

# interact

The magazine of **PROGRESSIO**  
CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES

A photograph of a young man with a short haircut, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark blue jacket over a red shirt. He is holding a large bouquet of flowers, including white baby's breath, yellow chrysanthemums, and red flowers. The background shows an outdoor setting with utility poles, a yellow building, and a white car.

## Changing lives

How Progressio development workers  
help change people's lives

**Also in this issue:**  
Illegal logging in Ecuador  
Women's roles in Somaliland  
A question of faith in Yemen



editorial

## Changing lives

In 2005, on a visit to Peru and Ecuador, I met Progressio development worker Jaime Torres (pictured on the front of this *Interact*). I wrote at the time (<http://incatrials.blogspot.com/>):

'Jaime is a young Colombian who gave up a prestigious job in Bogotá to come to a rural community to teach farmers to use computers. If that sounds stupid, it's not. It's really amazing. There are 13,000 farms in the district and they all rely on water distributed through a complex system of irrigation channels. The water is controlled by local irrigation councils, which need to know how much water to send where, and when. The irrigation councils have to apply to the government to get the water, so need to know how much water is needed, and when. The farmers need to know which crops to plant and when, so that they can get the best prices, and be sure they will have enough water for the crops to grow...

'Jaime has devised a database system to collate all the information, and a wireless internet system to make it accessible to the farmers and the irrigation councils... [He has] faced problems head on, solved them creatively, and created a sustainable system that provides a simple, workable solution to a problem faced by an entire district of farms. It's like one of those enlarged pictures of snowflakes: it's complex, simple and beautiful, all at one time. I was very impressed.'

Meeting Jaime and other Progressio development workers brought home to me the value of the work that we do, and the people who do it. I hope that this edition of *Interact* will give you a similar insight into their work.

Cover picture: Graham Freer/Progressio

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Unit 3, Canonbury Yard  
190a New North Road  
London N1 7BJ  
tel +44 (0)20 7354 0883  
fax +44 (0)20 7359 0017  
e-mail [enquiries@progressio.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@progressio.org.uk)  
website [www.progressio.org.uk](http://www.progressio.org.uk)

#### Progressio Ireland

c/o CORI, Bloomfield Avenue  
Off Morehampton Road  
Donnybrook, Dublin 4, Ireland  
tel +353 (0)1 6144966  
e-mail [progressio@eircom.net](mailto:progressio@eircom.net)  
Charity reg. in Ireland no. CHY 14451  
Company reg. no. 385465

#### Editor Alastair Whitson

**Executive Director** Christine Allen

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Frank Tondeur with his counterpart from ADM, Daysi Rivera.

# Harsh realities, positive attitudes

**M**ANY PEOPLE will have wondered why Nicaragua, despite having invested millions of dollars in environmental education (it is said that its per capita investment in training is the highest in the world), has not achieved the hoped-for results in tackling environmental problems: its rivers are becoming ever drier, its water more contaminated and its forest-cover less extensive.

Naturally, there are a number of factors at work, but our present concern is to find out if training programmes are really changing the behaviour of those involved. People have spoken of the pressures affecting society: the impossibility for a human being to concentrate, when listening to a talk, because of the many problems besetting him or her. And that is a harsh reality in Nicaragua.

Questions have also been raised about talks given by development workers that involve little participation, and the lack of a methodology for popular education needed to 'teach' groups with a limited

degree of literacy. Even malnutrition among the most vulnerable sections of the population, which prevents their effectively assimilating information, has been taken into account.

And of course, it has been noted that people living in poverty plunder the forests in order to survive, even though they know it is wrong. It has also been said that other attitudes exist that have nothing to do with survival (such as throwing rubbish out in the street) and which, despite the campaigns that have been waged, do not appear to change.

What is certain is that to change people's attitudes requires a process of training and consciousness-raising that may take many years. How, for example, can we explain to people the importance of collecting rubbish when they have lived in the midst of it since they were children, and see it as normal?

The other approach is to exert one's influence so that the real polluters, those who produce the rubbish and the agrochemicals, bear the costs of decontamination. We cannot continue to

ask poor people to go on bearing the costs of environmental protection, for the simple reason that it is immoral. So, if a tax was imposed on every plastic bottle found on a company's premises, instead of the people who threw them out being fined, it would make those companies change their attitudes and look for a solution to the problem.

At the same time, if we offered an incentive to those who do not use pollutants, those who prevent pollution, and those who make an effort to preserve natural resources, many people would soon change their attitudes. Because we also need a new culture that goes beyond the principle 'the polluter pays'.

International development organisations and governments have invested millions in educating people often without measuring the real impact of these efforts. For those organisations maybe the time has come to think about following a new strategy [one that involves listening and empowering] if we want things to change, before it is too late.

*Franck Tondeur is a Progressio development worker with ADM (the Association for Municipal Development) in Boaco, Nicaragua. He is from Belgium.*



## Latin American churches discuss responses to HIV and AIDS

**D**IVERSE FAITH COMMUNITIES from across Latin America came together in Cuenca, Ecuador, in March to discuss experiences and perspectives on HIV and AIDS.

The conference – titled ‘Know the truth and it will set you free’ (John 8:32) – was organised by the Social Pastoral of the Cuenca Archdiocese (a Progressio partner organisation) with the support of the Catholic Relief Service and Progressio.

The organisers were keen to open up an ecumenical dialogue on the topic because they recognise that while many

Participants brought experiences from across Latin America to the conference in Cuenca, Ecuador.

churches have been active in prevention, training and care of people living with HIV, others have been silent or indifferent to the problem.

Religious leaders working on HIV and AIDS in eight countries in Latin America presented their experiences to an audience drawn from churches, faith-based organisations and social organisations including Anglican, Jewish, Methodist, Baptist, Evangelical, and Catholic churches. Development workers and staff from Progressio also took part.

Participants were encouraged to analyse HIV not just as a medical problem, but as an issue which causes rights violations, poverty, emotional trauma and damage to bodies and souls through discrimination and isolation.

At the end of the event a joint declaration was drafted which takes a stand against moralistic or simplistic responses and the idea that HIV and AIDS is a ‘punishment’ inflicted by God. The declaration affirms Christians’ and churches’ support, love and solidarity for all people living with HIV and AIDS and their commitment to work on the theme.

## Somaliland media covers HIV and AIDS stories

**J**OURNALISTS IN SOMALILAND met with people living with HIV and AIDS at a Progressio-sponsored meeting in December, to hear their stories and gain a better understanding of how to present HIV and AIDS issues in the media.

Following the meeting, Progressio and partner organisation Talowadag helped set up an editorial committee to advise and support newspaper journalists writing on HIV and AIDS. The initiative is supported by the Mandeeg group of newspapers whose journalists will be encouraged to write regular articles on the realities of living with HIV and AIDS.

Progressio development worker Eliezer Wangulu commented: ‘This will be a major breakthrough in enabling people living with HIV and AIDS to share their experiences and hence contribute immensely in the fight against stigma and discrimination, which is rife in Somaliland.’



## Film challenges attitudes to migration

**A**TITUDES TO MIGRATION are explored from the perspective of Dominicans and Haitians in a new film directed by Progressio development worker Tigu Guimarães.

*El desafío de la convivencia* (The challenge of coexistence) will be premiered in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, in April. The film explores why Haitians migrate to the Dominican Republic and draws parallels with why Dominicans

migrate to the US and Europe, how they live, what they do and the social prejudice surrounding them.

By providing a rare opportunity for Dominicans and Haitians to share their similar migratory experiences, the film aims to improve understanding and tolerance between the two neighbours, and to show how policy-making can influence people’s experiences both positively and negatively.

### interactnow

Read more about Dominico-Haitians on page 16. To find out more about *El desafío de la convivencia* go to [www.eldesafiodelaconvivencia.blogspot.com/](http://www.eldesafiodelaconvivencia.blogspot.com/)

## Communities in Peru say 'no' to mining

ON 16 SEPTEMBER, 2007, three separate districts in northern Peru held referendums on whether to allow mining on their land. These agricultural communities depend on water for their livelihood and are concerned about mining's potential impacts on their scarce and fragile resources.

Although the referendums were non-binding, about 53% of eligible voters in the three communities came out to vote. Many of them had to walk several hours or even days to reach their voting centre. More than 97% voted against allowing mining into their zone.

In the months preceding the referendums, Progreso partner organisation Guarango provided media advocacy training and technical assistance to community leaders in the two affected provinces (Ayabaca and Huancabamba). It conducted a formal workshop, produced video and radio spots to support the campaign, filmed two of the referendums and produced two short videos chronicling the process, as well as a longer video report on the Majaz case. (The mining company involved is called Minera Majaz.) All these materials have been compiled into a DVD, which Guarango is distributing to community leaders and media and activist groups at the local, national and international level.

A previous Guarango film had

documented community opposition to a proposed mining project in Tambogrande. Progressio development worker Stephanie Boyd, who worked with Guarango to produce the film *Tambogrande: Mangos, Murder, Mining*, said: 'It was exciting to see a large delegation of observers from Tambogrande monitoring the referendum. The Tambograndinos were proud that their story had inspired the communities affected by the Majaz project to hold their own referendum.'

During the referendum campaign, the Majaz case gained nationwide attention. It was discussed on Peru's top-rated news magazine programmes and garnered front page stories in major newspapers. Peru's public ombudsman's office responded, calling on the government to respect the right of local citizens

to hold referendums on issues of local concern. It also urged the government to initiate a dialogue process with leaders and civil society groups from the three affected communities. The pressure worked and the government initiated formal negotiations in Piura, the state where the concession is located, with leaders and stakeholders. During the talks the government steadfastly refused to recognise the results of the referendum and in response community leaders suspended the negotiations.

Magdiel Carrion, president of the Farmer's Federation of Ayabaca, vows that they will continue the struggle until their cloud forest is declared a protected, non-mining zone: 'because if we allow them to contaminate our water, everyone who eats our crops will be contaminated,' he says.

### interactnow

Watch English-language versions of the Majaz video spots on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (search on Majaz)

Stephanie Boyd



A woman voting in the Ayabaca referendum.

## Somaliland takes stand against gender violence

PROGRESSIO PARTNER ORGANISATION Nagaad in Somaliland organised 16 days of activism against gender violence in Nov/Dec last year.

As well as various awareness-raising and community education activities, Nagaad brought together religious and traditional leaders to discuss domestic

violence and the break-up of family ties and cultural values. Following the discussion, the leaders called upon communities to work with government to ensure that gender oppression is eliminated and that traditional, religious and national laws for the promotion of women's rights are in place.

The government of Somaliland has since responded by convening stakeholder meetings to develop a national gender policy and to promote an amendment to the constitution aimed at increasing the representation of women in Parliament and other political arenas.

### interactnow

See page 15 for more on Nagaad's 'women in decision-making' project

Progressio's approach to development work is about connecting with people and growing with them, writes **Christine Allen**



# Making connections

IT'S THE NATURE OF ORGANISATIONS TODAY that we need to look at how effective we are in our work, and be able to demonstrate the difference that we are making.

This edition of *Interact* looks at our development workers and their impact – and as you will see, it's the relational aspect of the development worker placement that is so important. It starts where people are at and develops from there. It's not a question of someone (from the rich North) 'giving to' the partner in the South. It's more two-way than that. Indeed, many of our development workers are from the South, so our model of development is much more a process of mutual growth and learning.

As I was reading the different articles, the strapline that we use – changing minds: changing lives – kept coming into my head. We seek to make a difference to the lives of people, especially those who are impoverished and marginalised, but how important it is also to affect

attitudes, consciousness and understanding. This applies to the South as well as here in the North. It would be easy to say that 'changing minds: changing lives' means changing minds in the North and changing lives in the South, but the reality is more complex.

Yes, through development workers we can make a difference in the lives of people in the South and help partner organisations achieve real practical change for their communities. Yes, we want to raise awareness here in the North and encourage people to take action in solidarity and campaign. But equally, changing the attitudes and consciousness of those who are poor and marginalised, and those who work with them, can be a necessity for practical change to take place. The women in Somaliland (page 15) who are standing for Parliamentary election or who are already political leaders are the result of having their own consciousness raised, as well as having opportunities offered and structures opened to them.

And likewise in the North, the recent *lives* simply challenge brings home to us that it is not just how we think that matters, but how we act. We can make practical changes to our lifestyles that can help not only the planet, but the people on it.

Of course, it's not easy. Addressing lifestyle changes can be challenging. But read the example (page 14) of indigenous Peruvians facing up to centuries of oppression, racism and abuse, and our lifestyle challenges become set in a different context. To me, this means that we find different ways to live out our solidarity. It all takes place in very different cultural contexts but our overall purpose is to make both a mental and physical connection between people.

The papal encyclical *Populorum Progressio* talks about sending overseas not just experts but people who are 'tempered with love'. Their approach must not be domineering but respectful and seeking to work in a spirit of love. Although Progressio development workers can be of all faiths and none, this approach is central to their work and mission. Reading the articles, you can imagine the spirit of comradeship,

**Their impact is not just in the work that they do, but so importantly in the way that they do it**

solidarity and love that underpins the work they do and the relationships they have. Their impact is not just in the work they do, but so importantly in the way that they do it and the relationships they, and Progressio, have with organisations and people around the world.

We are about helping people to grow in their knowledge, ability and capacity, but ultimately the success of our development work is based on us leaving, and people being able to continue to work without us. Sustainable development means strengthening and supporting local people and organisations to be more effective in doing the work themselves. Whilst development workers may only be in a country for a couple of years, their legacy should last much longer. That's impact.

*Christine Allen is Progressio's executive director.*



Progressio development worker Stephanie Boyd (see page 11) and Ernesto Cabellos from partner organisation Guarango filming during the Majaz referendum (news, page 5).

Progressio's development workers play a key role in changing people's lives in the 11 countries where we work. But what does the experience mean to them – what do they think they are achieving, and what do they get out of it for themselves?

# BREAKING NEW GROUND

Patrick Reilly considers the challenges ahead as he looks forward to a new role in Somaliland

I'VE LIVED MOST OF MY LIFE in Alaska, but for Progressio I'll be working in Hargeisa, Somaliland, as a local democratic governance advisor in a think tank called the Academy for Peace and Development.

It's challenging enough to give good governance advice in a setting that you're used to, and for me I'll be in a new cultural setting – a Muslim or Islamic culture. I'm hoping I'll be open enough to listen to what their needs are, as that's actually where I'll be getting my direction from.

The biggest challenge will be how to put procedures in place so that people get to have a voice in how they should live as a community. Most places, when people get to help decide or participate in their future, they always feel much better off. Even if the decisions that they're trying to implement aren't accepted by the rest of their community, at least having an avenue to express their voice makes them more well off...

I'm mostly looking forward to meeting the people – because realistically there's a concern about going into a new community, particularly one that's still relatively foreign to me. But that's the excitement too because I realise that once I'm there – at least in my experience of prior travels – people open up as long as I can be relaxed and get to visit with them.

While I've got lots of formal education, I know really when it comes to interacting and relating to people, it's more from the neck down than up in your head. So that's what I'm looking forward to: trying to relate to people one on one.

*This is an edited extract from an interview conducted with Patrick the week before he left for Somaliland. After arriving in Somaliland, Patrick has decided to learn Somali. 'While fluency may not be within my grasp within the time frame of this position, the ability to be conversational in Somali is possible. Somali language skills will give me a better understanding of the local politics/culture and this improves the advice I give as we move forward with the decentralisation project.'*



## interactnow

Listen to Patrick Reilly's podcast in full at [www.progressio.org.uk](http://www.progressio.org.uk) – go to 'country programmes' then 'Somaliland'

# OUTSIDE THE COMFORT ZONE

**Michelle Lowe** shares her thoughts after arriving in Ecuador

HAVE BEEN THINKING A LOT about what it means to work in a developing country compared to being an employee of a charity tackling the same issues in the UK or Ireland. Although many of the issues, problems and ways of working are the same, the politics are very different, and can be a little uncomfortable at times.

Before I arrived in Quito (in May 2007), I had somehow thought that I was going to be doing the same communications and campaigning work that I was used to, but in a different country. In some ways I am, but the change of location from Edinburgh to Quito and from North to South has many implications.

Of all the new sights, sounds and information, I think the most striking thing for me in my first week here was the huge social inequality. There are massive USA-style shopping malls which are far more glitzy and scary than

anything Edinburgh has to offer, with expensive branded clothing, *lattes* and enormous supermarkets. Meanwhile, outside, throngs of people desperate for some form of income clamour at the windows of cars or leap onto buses to sell chewing gum or joke moustaches for 50 cents each.

In one of my Progressio orientation talks I was told that the average household income in Ecuador is US\$250 a month while the basic basket of necessities is \$430.

Unemployment and underemployment are huge and so many thousands of people leave each year to seek work elsewhere. The first message you see on arriving at Quito airport is a huge billboard: 'Say No to Coyoteism', the smuggling of immigrants into the USA. It's pretty sobering to compare my adventuring journey over here to the frightening forced migration of people in the other direction.

Before I arrived, I don't think I had fully made the connections between my move from North to South and the power relations of development. As part of a UK development organisation with a clear agenda, I am one of many forces trying to shape and change things here. For example, one of Progressio's partners, Coordinadora Ecuatoriana de Agroecología (CEA), is a network of agroecology organisations that supports small-scale sustainable agriculture. One of its coordinators, José Rivadeneira, told the familiar story of farmers pressurised by big supermarket monopolies into

intensive production of a limited variety of vegetables, resulting in loss of crop diversity, contamination and dependency on bought seeds.

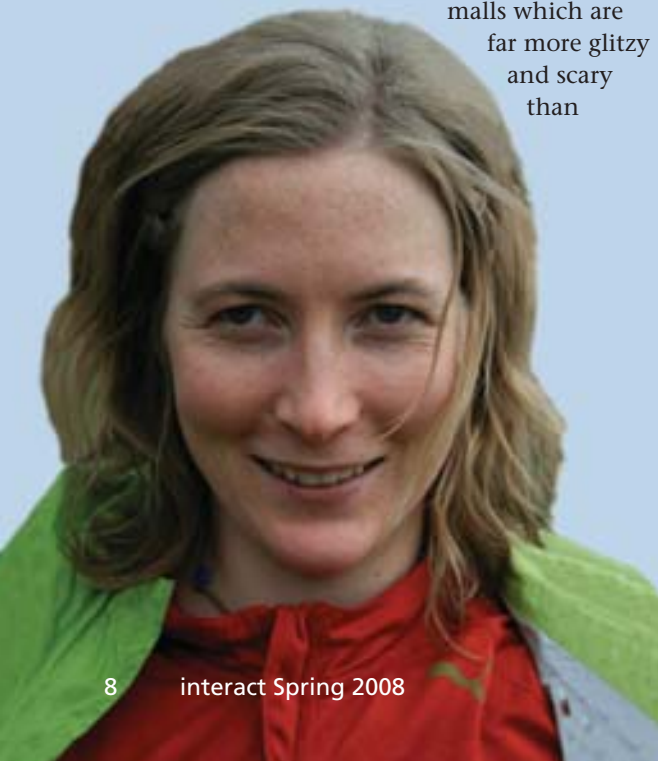
What was new was to hear their objections to organic certification schemes which are seen by many small producers as another form of Northern tyranny in which US and European companies set the criteria, charge unmanageably high fees for registration and place very stringent demands on producers.

They feel these criteria are more related to the interests of the consumer than the interests of the communities and environments where the crops are grown. So CEA is seeking to set up local certification with a greater emphasis on social and

**The most striking thing for me in my first week here was the huge social inequality**

environmental criteria (a new Progressio development worker, Myriam Salazar from Colombia, arrived in August 2007 to support CEA with a project to recover native seeds and agricultural practices).

Since I've been here it has been funny seeing myself through others' eyes: imagining the stereotype I fit into as people try to place me. Taxi drivers for example figure me out in three questions: 'Where are you from?', 'How long are you here for?', 'Ah you must be working for some charity or other ... orphans maybe, or the environment?'. When I try to explain to them what I do, I feel like a nice, idealistic white girl naively imagining I can save the world. The jargon I inevitably slip into to explain – 'development', 'sustainable environment', 'civil society participation', 'advocacy at an international level' – seems a long way from their reality as





they begin their night shifts.

Many people I meet from local organisations may see me and my *gringa* face as money: I'm a possible connection for them to a development organisation in the UK and its funds. And it's amusing how frequently people feel they

have to apologise after criticising northern consumers, lifestyles, companies and culture, as they remember that I am there: as if I am representative of all things evil, exploitative and capitalist. Not a position I often found myself in in Scotland!

*Michelle Lowe works on Advocacy and Communication in Ecuador and Peru.*

## interactnow

This is an edited extract from Michelle Lowe's weblog 'Michelle in the Andes'. Read more from Michelle's weblog at [www.michelleintheandes.blogspot.com](http://www.michelleintheandes.blogspot.com)

For **Charlie Smith**, being a development worker in Peru is a continuing process of sharing and learning

# DISCOVERY & RENEWAL

I'M WRITING THIS while leading a field trip for the 'El Perú puede cambiar tu vida' (Peru can change your life) course that we ran at the Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas. The trip included visits to Chiclayo, Cusco and Puno, and was part of an immersion experience for a group of students from the University of Rochester, New York.

It was the first time I had led one of these courses, and although I was there as coordinator, I also became a

**Each of us has a different experience and we can all learn from one another**

participant to a certain extent. Watching the students taking in what they saw and trying to make sense not only of what is happening in Peru, but also of the world at large, seeing their expressions of emotion, surprise, guilt, fascination, joy and sadness – all the emotions aroused when you visit the South after a life spent in the North – made me think about my first experience of travelling to a 'developing' country (as they say in the North: although as I see it, development has much more to do with human processes than economic growth, and therefore we need to ask ourselves which of our

countries really are the 'developing' ones).

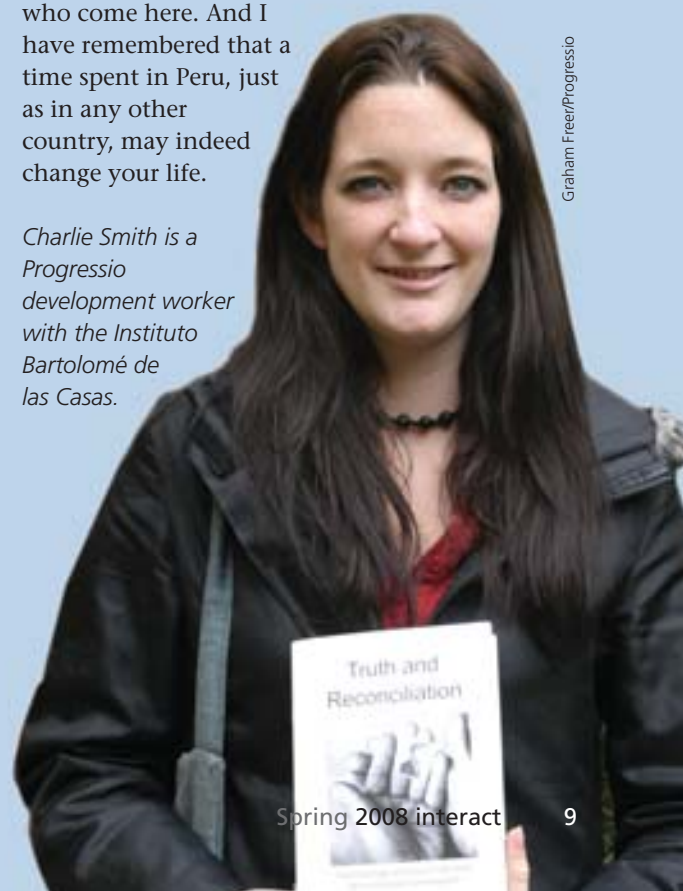
Having lived in Peru for many years, it gives me great pleasure to be able to share my knowledge and experience, and my understanding of the country, and to know that I can help other people to gain an understanding of Peru and the world. At the same time, part of this experience has been to realise that each of us has a different experience and we can all learn from one another. Having lived here for almost five years, it would be easy to think I don't have to go on trying to understand it. But this experience of sharing what I already know, what I feel, and of trying to answer the students' questions, has given me a new opportunity to rediscover Peru for myself, to experience and enjoy many of its different aspects: the coast, the mountains, the countryside and the city.

It has also made me think about the country of my birth, what it means to be a citizen of the North, what the world is like and what roles we play here on earth, and what each of us must do to try to make the world fairer and more just. And to reaffirm that we must never close ourselves off, neither to the country in which we live nor to our roots, because to do that leads to intolerance. It is

fundamental to go on trying to understand the world, to adapt, to fight for change and to celebrate life.

Now that I am about to visit England for the first time in over two years, I am taking the chance to think about who I am, where I come from and where I am going, since I believe that is part of a development worker's life. What I can say now, since this short trip, is that I am very happy where I am, and want to go on learning from this country that is so full of riches, but also from other foreigners who come here. And I have remembered that a time spent in Peru, just as in any other country, may indeed change your life.

*Charlie Smith is a Progressio development worker with the Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas.*



Graham Freer/Progressio

# GROWING STRONGER

**Sanne te Pas** was a Progressio development worker with Las Dignas – the Association of Women for Dignity and Life – in El Salvador

I HAVE LEARNED A LOT about the situation of women who experience violence at the hands of their partners and sexual violence, and about the naturalisation of this violence – and even of child sexual abuse. This came across particularly through fieldwork and through having had the opportunity to attend self-help groups on some occasions. The lack of sexual education and the serious consequences of this, above all for women, has had an impact on me. I feel even stronger now, after having

**More than ever I feel committed to the struggle for a just world, without violence against women**

worked with Las Dignas in defending the importance of a feminist analysis of this problem.

I also learned a lot about living in a country with such a difficult context: of war, injustice, tremendous *machismo*, impunity and hierarchical relationships. I think that I now value more

than ever the tranquillity of my life in Holland, and more than ever I feel committed to the struggle for a just world, without violence against women and without *machismo*.

These years have also taught me that I have to follow my heart in what I do, and they have given me a new dream: to become a documentary maker, in order to be able to continue researching and raising awareness on issues that concern me, and to give voice to the women who are so often not heard ...

My 'old' dream was to carry out research in an activist organisation like Las Dignas, which made me very happy to have found this job. I think that the cycle of capacity building has had good results, judging by how my colleagues have applied their new knowledge or skills in the projects that we have been carrying out together. Even though some of these colleagues have now left Las Dignas, they will undoubtedly continue to work for the wellbeing of women, and continue to be involved in the social movement of El Salvador, so these new skills will not be lost.

Activism has definitely motivated me, and I am very pleased to see that the women's movement seems to be more unified than when I arrived. I feel that this very dynamic of activism, however, means that sufficient time is still not taken to reflect more profoundly on the objectives of this activism, because of the desire 'to do everything'.

Nevertheless, I think that we have achieved a lot if we look at the results. Some of Las Dignas's research processes (press reports, Service Desk dossier) have been strengthened, and various publications have the potential to have an impact – such as the reports on violence against women reported in the press, a leaflet about child sexual abuse, a study on why women do not report domestic violence, and a leaflet on how to strengthen advocacy on the issue of violence against women through social research.

I myself have learned a lot from all these experiences. I hope that my new dream (of making documentaries) becomes a reality. This being the case, I will surely return to make a film about violence against women in El Salvador, and another about the serious consequences of the total criminalisation of abortion.

Well, I say 'surely', but that is my Dutch culture ... here in El Salvador we would probably say 'God willing' ...

*Sanne te Pas completed her two years as a Progressio development worker with Las Dignas in 2007.*



# PLAYING OUR PART

**Stephanie Boyd** reflects on five years of working with Guarango, an independent film and video production company in Peru

**W**HEN I BEGAN WORKING with Guarango, my colleagues were frustrated by the fact that their talents and energies were consumed by making short videos for private companies and government agencies and the occasional non-profit organisation or foreign broadcaster. They had the skills, ideas and talent to make their own independent productions on social justice issues, but lacked the confidence and – more importantly – the contacts with solidarity groups in Lima and abroad.

Connecting Guarango to these groups was, I believe, my most important contribution. I've watched my colleagues grow, both in their skills and self-esteem. Not only have they produced two feature-length, independent documentaries, they have also founded a media advocacy project and have a strong, clear vision for the future development of the organisation.

Five years ago, when I attended press conferences on mining issues in Peru, I was one of the only reporters asking questions about environmental and social issues. Today, the newspapers and television stations are full of debate and commentary on the impact of mining on Peru's natural resources (including water), labour force and social fabric. New laws have been enacted; mining companies are investing more and more money in community development projects and environmental technology; major mining countries like Canada are devising standards



E Sanchez/Guarango

*Stephanie Boyd and Fernando Carrasco, a farming leader from Tambogrande, give a radio interview to promote a screening of the Tambogrande film in Cajamarca – one of a series of public screenings and workshops in Peru on non-violent community resistance using the Tambogrande film. Such workshops are part of Guarango's participatory approach to film-making: using contacts and technical skills to create spaces for marginalised people to bring their stories to the outside world.*

to govern their corporations overseas; and mining communities themselves cannot be tricked or silenced by slick company officials, as they were in the past. Across Peru mining communities have risen up *en masse* and are demanding protection of their natural resources and a say in their own development.

Guarango certainly cannot take full credit for raising awareness on these issues – we are just one player in a larger network that includes leaders from mining communities and activists both in Peru and abroad. But I feel we have played a part in bringing some of Peru's forgotten stories and ignored peoples to the fore.

Yet the process of doing this

raises some searching questions. More than seven years have passed since the village of Choropampa was poisoned by a mercury spill from the world's largest gold

**Mining communities themselves cannot be tricked or silenced by slick company officials, as they were in the past**

mining corporation. They have been years of struggle and frustrated attempts to receive just compensation and medical care. Although the film we made (*Choropampa: The Price of Gold*) continues to be shown in Peru and around the world – in festivals, classrooms,

workshops, church halls and on television – we left their case in the hands of a US law firm and activist groups in Cajamarca and Lima. As media professionals, we had to move onto the next story, but our personal involvement with the town continues.

Seven long years, and yet I'm still witnessing the debilitating effects of the mercury spill, during my too-infrequent visits to Choropampa and in updates from friends. Safe and healthy in the mountains of Cusco, I can't help but feel a pang of guilt as I read Jessica's most recent email:

'I'm in pain and I've got a pounding headache. One night it seemed like my legs and feet

### Seven long years, and yet I'm still witnessing the debilitating effects of the mercury spill

were dead. After a while, I couldn't feel my hands – my fingers were bent and I couldn't bring them together. That's all I remember, because after that I don't recall anything – only

that I woke up the next day in Choropampa's health post...'

This brave young woman from Choropampa is determined to overcome her mercury-related illnesses and finish her studies in veterinary medicine. Reading her email from the sanctity of my new home, at the other end of the country, I realise that Jessica and her fellow villagers are trapped in the past. Like the victims of Hiroshima and Chernobyl, they live with the consequences of their environmental disaster, whereas I remember it only occasionally, while showing the film or writing articles.

I'm hit with that same old feeling of helplessness that plagued me during the years we spent making the film. As a media worker and activist, I can try to draw awareness to Jessica's case, but I can't make the pain go away. I can't make her eyes better or conduct laboratory research or mount a legal case to sue the company for medical care and damages. And worst of all, I can't stop her health from deteriorating.

Many journalists and development workers survive by their apathy. They build up thick skins, immune to the daily sufferings of others – otherwise, the strain would be too tough to bear. They would be incapacitated, unable to support the people they're supposed to be helping. It's tough to write an article or

### When do you stop feeling guilty that you've always got a plane ticket home, an out, an escape?

conduct an interview if one is overcome by grief and compassion, or so goes the common wisdom. Somehow I've never been able to close myself off to human emotion. But how do you strike a balance between being human and a functioning professional? When do you realise you've turned into a machine and no longer care about the people you're working with and see them as subjects, 'the other'? When do you stop feeling guilty that you've always got a plane ticket home, an out, an escape?

Perhaps the fact that I'm still asking these questions, five years later, at the close of my time with Progressio, shows that I'm not completely lost. Whether it's guilt or solidarity, or a jumble of both, these feelings help remind us that we're human. Living in Peru hasn't given me all the answers, but it has stimulated a constant questioning – a joyous, heart-wrenching, bitter and profound learning experience that I will carry with me always.

*Stephanie Boyd's term as a Progressio development worker ended in October 2007. Stephanie is now writing a book about her experiences which will be published by Progressio in 2009 (with a Spanish edition published in Peru by Guarango).*

## What did I learn?

I've always believed that we development workers gain far more from our experiences than we could ever hope to give in return. Here are just a few of the lessons I've learned:

- In order to help others, you must first know who you are and be strong in yourself
- Everyone – I mean EVERYONE – has a story to tell ... we only have to learn to listen to them
- The world is not black and white – allies can be found in the homes of our deepest enemies
- Sometimes you have to pass people the ball and let them run with it (and hope that they score a goal, but take the chance that they might trip over their own shoelaces)
- Despite all our flaws as a species, we humans have the ability to learn from our mistakes
- There is always an alternative to violence
- In order to gain a person's trust, you have to sit down and eat lunch with them
- Never judge a country by its politicians
- If you're trying to change the world and everyone likes you – you're doing something wrong
- Sometimes those with the least money have the most to give
- A united people can never be defeated
- The small can overcome the rich and powerful
- The impossible is always possible

# THE HURRICANE THAT BRINGS GOOD

**Helping to develop an indigenous university was just the start of a continuing commitment to Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast, writes Jane Freeland**

**I**N 1994 I WORKED on a CIIR/ICD project to support the development of a proposed University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URACCAN). This proved one of the most exciting years of my life, and began an enduring relationship that continues to this day.

The Caribbean Coast region is Nicaragua's unknown other half, a region of rainforests, swamps, lagoons and rivers, home to five indigenous and ethnic groups. Three of their languages survive, despite efforts to impose Spanish and kill them off, though another three are in serious danger.

Since colonial times Coast peoples (*Costeños*) have defended their autonomy. In 1987 an Autonomy Law was finally passed, granting political, territorial and cultural rights, but it has yet to be fully implemented.

*Costeños* had long dreamed of their own university offering courses tailored to the needs of the region. In the new context of autonomy, URACCAN aimed also

to educate for indigenous leadership, diversity and cultural revitalisation. Within this vision, our project brief was to discover how the Coast's multilingualism might affect minority access to higher education, and to design a Language Department able both to support the revitalisation of the Coast's languages and cultures and remove linguistic obstacles to university access.

In this region, travel is mainly by water, slow and expensive. So URACCAN proposed three campuses, in the north, the south, and the central mountains. With my Nicaraguan counterpart, I travelled to all these centres and their outlying communities, in small planes, jeeps, boats and dugout canoes, over jungles, through mangrove swamps and across rivers sometimes swollen with sudden rain. At one level, this was a real physical adventure.

It was also a lesson in the complexities and tensions of educating for diversity. We focused mainly on the bilingual primary school programmes in three regional languages, instituted in 1985. Minority access to higher levels would depend entirely on their success. As we observed classes and talked to people at all levels of the system, we realised how symbolically important the programmes were: they were, at the time, the only practical fulfilment of the autonomy promises. Yet in an economy crippled first by war and now by IMF restrictions on spending, they lacked materials, teachers and training. They were also hobbled by a government reluctant to implement the Autonomy Law, with its provisions to devolve control over education.

There were also tensions at community level. Adults who had been punished for speaking their languages in school were thrilled

to see school texts in them, and indigenous teachers spoke of confident, bright children participating freely in class. At the same time, parents also believed that only by learning in Spanish would their children be able to *salir adelante*. This Spanish expression sums up all these tensions: it means to move forward, but also out, as though progress must entail abandoning diversity.

We realised that URACCAN must create the necessary framework to strengthen both elements of the programmes. It must promote study of the local languages and develop community confidence in them, through culturally sensitive materials, methods and training; and it must strengthen Spanish as a second language, without which community support would die.

Within a year, our recommendations had taken flesh in an Institute for the Research and Promotion of Languages and Cultures (IPILC), headed by my counterpart in the project. Officially, my development worker role ended there. In fact, I've returned regularly to collaborate with IPILC as researcher, teacher, research supervisor and friend. Over the years I've watched it go from strength to strength, despite precarious funding.

The saying goes that URACCAN is the only hurricane (*huracán*) to bring good. The saying applies equally to my own experience. My development worker's job description in 1994 spoke of a 'transfer of training' to my Nicaraguan counterpart. What actually took place was a rich process of reciprocal learning I am still proud to be part of.

*Jane Freeland was Senior Lecturer on the Latin American Studies programme at Portsmouth University until 2001, when she retired to devote more time to her work with URACCAN.*



*Eloy Frank, coordinator of IPILC in the Minas area, and himself a graduate of URACCAN, leads a workshop for Mayangna people.*

# Finding yourself

Running workshops on culture and identity with indigenous Peruvians raises challenging questions for a development worker from the North, writes **Nicoletta Velardi**

**T**O WORK ON THE TOPIC of discrimination with individuals who have experienced so much of it that they come to internalise it and take it for granted in their relationships not only with the culturally dominant 'majority', but also with other indigenous populations, is not only a challenge but also an intense personal and interpersonal process: profound, conflictive, enriching and valuable.

I realised I was working with indigenous peoples characterised by what we have come to define as an 'identity crisis' or 'cultural conflict'. This has its origins in the very history of post-colonial Peru, a history of domination by the so-called 'modern' culture over the indigenous culture. The interaction between the two cultures has produced in Peru an indigenous 'subject' who does not recognise her own Kichwa culture as significant, but rather sees it as obsolete, as having no place in the present but only in the past. An indigenous subject who, on the one hand, declares her indigenous cultural identity, but on the other, denies and rejects it in favour of a modern culture to

which she will never truly belong – and in so doing, makes invisible not only the discrimination she is subject to and reproduces, but also her own cultural diversity and richness.

## Opening old wounds

The workshops developed in the project require, amongst other things, that the indigenous participants reopen wounds that had, voluntarily or involuntarily, long been forgotten and buried in a dark corner of their past. Each participant, as it were, 'undresses' her/himself and then 're-clothes' her/himself, piece by piece, stripped of the discrimination and self-discrimination which had characterised their 'dressing up' until that point.

My role as workshop facilitator – to encourage participants to follow a process of (re)cognition and acknowledgement of their own culture, its value and position in the modern world – was a challenge I had never met before. The process was profoundly conflictual for me, because on the one hand I asked myself: 'What right do I have to *shake them up* and ask them to analyse and deconstruct the conditions of their discrimination? What right do I have to make them relive painful, long forgotten and buried moments? What right do I have to make them question their identity and their position in Peruvian society?' On the other hand, I understood the need to be 'brazen' in order to take the next step and begin raising awareness of the processes by which an individual becomes a social and cultural subject.

## Turning point

A moment that was unforgettable for its intensity, depth, pain and sense of helplessness occurred during one of the workshops in February. As part of the activities, we decided to do what we call the 'identification exercise'. In brief, the exercise consists of placing a line on the floor. One side of the line represents the past (*ñawpaq* time), identified with the Kichwa culture (*ñawpaq kawsay*), while the other side represents the present (*kunan* time), identified with the modern culture (*kunan kawsay*). The line in the middle represents the 'middle time' (*chaupi* time), identified with a culture that has some features of the Kichwa and some of the modern culture. Workshop participants take positions on the side on which they consider they belonged, in terms of their knowledge and their 'identity'.

Choosing a position means, for the individual, recognising and identifying his or her own kind of knowledge, his or her culture, and giving it value. One by one, the leaders and specialists took up a position, and explained it, while at the back of the hall there were four leaders looking lost, anxious and full of conflictive feelings, who could not take a position, and could not provide a clear definition of their own kinds of knowledge, their culture, their own position, because they experienced deep identity and cultural conflicts.

## Personal struggle

There was a moment when my eyes filled with tears, when I saw four adult human beings in profound conflict, pain and confusion, and realised that I was unable to help them resolve their conflict or offer a solution. They needed to experience this moment on their own, and my role as facilitator was precisely to let them be, to let them realise the conflict they were living, help them name it, and take the next step, that of (re)cognising themselves.

These same leaders are now carrying on a hard personal struggle, with admirable pride, strength and sincerity, and in truth, it was an honour, and very enriching, to be able to live with and accompany them through this process of self-realisation and recognition as cultural and social subjects.

*Nicoletta Velardi is a Progressio development worker with Centro Bartolomé de las Casas in Cusco, Peru. Nicoletta is an anthropologist from Italy.*



*An indigenous leader at a workshop in March 2007.*

**W**AIRIMU MUNYINI was impressed. After just three months as a Progressio development worker, working with women in Somaliland, she witnessed something she wasn't expecting. Determination. Desire. Ambition.

'I have continued to encounter the tenacity of Somaliland women in going about activities that they believe in. And this tenacity cuts across age, class and status,' she says.

Since taking up her post in Hargeisa, Somaliland, in 2006, Wairimu has witnessed small but positive steps towards increased female political participation – and the momentum continues to grow.

### Women's role

Somaliland is an internationally unrecognised country, but one where women have played a major role in helping to promote peace, reconciliation and reconstruction after Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991. Today women are even the country's primary breadwinners.

Yet Somaliland women are still desperately under-represented at the highest levels of government – only two of 82 elected members of the lower level parliament, the House of Representatives, are female. At local government level, only three of 330 elected councillors are women. The Guurti (House of Elders) comprises 82 unelected male members.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that women were traditionally excluded from decision-making. Somaliland's clan system – based on a family's male ancestry – does not give status to women.

Add to this traditional cultural views, which see women as unsuitable for public office, and high levels of female illiteracy and it's easy to see how

# Steps on the road to equality

Women in Somaliland are breaking new ground in their quest for equality, writes **Dr Adan Yousuf Abokor**

men have been given the opportunity to create myths and misconceptions about the rights of women in Islamic society.

### Women's exclusion

Women's exclusion from the political and social spheres of society goes hand in hand with economic exclusion and poverty. In fact, however, women can be powerful drivers of development.

Wairimu has been working with Progressio partner organisation Nagaad, an umbrella organisation of women's groups based in Hargeisa, to bring about a shift in the status quo. As Amina Warsame, Nagaad's director, says: 'Once women are empowered, society can move on.'

Since 2001, Nagaad's 'women in decision-making' project (WDMP) has, through conferences and training sessions, civic education programmes, grassroots meetings and sensitisation campaigns, established a platform for women's involvement in all areas of society.

### Women's equality

The first, tentative results of this work are now starting to take hold. Women now possess at least formal equality, enshrined in the Somaliland constitution from 2001. And all the three political parties have had women as members and candidates and continue to do so.

Somaliland expects to hold its local and presidential elections this year. Already,

nine women from the region of El Gavo have expressed an interest in standing for office. The WDMP is currently in the process of identifying and profiling potential female candidates in all six regions of the country to support their campaigns.

There is undoubtedly a long way to go. Last year, efforts at getting the Electoral Law amended to include a quota system for women and minority groups were defeated after the Guurti rejected the proposal (on the grounds, ironically, of equality for all).

### Women's rights

But the WDMP has not given up on lobbying for a quota despite the disappointment of last year. Wairimu Munyinyi says women are slowly taking a stand to show they can succeed against all odds: 'The way I see it, the time has come for women to refuse to be subjected to double standards when it comes to their quest for leadership positions,' she says. 'I am yet to hear of any man being accused of wanting to destroy the family unit simply by expressing interest in a leadership position. Why the same interests are interpreted subjectively when they come from women cannot be justified.'

'Somaliland women now need to defend their interests on the same basis as men do: they are the mothers, sisters and daughters of those very men that challenge their right to leadership and decision-making.'

*Dr Adan Yousuf Abokor is Progressio's country representative in Somaliland.*

*Women can look forward to a greater role in Somaliland's future.*

# The process of recognition

The human rights of Haitian migrants to the Dominican Republic can no longer be overlooked, writes **Lizzette Robleto**

**A** FAVOURITE DESTINATION of British tourists, the Dominican Republic (DR) is known for its sandy beaches and clear blue waters. Yet behind this idyllic façade lie the murkier waters of the DR's treatment of migrants from Haiti, its poor neighbour.

While Dominican-Haitians and Haitian migrants to the DR make a significant contribution to the economies of both the DR and Haiti, they remain largely unrecognised by both states. As general elections in the DR approach this May, the situation of these two groups remains an unresolved challenge.

## Stateless

In 2005, a key ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) found that the DR had been wrong to deny nationality to two girls of Haitian descent. The ruling required the Dominican government to pay a modest sum in compensation and to simplify the procedures and requirements for Dominican-born Haitians to acquire Dominican nationality.

However, in November 2007 the IACHR reported that so far the DR has only complied with the compensation element of the judgment. Meanwhile, the real problem – the stateless situation of many Dominican-Haitians whose fathers or mothers are Haitians or who were born in the Dominican Republic to Haitian parents – remains unchanged.

## Exploited

Haitian migrants have their own story to tell. As a result of their undocumented status many are exposed to exploitation, gross human rights violations and human trafficking. In practical terms, this means that a large percentage of the Haitian migrants living in the DR lack the appropriate access to protections enshrined in Dominican law: calling the police would be out of the question if you're worried about being deported.

According to the US-based organisation Refugees International,

'years of unregulated migration have created a permanent underclass of people of Haitian descent in the Caribbean, including in the Dominican Republic'. Haitians are often accused of taking jobs away from locals – yet most Dominicans admit Haitians do the work they choose not to do.

Paradoxically, it is the search for better-paid employment, a better education and better quality of life, coupled with political instability in Haiti, which has encouraged Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic, other Caribbean islands and the USA. The Dominican economy, especially the sugar and construction industries, has long profited from a steady influx of cheap Haitian labour. More than 90% of the country's seasonal sugar workers and two-thirds of its coffee workers are Haitians or Dominicans of Haitian origin. In a recent report, The Cultural Centre and Action Aid suggested that Haitian labour is indispensable in the agricultural sector representing almost 30% of the national GNP.

## 'Illegal'

Indeed, the relationship between poverty and legality is often an element which is overlooked in the chain of migration. Obtaining birth certificates, passports and other official documents costs a

relatively large amount of money. For the poor majority of Dominican-Haitians and Haitian migrants living on less than a dollar a day, the difficulties involved in obtaining legal documents only exacerbate their vulnerability.

Stigmatising 'illegal' people without considering the reasons for their illegality is an easy way out and not conducive to putting an end to illegal migration. Facilitating the acquisition of legal documentation should be a first step to encourage people to be 'legal'. Having cheaper and simpler procedures in place for naturalisation, and for visas for migrant workers, would be the second. Tackling illegal migration from its core is just the first, but very important, step in the process of reducing the human rights violations against this vulnerable group. The aim should be to reduce discrimination and increase tolerance in the island.

And this goes for both governments. Unfortunately, there is a serious lack of concern – and even less action – from both the DR and Haitian governments.

The DR government, for its part, has accused NGOs of hosting an international campaign against the DR. This is not the case. All we are asking is for serious attention to be given to this issue, to ensure that appropriate measures are taken, and adding our voice to calls on the DR to comply with its international and human rights obligations.

*Lizzette Robleto is Progressio's advocacy coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean. Progressio currently has 16 development workers in the Dominican Republic, two of whom are with organisations working with Haitian migrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent.*



People of Haitian origin at the border town in Dajabón during enforced repatriations of May 2005.

Gianni Dal Mas



# Defending the last primary forest

Olindo Nastacuaz is helping his community stand up to illegal logging, writes **Michelle Lowe**

**I** WILL NEVER SIGN A DEAL with the logging companies. Even if they threaten to kill me I won't sign because I know that my people will suffer.' So says Olindo Nastacuaz, president of the Federation of Ecuadorian Awá Centres (FCAE). He is a determined man: a man with a mission to defend the forests, culture and identity of his people.

The Awá are an indigenous nationality who live on 116,000 hectares of their ancestral land in the foothills of the Andes in the northwest of Ecuador. The Awá traditionally live from hunting and gathering, fishing and agriculture, and

**'We are going to need to be really strong to be able to continue to resist'**

have lived sustainably in the forest for generations. Their territory contains one of only two areas of primary forest remaining in the province of Esmeraldas after massive deforestation.

Olindo and the FCAE are trying to preserve their highly biodiverse forest but the pressures from loggers, plantation owners, roads, mines, and land speculators are now enormous. Progressio partner organisation Acción Ecológica has worked with them on advocacy initiatives and on making public their reports of illegal logging on their land.

The federation was established, Olindo explains, because the Awá wanted to unite to defend their territory and culture in response to their land

being invaded and occupied by communities, companies and individuals who claimed it was uninhabited. They achieved legal recognition of their land in 1987 and this has since been reinforced by a series of legal decrees. However, as Olindo points out, this was far from being the end of their problems:

'Our territory is now surrounded by plantations. There is going to be more and more pressure for control of this primary forest. We are going to need to be really strong to be able to continue to resist.'

Like other communities dealing with illegal logging in Ecuador, the Awá have not found the government to be a useful ally in their struggle. Olindo says: 'It is the companies who have the most power and weight with government. The government doesn't do anything. They don't seem to be serious about tackling the problem at all.'

In addition to external pressures, the federation has to deal with internal ones. Some of the Awá, especially those who live in remote communities, believe that they should sign a deal with logging companies to get a road built through their land which they say would help reduce poverty and improve their quality of life. Others such as Olindo fear the cultural destruction and deforestation that might come with the road.

For now at least the forest is safe, as decisions on the community land have to be agreed by a majority of the 22 Awá centres representing the population of 3,500 – and the majority are still in favour of conserving the forest.

Olindo and the FCAE's challenge is to



Olindo Nastacuaz.

prevent their community succumbing to the loggers' deals by providing their people with other sustainable options for managing the land and earning a decent income. They have set up a project to sustainably manage their forest and harvest wood using light machinery and low impact techniques. They are also trying to acquire FSC certification to show their wood is from a sustainably managed source, but this process has proved to be long and difficult.

They are also studying options for eco-tourism and for carbon trading schemes and Olindo hopes that these projects combined with environmental education can save the forest: 'We have to have a constant campaign going out to speak to people and raise awareness about the environment and the impacts at a local level but also around the world.'

'At the moment, the majority are still saying no to letting the loggers in. They know what is happening in the rest of the country and internationally. We have to fight to keep it that way.'

'We are all guilty. We are damaging Mother Nature and we will all suffer the consequences if we don't act now.'

*Michelle Lowe is a Progressio development worker, working on advocacy and communications in Peru and Ecuador.*

Michelle Lowe/Progressio

**Progressio is working to tackle illegal logging** by supporting partner organisations in countries where the wood is coming from and through lobbying in the UK and Europe for strict legislation to stop the purchase of illegally logged timber.

In Ecuador, Progressio development worker Germán Luebert, a specialist in geo-referencing information systems, is working with Acción Ecológica to set up a database of maps and information to support advocacy and monitoring work and allow Acción Ecológica to denounce illegal activities at a national and international level.

# To develop or not to develop?

That is the question ... and Progressio development worker **Fernando Ruiz** has his answer

IF WE LIST ALL THE PROMISES made in relation to development, we have to conclude that the idea has been a total failure.

The idea was, in effect, to change the ways of life of millions of people to achieve an ideal called 'development'. What was this ideal? It was a particular way of life that certain countries in the world had managed to achieve and that seemed to be what the other countries wanted.

However, it has failed, not only because the number of people who do

**'Development' is itself the parent of 'underdevelopment' and an element of the discrimination that looms over the lives of millions of people**

not have that lifestyle has increased rather than decreased, but also because, from the beginning, 'development' has been one more expression of ignorance about the situation of millions of people in the world.

'Development' is, of course, a comparative term. That is, it presumes that there is an initial

undesirable condition and that there is a goal, a desired paradise that is 'development'.

By accepting 'development' as our goal, we accept that we are in an undesirable state and that we should change this state for a 'better' one. Thus, we are throwing our cultural values, our history, our processes, our ideals and our own concept of a better future or a good life, overboard.

We are also asked to accept that 'development' is not only necessary, but also inevitable. The difference is understood as a hierarchy: that is to say, we accept inferiority as a starting point in the quest for 'development'.

I have tried to find everything that this word embodies and it seems to have many meanings. Development of a theme, community development, the development of a child through to adolescence, technological development, alternative development, etc, etc, etc. There are so many meanings attributed to this word that it loses its value, because we can use it to say (develop) anything at all.

The sociologist Edgar Morin tells us: 'Development is a global myth and a reductionist idea, according to which economic growth is the necessary and adequate drive for all development... And nobody asks for an explanation faced with such an unstructured argument. The notion of development is seriously underdeveloped; and underdevelopment is a poor and abstract product of the weak notion of development.' (Taken from *Terre patrie*, 1993.) According to this assertion, 'development' is itself the parent of 'underdevelopment' and an element of the discrimination that looms over the lives of millions of people.

The writer José

Saramago describes the inner self as a cave where we hide, alone and unsure; where interpersonal relationships and customs deteriorate; where there is no personality; we are just there, victimised, afraid and propping up our oppressor to make us feel free and as though we are the liberators.

So 'development' appears and along with it comes blindness, as Saramago says. Specific beings and the complexity of what is real are ignored because we cannot assess them. Therefore, returning to Moran, 'the advancement of development is the advancement of barbarity'.

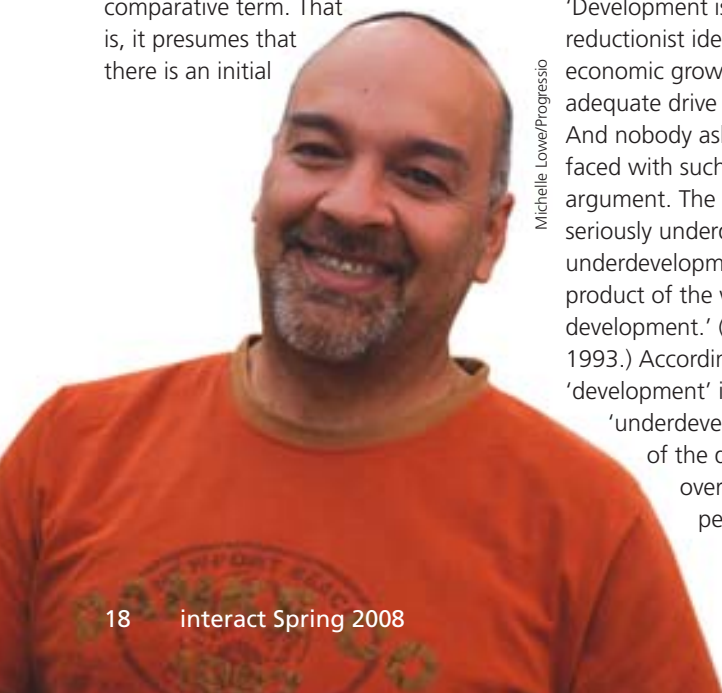
It is assumed that *development* is a gift derived from the wisdom of a better – 'developed' – way of life that will illuminate the dark and unproductive lives of the peripheral minorities. But cultural elements and their relationship with nature, such as access to certain places and their significance, ways of passing on wisdom, spiritual expression and rituals, are disowned and undervalued. The dominant discourse renews its utilitarian emphasis and crushes any possible alternatives. The economist's vision prevails; and all other visions follow or are distorted and eliminated by the discourse and by its practice.

However, one thinker, Vandana Shiva, comforts us with the assurance that 'alternatives do exist, it is just that they have been excluded'.

I am working, as a Progressio development worker, with the Instituto de Estudios Ecuatorianos (IEE – Institute of Ecuadorian Studies), helping to build the organisational capacity of the Cotopaxi Indigenous and Campesino Movement. One element of this is the use of an intercultural language that recovers expressions originating from and inspired by Kichwa. An intercultural language implies dismantling expressions that come from the discourse on development and other dominant discourses, and reviving the Andean meaning of relationships between communities and *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) along with other less dominant ideas.

In short, it is an approach that rejects the proposal of 'development', with its implication of maximum use and exploitation of resources and loss of solidarity, in favour of one of sharing and exchange.

*Fernando Ruiz is from Colombia.*



Michelle Lowe/Progressio

# GIVE US SEED...

FOR THE PAST SIX MONTHS, PROGRESSIO HAS BEEN CAMPAIGNING AGAINST THE FIELD TESTING AND COMMERCIALISATION OF TERMINATOR SEEDS, A GENETIC MODIFICATION TO PLANTS THAT MAKES THEM PRODUCE STERILE SEEDS. WE HAVE FOCUSED OUR EFFORTS BOTH ON THE EU AND THE UK GOVERNMENT AND THE RESPONSE HAS BEEN PHENOMENAL. WITH OVER 2,000 SEEDPACKETS SENT TO UK MPS AND HUNDREDS OF VALENTINE'S CARDS AND LETTERS SENT TO STAVROS DIMAS, EU COMMISSIONER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, THE UK PUBLIC HAS SHOWN HOW PASSIONATE THEY ARE ABOUT STOPPING THIS DANGEROUS NEW FORM OF GENETIC MODIFICATION TO PLANTS (AND TREES). WITH NUMEROUS OFFERS OF SUPPORT AND A MEETING BETWEEN PROGRESSIO AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT, YOUR HELP HAS GIVEN US THE MOMENTUM AND CREDIBILITY NEEDED TO SPEAK DIRECTLY WITH DECISION MAKERS ON THIS ISSUE.

...SO THAT WE MAY LIVE AND NOT DIE, AND THAT THE LAND MAY NOT BECOME DESOLATE (GENESIS 47:19)

WHILE THE REASONS FOR OPPOSING TERMINATOR SEEDS ARE NUMEROUS - THEY ARE A THREAT TO FOOD SECURITY, BIODIVERSITY AND THE LIVELIHOODS OF OVER 1.4 BILLION FARMERS WORLDWIDE WHO SAVE SEEDS - PEOPLE OF FAITH MAY ALSO WISH TO LOOK AT THE ISSUE FROM A THEOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW. THIS IS WHY PROGRESSIO HAS COMMISSIONED A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION TO ANSWER THE QUESTION 'WHY SHOULD WE, AS CATHOLICS, CARE ABOUT TERMINATOR SEEDS?' WRITTEN BY DONAL DORR, MA, AND SEAN MCDONAGH, SSC, THE COMMENT OUTLINES THE THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS AROUND DEVELOPMENTS LIKE TERMINATOR SEEDS AND GIVES US A SOUND BASIS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE FROM A FAITH PERSPECTIVE.



AN INDIGENOUS POTATO VARIETY FROM THE AZUAY REGION OF ECUADOR...

ON 19 - 30 MAY 2008, THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY WILL MEET TO DISCUSS ISSUES RELATED TO THE CONSERVATION OF THE WORLD'S BIODIVERSITY, INCLUDING TERMINATOR SEEDS. WE ARE ASKING YOU TO KEEP THESE DECISION-MAKERS IN YOUR PRAYERS DURING THIS TIME - THAT THEY MAY SEEK JUSTICE, AND BE MINDFUL OF THE NEEDS AND STRUGGLES OF THE POOR AND OF THE CURRENT FRAGILE STATE OF OUR ENVIRONMENT. LET US PRAY THAT THEY MAKE SOUND DECISIONS ON OUR BEHALF, LEADING US TOWARDS A MORE JUST SOCIETY, WHERE PEOPLE HAVE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO RESOURCES FOR MANY GENERATIONS TO COME.

## interactnow

The Progressio Comment 'Unless the grain of wheat shall die: The moral and theological case against Terminator seeds' is available price £2 plus p&p or as a free download from Progressio (order online or download free from [www.progressio.org.uk](http://www.progressio.org.uk))

LET US PRAY: DEAR LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE ABUNDANCE OF CREATION YOU HAVE PROVIDED FOR ALL AND FOR THE JUSTICE YOU PROMISE TO DELIVER FOR THE POOR AND MARGINALISED. AS THE UN CONVENTION ON BIODIVERSITY DRAWS NEAR, WE ASK YOU TO BE PRESENT IN THE PREPARATIONS AND THE MEETINGS. WE PRAY THAT YOU WOULD WORK TO STRENGTHEN THE INFLUENCE OF THOSE COUNTRIES WHO ARE WORKING TO MAINTAIN THE CURRENT MORATORIUM ON TERMINATOR AND YOU WOULD CHANGE THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THOSE WHO SEEK TO WEAKEN IT. LORD WE PRAY FOR JUSTICE TO BE DONE AND FOR YOUR CREATION TO BE PROTECTED. AMEN

