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interact

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A photograph of a woman with a joyful expression, wearing a traditional patterned dress with red, white, and grey sections. She is holding a long wooden staff in her right hand and has her left hand on her hip. The background is a lush, green, rural landscape with trees and foliage.

miracle
workers



Our actions must speak as loud as our words, writes Progressio's Executive Director Christine Allen

miracle workers

The Progressio people who went to Copenhagen for the climate change summit were not the rich and powerful in the traditional sense. But our delegation included representatives from our partner organisations, who bring a wealth of experience of the reality of living vulnerable to climate and weather changes. The delegation therefore represented powerful voices – the voices of those who are poor and marginalised around the world, but nevertheless powerful because they speak of truth, from experience.

The individual, small-scale level can often feel very far from 'high-level' policy and decision-making. At Progressio, we seek to make the connections by rooting our policy analysis in our direct experience with people who are poor and marginalised – and by bringing their voices to the negotiating table.

Small voices being heard loudly is something of a theme for this edition of *Interact*. Whether it's the experience and potential of small-scale farmers being heard amidst the clamour of large-scale food production, or the voices of women standing up for their rights, we are seeking to make sure we can amplify and support the voices of people being heard where it matters.

We believe the small voices of each one of us counts – through our actions, our participation and our understanding of the issues. For Progressio, those "voices" – those individual actions – are part of the global solidarity we seek to build.

Christine

contents

Cover: Gladys Gogwe (53), a small-scale farmer in southern Malawi, who has been growing *Jatropha*, *Neem* and *Moringa* trees to boost her income and conserve and enrich the soil. See page 4 for the full story.

Photo: Marcus Perkins/Progressio

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focus

"People in the cities, they make the decisions, but they don't know what it is like here. They are in their offices, they cannot imagine this life – maybe if they visited, but they do not. Rural people eat, breathe and sleep agriculture. For this we need water. We have to protect mother earth, and care for her." This is the message that Fabiola Quishpe, a farmer from Ecuador, brought to the climate change negotiations in Copenhagen: see page 8 for more details. Fabiola (in white poncho) is pictured with (far left) Olga Guamán, Luisa María Ullcopilalumbo (centre right) and Blanca Quishpe (far right) in a house in Apahua community, province of Cotopaxi, Ecuador.

Photo: Santiago Serrano/Majority World/Progressio



miracle workers

"I learned that from these three plants – which are easy to grow in our difficult climate – you can make oil for lamps or to run engines, soap for the home, fertiliser for crops, and moisturiser for the body. If you are HIV positive you can boost your immune system with powder extract. One of the plants is particularly good for heart disease and eyesight problems. Moringa makes a good food supplement, a nice relish and is also good for skin complaints. It even tastes nice in tea – I take half a teaspoon with water every day!" Betty Mkusa, 55, a farmer in southern Malawi, shows farmers from neighbouring communities around her 'garden', where she grows – among other crops – three 'miracle' plants called *Jatropha*, *Neem* and *Moringa*.



The majority of small-scale farmers in Malawi are women – and they are leading the way in building a more sustainable future for rural communities in this impoverished country, writes Keith Ewing

The last time I visited Chikwawa in southern Malawi, people were hungry. It was 2006 and a terrible drought had brought 12 million poor farming families with paper-thin livelihoods to the threshold of starvation. Vulnerable women were being hit especially hard – widows, single mothers, those who were HIV positive, or women caring for many children while their husbands travelled to Mozambique in search of work.

Ensat, a middle-aged lady, told me how she had just buried her 21-year-old daughter Serena, a divorced mother of two. Serena had gradually succumbed to hunger despite the watery porridge her family begged from neighbours. There were many stories of vulnerable people not surviving.

I saw one very elderly woman with a hoe attacking the lifeless brown earth with relentless ferocity in a bid to prepare it for planting. Alice James, a 70-year-old widow, told me she had lost 10 of her 11 children to disease and a variety of misfortunes. We talked for some time about her life and the challenge of survival. As I left she said with a grim smile: "You might find us dead here next time."

Revolution

My next visit to Malawi was earlier this year. It could not have been more different. I was there to witness a small revolution among women in Chilhambi 3 village and surrounding districts, who are being supported by Progressio partner Environment Africa. The start of a transformation in family income is being ushered in thanks to three 'miracle' plants called *Jatropha*, *Neem* and *Moringa*. The cultivation and marketing of these plants by villagers, Environment Africa believes, could begin to protect some of Malawi's poorest people from constant vulnerability to crises.

If the three plants are beginning to be seen locally as some kind of miracle, then Betty Mkusa, 55, is the arch-missionary, spreading the good news of their powers and profitability to local women, neighbours across the district and much further afield. Busloads of curious community groups from other districts of southern Malawi regularly converge on her home for tours of her garden and to hear Betty's stories about *Jatropha*, *Neem* and *Moringa*.

She speaks with the passion of someone who has ▶

made a discovery that seems too good to be true. Under an oppressive midday sun in her garden, Betty delivers a seminar to community leaders from Zomba district. She eulogises about the properties of the three plants – Moringa has seven times the Vitamin C of oranges and four times the calcium of milk, she tells them. She describes the potential money savings on household costs such as soap, oil and fertiliser for poor families, and also the scope for income from selling seedlings to others.

“Just this year,” she tells the group from Zomba to nods of approval, “I have sold seedlings worth 50,000 kwacha (£214).”

Benefits

Local forestry officer, Mike Gareta, is full of praise for the Environment Africa initiative, as it is reducing local people’s habit of chopping down trees to make charcoal, a practice which contributes to environmental destruction across Africa. “It is benefiting the environment. Little by little trees in this area are recovering. This project is about improving livelihoods. It could make a great difference to the lives of people around here.”

Betty, who, with her husband, cares for two orphans, is now able to pay their school fees thanks to the extra income

from cultivating and selling *Jatropha*, *Neem* and *Moringa*. One of Betty’s neighbours, Mary Gomani (44), a mother of five whom Betty introduced to the plants, is putting herself through school as a result of the small business she has launched cultivating and selling the plants.

She proudly states: “I have started my education again. My parents died when I was very young so I could not go to school. I want to learn because education is very important. If you go to school you can do whatever you like. I have begun again in Form Two, which means I am in a class with 14-year-olds,” she says with a laugh. “But they don’t mind having an older person there and we all get on very well together.”

Markets

One of the difficulties facing Mary, Betty and the many others in the surrounding Shire valley who are learning about the *Jatropha*, *Neem* and *Moringa* plants and starting to grow them for sale, is finding markets for the produce. “If my business improves I have plans to build a house, but first I will have to plant more *Jatropha* in order to boost production,” says Mary. “Finding a bigger market than locally will be a big challenge for us.”

That is where Progressio’s development



◀ “There is great potential here,” says Progressio development worker Innocent Ogaba (pictured talking to Betty Mkusa). “This project is all about improving the livelihood of the community and deriving environmental benefits, too – such as the absorption of CO₂ and the fixing of nitrogen in the soil.”



◀ “Betty invited me to her house and I saw what she was doing, so I started growing the plants too,” says Mary Gomani. “I am now growing and selling seedlings, as well as using the plants in my home: for example, Moringa is a good pesticide. I have now bought a plot of land with the money I have made. Before I began this we did not have much money coming into the house.”

worker, Innocent Bidong Ogaba, comes in. He has been working with Environment Africa to help people like Betty and Mary identify the potential for marketing the various products that the three miracle plants produce.

“There has already been some interest from pharmaceutical companies in the medicinal qualities of Moringa powder,” says Innocent. “But, of course, before you go into production on a large scale you need machines to extract the oil or for making the soap to sell. We are doing a lot

of work on exploring potential markets for the products.”

Betty, who is now known locally as “Mamma Jatropha”, agrees that the future looks bright for many women like her. “Day-to-day living is going to improve around here,” she states. “Most years we face drought. In the long term this project will change many lives.”

Keith Ewing is Progressio’s Head of Communications. Photos: Marcus Perkins/Progressio



Millions will go hungry without urgent support for poor farmers, warns Progressio in a new report *Fertile Ground*. The report outlines the contribution of small-scale farmers to the world’s food needs; the threats and problems they face; and what needs to happen for small-scale farmers to play their part in providing the food that the world’s people need. Read more and download the full report at www.progressio.org.uk

Or to order a printed copy (free to Progressio members) email enquiries@progressio.org.uk, call 020 7354 0883, or write to Progressio Publications (address on back page).



Progressio supporters at The Wave climate change march in London on 5 December.

What were your hopes for Copenhagen?

"We hope that Copenhagen will change the course of the way that we are treating nature.

"We hope that developed countries take responsibility for their long history of having contaminated the atmosphere, which is an asset that belongs to all of us.

"We hope that, as a result of the negotiations in Copenhagen, reparation for our people and for the ecosystem begins.

"We hope that substantial agreements are reached ...

"Only if this happens can we, in our countries, enjoy a climate in which sustainability, but also peace and justice, can flourish."

interactnow

Read more about Progressio in Copenhagen at www.progressio.org.uk or check out our Poverty Bites blog at <http://progressio.typepad.co.uk/povertybites/>

These are the words of Ángel Ibarra, Director of the Salvadoran Ecological Unit (a Progressio partner organisation in El Salvador). Ángel was speaking at pre-summit negotiations held in Barcelona in November. Two days later, El Salvador suffered the sort of natural disaster that climate change could make worse, and more frequent. When Hurricane Ida hit, flooding and landslides left 198 people dead, close to 8,000 people homeless, and \$30 million dollars of damage in lost crops and damage to infrastructure.

As in El Salvador, it is the world's poor who will be hardest hit by climate change. That's why Progressio (with financial support from DFID, Big Lottery Fund and Irish Aid) made sure their voice was heard, supporting Ángel's visit to Barcelona, and enabling Fabiola Quishpe (from Ecuador) and Aline Arroyo (from El Salvador) to attend the negotiations in Copenhagen. They were joined by Progressio advocacy staff, making sure the message of our "Just Add Water" campaign was heard.

Interact went to print as the negotiations in Copenhagen were beginning – and by the time you read this, the outcome will be decided. Let's hope the voices of the world's poor – the people hardest hit by climate change – were listened to.



A young man gets his voting forms at a polling station in Tegucigalpa on election day.

Honduras: election highlights deep social divisions

Five months after a military coup ousted President Manuel Zelaya, Honduras went to the polls on 29 November to elect a new president. The declared winner was Porfirio Lobo, a rich landowner of the Nationalist Party, who pledged to form a unity government that will reconcile the Honduran people.

The elections themselves divided public opinion, with some viewing them as a fresh start, and others seeing them as fundamentally flawed. Jesús Garza of the Honduran Coalition for People's Action said: "So long as there is no genuine democratisation ... and a model of citizen participation that is truly inclusive,

electoral processes will not make an actual difference in the country. It is only by opening participative spaces to people ... that we will be able to solve the ongoing crisis."

Progressio country representative Xiomara Ventura commented: "Most of our partners believe that a genuine democratisation of this country hinges on a Constituent Assembly which should bridge the gap between the wealthy and the impoverished and tackle the root causes of poverty."

Progressio development workers are continuing to support partner organisations despite the difficult working environment created by the political situation. See pages 10 and 12 for more on the impact of the coup in Honduras.

Jestina Mukoko: at last again a free woman

All charges against human rights activist Jestina Mukoko have finally been dropped by the Zimbabwe Supreme Court, leaving Jestina "feeling liberated" even though the charges had no basis, according to Progressio regional manager for Africa, Cathy Scott.

Progressio members were among many

groups who campaigned for Jestina's release following her arrest last December. "She told me how moved she was when she later had the opportunity to go through the pile of correspondence sent to her to keep up her morale," says Cathy, who met Jestina in Zimbabwe in October. "If anything, she feels strengthened by the ordeal, and the experience has stiffened her resolve to go on defending human rights."

rights and freedoms

What has been the impact of the coup in Honduras on people's lives? What are the real stories behind the headlines? Interviews by Progressio development worker Nuria Zayas

Víctor Ochoa, President of the Campamento Environmental Movement (CAM), a Progressio partner organisation

All rights and freedoms have been violated. Participation has been blocked. People are scared. In conversations, nobody dares to take a stance. People limit themselves to saying: "When is this going to end?"

The coup's economic impact is glaring. People don't have purchase power. This clearly affects food security in the towns. In rural communities, most people are farmers and are self-sufficient as they grow basic grains, but they have no access to health services and no money to buy medicines.

María José Urgel, Progressio development worker

Since the coup, human rights defenders have been subjected to intimidation, harassment and threats. We have not been able to work safely or effectively. Meanwhile there has been a dramatic increase of human rights abuses. My partner organisation began to feel overwhelmed by the numbers of people in need.

Concepción Aguilar, programme coordinator of the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations in Honduras (ASONOG), a Progressio partner organisation

Copán is one of the most impoverished departments in the country. The coup has worsened poverty and extreme poverty

conditions in the region. I compare it to an undernourished child, who is very fragile, so you can imagine what an impact it has. Most people here can only meet one day's needs, so insecurity in human rights, and particularly restrictions in our freedom of movement, have affected people who could not go out and work and ended up with nothing to eat.

The social division that is so visible throughout the country starts with the family. Human rights violations and the very fact of seeing military checkpoints has a psychological and physical impact which all families and communities are coping with.

The impacts of the coup will go deeper than Hurricane Mitch in 1998. After the hurricane, we had many human losses, but a lot of infrastructure could be rebuilt mainly thanks to international aid. But now we need to rebuild values, ethics, the social and economic fabric of this country, and to restore the slow progress made in terms of democracy before the coup.

But I am encouraged by the growing interest in civil society to participate in dialogue, to get a sense of what is going on in their country, to learn more about the law and the Constitution. It is a phenomenon that should be tapped.

José Ramos, Progressio development worker

The state of siege and the many curfews have affected our freedom of movement and freedom of assembly, without which carrying out my work is really hard.

But I believe a problem can turn into an opportunity. Now is the time to work with civil society. The coup has in some ways strengthened civil society, which is now more engaged. We now clearly see where people stand on the political spectrum.



Teófilo Santos (above), shop-owner and small-scale coffee farmer in the Huertas community, Dept. of La Paz

I am a member of the resistance movement against the coup and was beaten by the military. They hit my back many times with a truncheon. People in my community are very scared when it comes to going to marches and demonstrations, because some neighbours from the municipality of Santa Elena were put in jail.

The economy has plummeted. In communal shops like mine, the plunge in takings has been very obvious. We can't sell cheaper than the prices we have paid to farmers, but people can't buy from us either as they barely have money.

People are losing their jobs and very few have their own crops to provide food for themselves and their families.

I see a strong social polarisation which makes me fear a civil war in Honduras.

Gustavo Blanco, journalist with Radio Globo, Tegucigalpa

The coup was a turning point. It marked the start of heavy repression for us. We were getting phone calls warning us –“if you keep talking like this, we'll shut you down.” On 28 September [after a Presidential decree which severely limited fundamental freedoms], soldiers and police came to confiscate all the radio equipment. For 22 days we operated via the Internet. Eventually, we reopened the station.

Rumualda García, small-scale farmer, Cerro de Hule community, Dept. of La Paz

There are no jobs since the coup. We are 15 family members, and following the coup, we have run out of a salary. There is not much work in the big coffee crops owned by the rich. Last year 150 workers were hired while this year only 30 to 40 were. If the rich are facing financial problems, you can imagine how that affects us the poor!

letter from Honduras

Young women call for 'equal participation through a more decent and humane Constitution' during a demonstration in Tegucigalpa on Honduras's Independence Day (15 September). Following the coup, calls for democracy to be reinstated and for reform of the National Constitution went hand in hand.

Photo: Nuria Zayas/Progressio

Queremos participación
igualitaria a través
de una Constitución de
la República MAS
Digna y Humana

Edith Villanueva says she can't get the glassy-eyed soldiers who forced her into a military van on the afternoon of 29 July out of her mind. That day, she and another 45 women made their way to Comayagua, in the centre of Honduras, to take part in demonstrations against the coup that had ousted President Manuel Zelaya.

Her fate, and that of 40 other women in the van – into which the military also threw tear gas – would be the Comayagua prison. They would spend 11 hours there, without food or water, before a human rights organisation eventually helped secure their release.

Edith's story is a common one – many people have tales about the retaliatory acts and violence which were being used against people who openly opposed the coup. But Edith's case also highlights another, less expected trend: that for the duration of the coup, women have been its "most visible and outspoken critics" as well as "the ones who took to the streets and remained there the longest." Edith should know, because these are her words.

"Women are used to working for democracy in a society where we are completely discriminated against," she explains, adding that this has translated into greater participation of women in the resistance movement against the coup. "We still lobby for improved rights," she stresses, but the coup "gave us a common cause – calling for democracy to be reinstated."

Higher price

As a founding member of *Progressio* partner organisation COMUCAP (the coordinating group of rural women in the Department of La Paz), Edith has fought many such battles before.

In this particular case, though, women have paid a much higher price for engaging in social protest than their male counterparts. "Women are more vulnerable to sexual aggression, sexual

insults and verbal attacks by the military and the national police," says María Elena Méndez, Executive Director of another *Progressio* partner organisation, the Women's Studies Centre of Honduras.

Edith says that a common mantra from police to protesting women, with accompanying insults, is often: "What are you doing out on the street? – you should be at home doing the dishes and taking care of your husband."

Violations

Over 400 cases of violations of women's rights have been recorded since the military coup in July, according to Honduran women's organisations attending a hearing into the worsening situation of women's rights at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in November.

"And we don't think these are the only victims," the Inter-American Court hearing was told. Many women say they are afraid to report acts of violence to the police, or to file a complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office. In the words of María Elena, "the dismantling of democracy brought about by the coup has weakened state institutions." And as a result, trust and confidence in the justice system is waning.

The Honduran media has not been spared either. In recent weeks, three radio broadcasts involving women's organisations have been cancelled.

And amidst the climate of impunity under the de-facto government, domestic violence soared. In July alone, 51 women were killed – a massive increase on an average of 26 deaths per month in 2008.

Taken together, it's little wonder that María Elena says: "The coup has meant a setback for the strides women's movements have made over the last 20 years."

Nuria Zayas is a Progressio development worker in Honduras.

Monika Galeano is a Progressio development worker with the Women's Studies Centre of Honduras. She also helps other Progressio partners in Honduras build their capacity to work on gender issues.

Q: How would you describe yourself?

A: I am a sensitive, simple and happy woman. My heart guides my actions, so I am a loving person in everything I do and to everybody I deal with.

Q: What made the biggest impact on you?

A: On one of my first work trips, I conducted a workshop on human rights with Garifuna community leaders in La Ceiba, on the north coast. They were all black except for me. At the beginning there was a distance between us, which we overcame by sharing and interacting with each other. Through that workshop, I got a sense of what being black and having endured a whole life of discrimination means. I was shaken and it was a very moving experience for me.

Q: What has been the most exciting moment so far?

A: Publishing *El vuelo de los gansos [The Gooses' Flight]*, a manual about sexual rights and HIV for leaders of gay and lesbian organisations. I wrote the book in just six months, so it was a demanding task, but also a very exciting one! Non-gay people who read the book found it most useful to them as well.

Q: And the biggest lesson?

A: By working with the Honduran Positive Women's Network, I have reinforced the idea that no matter what a person endures or experiences, one should always make the most of life. For these women, living with HIV is not the only problem, nor the most important. And despite such an adverse environment, they are happy and optimistic.

Q: What is the biggest development challenge?

A: Education, without a shadow of doubt, as education empowers people to take control of their lives. Education to respect diversity is pivotal as a means to prevent violence.

Q: If you could change one thing what would it be?

A: I would transform mindsets so that women get to recognise themselves as sexual and free human beings, entitled to respect and dignity.

Monika Galeano

Honduras

Monika Galeano putting a sticker on the hand of Miriam Suazo, at a workshop conducted by Monika for staff of the Women's Studies Centre of Honduras to raise awareness about HIV and promote sexual health.

Photo: Nuria Zayas/Progressio



The lives of all living beings

I remember that when I was a child the farmers in the community knew when the winter was going to start and how fierce it was going to be, just by observing nature, the birds singing, the sun and the trees.

But man has gradually lost his natural instinct as technologies have been imposed on him, destabilising the local economy, putting food sovereignty at risk and destroying natural resources.

Agricultural methods such as mono-cultivation, intensive livestock farming, slash and burn, have caused deforestation and the disappearance of water springs and wildlife. Man's greed puts the lives of all living beings at risk. All this endangers the lives of poor families because these practices are not sustainable.

Thousands of years ago the Earth's

topsoil was darker and harvests were abundant. Now, because of man's intervention, soil fertility is low and needs more investment for it to produce crops. If we don't start to protect natural resources, in very little

time we will not have any ground that we can grow crops in and hunger will increase globally.

The great writer who wrote the book of Genesis in the Bible says that God commanded the Earth to produce trees, bushes and plants to feed all the living creatures that live on the face of the Earth, whether they be creatures of the land, sea or sky.

But man has mistakenly taken an attitude of greed for economic power that has led him to convert the planet into a desert and a hostile climate for himself and other living creatures. Climate change is manifesting itself through natural phenomena such as drought in some places and floods in others, as well as an increase in plagues and illnesses in plants and human beings. Nature is wise and is making sure we pay the price for the damage we have done.

People resist changing attitudes but human beings can recognise good from bad. Man knows that he commits sin by destroying natural resources. For thousands of years he has been intervening in the Earth to produce food. But now the planet is being destroyed because of bad practice in terms of soil usage. We must stop and recognise the wealth of knowledge that communities and local farmers have about nature and how it works.

Faustino Reyes is a small-scale farmer in Honduras. His testimony was collected by Progressio development worker Marvin Zavala Ruiz.



Nick Sireau/Progressio

Faustino Reyes