management in an Awajún territory, aligning local government practices with principles of social justice, citizen participation and intercultural recognition.

Keywords: Intercultural governance, Inclusive public management, Awajún, Citizen participation, Indigenous peoples

1. Introduction

Intercultural governance has become a pressing issue in highly diverse societies where traditional public policies fail to respond equitably to the needs of all social groups. Within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 5, the United Nations emphasizes the importance of building strong and inclusive institutions that reduce structural inequalities and guarantee the participation of historically excluded populations, including indigenous peoples (United Nations, 2022). Comparative studies show that when decision-making structures are vertical and weakly representative, economic, political and cultural inequalities are reinforced, undermining the sustainability of public interventions (Daniella et al., 2021; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, 2020; Afanasieva et al., 2020).

At the international level, some countries have advanced towards intercultural governance models that formally and practically incorporate indigenous peoples into decision-making processes. In Canada

and New Zealand, for example, co-management mechanisms and the recognition of territorial rights have strengthened indigenous participation in the management of resources and local policies (Smith & Brown, 2021). However, the literature stresses that such models are effective only when they are adapted to the specific socio-cultural context and sustained by political will, adequate resources and clear normative frameworks (Ray et al., 2024; Shi & Yang, 2025; Sohns et al., 2024).

In Latin America, the panorama is paradoxical: there are countries that have incorporated principles of plurinationality and indigenous participation into their constitutions, while others have not moved beyond formal declarations that are weakly translated into practice (Pérez, 2023). Bolivia and Ecuador are often cited as references for the constitutional integration of plurinationality, whereas Mexico and Colombia still face structural obstacles to implementing intercultural policies despite having advanced legal frameworks (Matos, 2010). Overall, this body of work shows that legal

recognition is not enough; concrete governance devices are needed to ensure effective indigenous participation throughout the entire public management cycle.

In Peru, Amazonian indigenous peoples such as the Awajún have historically faced linguistic, territorial and political barriers that limit their participation in defining development priorities and evaluating policies that directly affect them (Grote, 2024). Despite normative advances in prior consultation and collective rights, the translation of these frameworks into local management practices remains limited, especially at subnational levels. Several analyses indicate that weak articulation between the state and indigenous organizations undermines the legitimacy of public decisions and deepens institutional mistrust (UNESCO, 2022; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, 2020).

Theoretically, this study is grounded in Fraser's social justice framework, which argues that equity requires the interdependent dimensions of cultural recognition, fair redistribution and effective political representation (Fraser, 2008). It also draws on Ansell and Gash's concept of collaborative governance, which emphasizes consensus-building between state and social actors through participatory and horizontal processes (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The notion of citizen participation connects with Arnstein's classic "ladder of participation", which ranges from manipulation to citizen control and shows that only the upper rungs correspond to effective and substantive participation (Arnstein, 1969; Aquino et al., 2024; Del Valle, 2024; Hongladarom & Bendasak, 2024; Moghavvemi et al., 2025).

Against this backdrop, the general objective of this research is to design an intercultural governance model for the Awajún people to strengthen inclusive public management in a local government in the Amazonas region of Peru in 2025. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) diagnose the level of inclusive public management, (2) determine the characteristics that an intercultural governance model adapted to the Awajún people should have, and (3) validate the proposed model through expert judgment. The central hypothesis is that implementing such a model will improve the

inclusion and participation of Awajún communities in public management, in line with international standards of inclusive governance (United Nations, 2022; Smith & Brown, 2021).

2. Methodology

From a typological standpoint, the research is classified as applied and descriptive, as it aims to generate a concrete governance model based on an empirical diagnosis, with the purpose of improving inclusive public management. Its applied nature lies in the intention to provide a practical tool for a local government, while its descriptive character is reflected in the emphasis on characterizing actors' perceptions of current management. This approach is consistent with previous studies on intercultural policies that combine theoretical reflection and empirical analysis to support management proposals (UNESCO, 2022; Gómez & Torres, 2022).

The study adopts a quantitative approach, since it works with numerical information obtained through structured surveys, which allows patterns of responses and levels of perception in different dimensions of inclusive public management to be described. The design is non-experimental, cross-sectional and descriptive-propositional, because the variables are not manipulated but rather observed as they occur in the context of the local government in Amazonas in 2025 (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The propositional component lies in using the diagnostic results as a baseline for constructing the Awajún intercultural governance model, following the logic of studies that articulate descriptive analysis and model design (Smith & Brown, 2021; Pérez, 2023).

The main variables are intercultural governance and inclusive public management. Intercultural governance is conceptualized as the process through which cultural diversity is integrated into decision-making structures, with emphasis on citizen participation, cultural inclusion and political representation (García et al., 2023; Ahmed et al., 2024). These dimensions allow the degree to which policies incorporate the visions and practices of Awajún communities to be evaluated, in line with studies that highlight the importance of indigenous worldviews in public policy design (Smith & Brown, 2021). Inclusive public management, in turn, is

operationalized in three dimensions: strategic planning, policy implementation and program evaluation, consistent with the governance cycle proposed in the collaborative governance literature (Ansell & Gash, 2008; UNESCO, 2022).

The target population is made up of Awajún community leaders, public servants of the local government of Amazonas and members of civil society organizations involved in public management and cultural inclusion. Given the specialized nature of the phenomenon under study, a non-probabilistic, purposive sampling strategy was applied, selecting participants on the basis of their experience in public management and community leadership (UNESCO, 2022). The total population of the territorial scope is approximately 20,202 inhabitants; a sample of 60 individuals was used, considered sufficient to obtain relevant information and adequately represent the key perceptions needed for model analysis (Gómez & Torres, 2022; Smith & Brown, 2021).

The data collection technique was the survey, applied through a structured questionnaire with closed questions and a five-point Likert scale designed to measure perceptions of participation, cultural inclusion and political representation, as well as planning, implementation and evaluation within public management. This type of instrument is widely used in governance and public policy research because of its capacity to capture nuances in actors' assessments (Likert, 1932; UNESCO, 2022). The questionnaire was administered to Awajún leaders, local government officials and representatives of civil society organizations, following methodological recommendations for research in intercultural contexts (García et al., 2023).

Regarding validity and reliability, the instruments were subjected to expert judgment and a pilot test. The expert panel, composed of specialists in public management, interculturality and territorial development, reviewed clarity, coherence and cultural relevance of the items (UNESCO, 2022; Ansell & Gash, 2008). The pilot test was conducted on a small group of participants with similar characteristics to those in the main sample and made it possible to identify potential ambiguities or comprehension difficulties. This procedure is consistent with recommendations for culturally

sensitive instruments in studies involving indigenous peoples (Smith & Brown, 2021; García et al., 2023).

Data analysis relied on descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), processed using SPSS to ensure precision and reliability. The results are presented through tables that summarize the distribution of responses in each dimension of inclusive public management. Ethically, the study adhered to institutional regulations on research involving human participants and to the principles of respect, justice and beneficence, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality and the right to withdraw without consequences (United Nations, 2022; Pérez, 2023). Data were used exclusively for academic purposes, in line with good practices for research with indigenous communities (UNESCO, 2022; García et al., 2023).

3. Results

Table 1. Dimension 1. strategic planning

Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	8	13
Fair	24	40
Good	28	47
Total	60	100

In the strategic planning dimension, nearly half of respondents (47%) perceived a good level, while 40% considered it fair and 13% low. This suggests the existence of a basic organizational structure with planning mechanisms in place, yet with clear gaps in integrating intercultural criteria and Awajún participation in the definition of objectives and budget execution. These findings are consistent with studies that report formal advances in planning that nonetheless remain weakly aligned with indigenous priorities (UNESCO, 2022; Gómez & Torres, 2022).

Table 2. Dimension 2. policy implementation

Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	6	10
Fair	22	37
Good	32	53
Total	60	100

With regard to policy implementation, 53% of participants rated it as good, 37% as fair and 10% as

low. These results indicate that, although there are efforts to carry out planned interventions, continuity and monitoring remain uneven. The literature notes that without clear coordination mechanisms and active community involvement, implementation tends to be fragmented and difficult to sustain (UNESCO, 2022; Ray et al., 2024). In the Awajún context, the findings suggest that policy execution does not always rely on intercultural dialogue or shared responsibility, which can reduce alignment with local worldviews and priorities (García et al., 2023; Smith & Brown, 2021).

Table 3. Dimension 3. program evaluation

Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	14	23
Fair	30	50
Good	16	27
Total	60	100

Program evaluation appears as the weakest dimension. Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) perceived it as low, half (50%) as fair and only 27% as good. This pattern reveals a fragile institutional culture of evaluation, focused more on fulfilling formal requirements than on the systematic analysis of results, impacts and lessons learned. In line with the findings of UNESCO (2022) and Ansell and Gash (2008), the limited use of participatory evaluation mechanisms, co-constructed indicators and feedback processes hinders institutional learning and the continuous improvement of programs targeting the Awajún population.

4. Discussion

First, the results show that inclusive public management in the selected local government in Amazonas exhibits partial progress but does not yet consolidate as a fully intercultural system. In terms of social justice, Fraser (2008) argues that equity requires articulation of cultural recognition, redistribution and political representation; the findings indicate that these dimensions are unevenly developed in the Awajún territory. The relative stability perceived in planning and implementation contrasts with the weaknesses in evaluation, suggesting that the management cycle closes without comprehensive analysis of impacts or meaningful

community participation in assessing programs (UNESCO, 2022; Pérez, 2023).

In the strategic planning dimension, the combination of good and fair ratings points to a structure that has introduced planning mechanisms but has not consistently internalized the perspectives and priorities of the Awajún people. This is consistent with studies showing that local governments often demonstrate formal progress in planning yet retain centralist and technocratic logics in the definition of goals (Gómez & Torres, 2022). The lack of substantive involvement of indigenous leaders in formulating plans and budgets limits the government's capacity to respond to demands for cultural recognition and just redistribution highlighted by social justice theory (Fraser, 2008; Smith & Brown, 2021).

Regarding policy implementation, the predominance of good and fair ratings suggests that planned actions are being carried out, but with problems of continuity and coordination. Previous research indicates that in the absence of clear mechanisms for co-management and sustained dialogue, implementation processes tend to fragment and lose legitimacy among indigenous communities (UNESCO, 2022; Ray et al., 2024). In the Awajún case, the results suggest that program execution is not always framed within spaces of intercultural dialogue or shared decision-making, which can translate into interventions that only partially reflect the local worldview and priorities (García et al., 2023; Smith & Brown, 2021).

Program evaluation appears as the most delayed yet most critical dimension for improving public management quality. The high proportion of low and fair ratings reflects a weak evaluation culture focused on procedural compliance rather than outcomes and impacts from the perspective of beneficiaries (UNESCO, 2022). The literature highlights that, in intercultural contexts, evaluation should incorporate indicators developed jointly with communities and feedback mechanisms that inform policy adjustments (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Gómez & Torres, 2022). In the local government of Amazonas, the absence or limited use of these components hinders institutional learning and the continuous improvement of programs aimed at the Awajún people.

From a participatory perspective, the findings

reinforce the relevance of moving beyond the lower rungs of Arnstein's ladder characterized by manipulation or tokenism towards forms of partnership and citizen control (Arnstein, 1969; Aquino et al., 2024). Intercultural governance involves not only listening to communities but also sharing decision-making power and accountability across the stages of planning, implementation and evaluation. International experiences show that models integrating indigenous voices into joint management bodies tend to strengthen policy legitimacy and trust in institutions (Smith & Brown, 2021; Ray et al., 2024). In light of the present results, progressing towards these higher levels of participation is key to transforming relationships between the state and the Awajún people.

Finally, the proposed Awajún intercultural governance model structured around intercultural strategic planning, participatory implementation and culturally relevant evaluation, and articulated through the phases of awareness-raising, participatory diagnosis, co-design and implementation, and intercultural evaluation responds directly to the gaps identified in the diagnostic phase. Empirical evidence and expert judgment indicate that the model's internal coherence, operational feasibility and cultural relevance make it a promising tool for strengthening inclusive public management (Ansell & Gash, 2008; UNESCO, 2022). As Poeze and Knapp (2019) and García et al. (2023) argue, the success of governance models lies in their flexibility and adaptability to different contexts; thus, the Awajún model could serve as a reference for other Amazonian local governments, provided that the specific characteristics of each indigenous people are respected.

5. Conclusions

The study shows that inclusive public management in the analysed local government in Amazonas has achieved partial progress in strategic planning and policy implementation, but faces significant weaknesses in program evaluation, particularly regarding the incorporation of intercultural criteria and Awajún participation. These weaknesses reflect an incomplete implementation of social justice principles, as recognition, redistribution and

representation remain only partially articulated in the management cycle (Fraser, 2008; Pérez, 2023).

In response to this situation, the proposed Awajún intercultural governance model centred on intercultural strategic planning, participatory implementation and culturally relevant evaluation, articulated in four phases offers a concrete pathway towards more just, representative and culturally sensitive public management. Expert validation supports its coherence, feasibility and adaptability to similar contexts. Gradual adoption of the model could help narrow the gap between formal recognition of indigenous rights and their effective exercise, strengthen trust in local institutions and consolidate an active intercultural citizenship. Future research should focus on piloting the model in different Amazonian local governments and evaluating its impacts on participation, decision-making quality and the well-being of Awajún communities.

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