

summer 2004

interact



Live and learn

Empowering people through
education and training

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A talk by James O'Connell, Professor Emeritus of Peace Studies organised by the Catholic Institute for International Relations

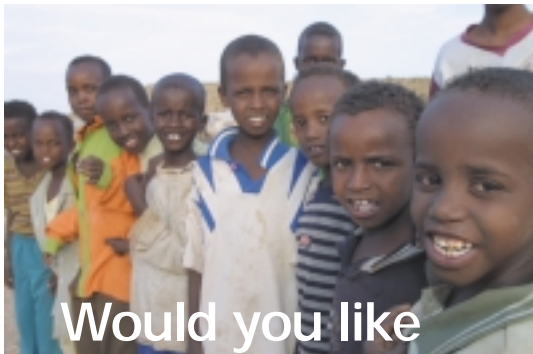
James O'Connell was head of the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford for 15 years. He has also taught in Nigeria, the United States and Ireland.

He has published on international, Middle Eastern and Nigerian politics as well as human rights and other topics.



6.30pm, Wednesday 28 July

Room B202, 2nd floor, Bloomsbury Suite, Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London, WC1 (wine reception follows)
Admission is free, but to reserve a place call 020 7354 0883 or email nick@ciir.org



Would you like a CIIR speaker?

Are you part of a church, student group, religious community or local justice group? Would you like to know more about particular development issues such as the environment or HIV and AIDS? Perhaps you have a special concern for one of the countries where CIIR works? Or are you interested in campaigning on global justice issues, but don't know where to start?

CIIR has staff members who are able to visit your local group and give a talk or lead a discussion session. Or if you would like more in-depth information on our work so that you can do your own talks, we are happy to provide resources for you wherever possible.

To find out more or to discuss your requirements, please call Lucy Cathcart on 020 7354 0883 or email lucy@ciir.org.

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Have you considered making a legacy to CIIR in your will? Making a will is an important way of safeguarding your loved ones' future, but it is also an opportunity to show your commitment to fighting poverty and injustice. Your legacy could make a lasting difference in some of the world's poorest and most marginalised communities.

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Making a legacy to CIIR is a simple process. If you would like more information on how to make or change your will, please contact Lucy Cathcart on 020 7354 0883, or email lucy@ciir.org.



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editorial

Live and learn

Education is a subject about which everyone can agree, and no-one can disagree. Everyone agrees that education is a good thing; we just can't agree on how best to do it.

The stories in this edition of **Interact** show that people – from the indigenous peoples of Ecuador and the Peruvian Amazon, to the San youth of Namibia – are the best judges of what works for them. These stories describe the ways in which people around the world are taking charge of their own learning.

Education is a major concern of international development – indeed, the second of the eight Millennium Development Goals is 'Achieve universal primary education'. But for development organisations like CIIR, education is not just a goal, nor even simply a tool, but a strategy. It is a way of enabling people to take charge of their own futures – to raise questions and find their own answers.

Developing means learning, and both are an ongoing process. As the stories in this edition of **Interact** show, education is not just something that happens in a classroom. It is all around us. We live and learn every day of our lives.

Editor
alastair@ciir.org

Cover picture: Children at school on the Bolivian Altiplano, near lake Titicaca. © Mark Howard



Putting on a positive face: disabled people in southern Africa, like this young man pictured with his family in Zimbabwe, can face daily discrimination.

Lessons in life

Forward Mlotshwa describes the daily struggle to educate people in Namibia about disability

IT'S EARLY MORNING when the phone rings. The Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) wants to interview me on a live, 30-minute television programme that evening.

The call comes one week after a successful Disability Human Rights Conference which was held some 700km from the capital of Namibia, Windhoek. Despite the location, the conference got a lot of publicity from the print and electronic media – perhaps because many senior civil servants were there. Suddenly, the media is interested in disability issues.

As a foreigner, I hesitate to accept the invitation. However, I finally agree to attend once I get the assurance that there will be no controversial questions asked, as I would be tempted to answer and get myself in trouble. I will be interviewed alongside the secretary general of the organisation with which I work, the National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia.

Driving out prejudice

The programme is due to start at 7pm and the secretary general and I have to be there an hour

before starting time. I drive to the NBC studios well on time. At the gate I am told I cannot go in with my car: I have to leave it outside the gate and walk.

As an activist, I see this as an opportunity to educate the security people about disability and mobility. Unfortunately, my strategy fails to work, and I instantly change and become aggressive. This does not work either, but I maintain my position that I will not leave the car outside as I had been invited by the national broadcaster for their programme, and thus refuse to be treated as someone who is disturbing the peace.

These are the problems some of us deal with on a daily basis. These problems make many disabled people aggressive as most cannot handle such situations.

On another occasion, I had driven to a hospital for a scheduled meeting. I decided to park my car close to the hospital entrance. When inside, the security guard came charging at me and demanded that I remove my car as the area was reserved for hospital staff. I refused and

told the guard that if he wanted to move the car he could go and push it away. A heated argument followed, and the hospital superintendent was called.

After we had put across our arguments, he commented that I was the first disabled person who had come to the hospital driving. I told him that was not the issue as all public structures should be ready for use by anyone anytime.

Positive attitude

Back at the NBC studios, I decide to park my car at the entrance to block cars going and coming until I am allowed in. Within minutes, a reporter arrives in her car. She wants to drive in as she is coming to work.

I refuse to give way until she gets out of her car and enquires as to what is going on. I relate my story and she gives instructions that I should be allowed in. As I drive in I am even more angry to see that there is parking set aside for disabled people – yet still the security guards did not want to let me in.

Since there is time before the programme starts, I manage to calm down in readiness for the official business. The programme goes well and the NBC management are impressed at the positive attitude that we show despite all the problems faced by people with disabilities.

During the presentation, I make a comment that 'people with disabilities survive in a harsh environment'. The national broadcaster goes on to make an advert out of the statement (although the phrase 'people with disabilities' is edited out, leaving only 'survive in a harsh environment'). Ever since, as I travel in the regions, everyone knows me because of that statement.

Forward Mlotshwa is a CIIR/ICD development worker. He is from Zimbabwe.

Learning to change



CIIR's approach to tackling environmental vulnerability shows the importance of learning from experience, writes **Christine Allen**

THE RECENT FLOODS in Haiti and the Dominican Republic (see News, page 6) remind us again that when environmental disasters hit, the impact is felt most harshly by the poor and those who depend on the earth for their livelihoods and survival. In 1985 an earthquake in Mexico City left 10,000 dead, but when an earthquake of similar intensity hit Los Angeles in 1988 it killed 63. The difference is that countries in the North have the means to reduce their vulnerability to environmental and other natural disasters in a way that the countries of the South cannot.

Models of development are too often seen as promoting a headlong rush into growth, industrialisation and scientific advances. Yet for many people on our planet, their growth or development is dependent upon the earth. The omission of considerations of the earth and its welfare in our models of development has been a massive, disastrous mistake, which we now seek to remedy at this eleventh hour.

Practice and policy

In 1988 when Hurricane Mitch devastated Central America, CIIR/ICD's programme of development was devastated too. Development workers, who up until that point had been working with partners, had to turn towards responding to the emergency and the immediate needs of the victims at the time.

It was this experience that led us to reflect on the level of vulnerability that is faced by developing countries, and Central America in particular. We set up a

project (supported by the Community Fund) to provide practical assistance to peasant farmers in ways of reducing their vulnerability and ensuring more sustainable natural resource management.

Drawing on this practical work, we came to recognise the importance of informing and educating people in the North about environmental issues. Policy makers in particular must look at the impact of their decisions, especially on the lives of the poorest.

For example, while free trade makes some rich, it makes many poor and limits the opportunities of local farmers to market their produce. Similarly, intensive or scientific agriculture may appear to produce enormous results on the macro level, but the impact on the local farmers who do not control or have access to the processes or the markets, and who need to feed their families, will be devastating.

Stewardship and solidarity

Consequently, our environmental advocacy project (funded by the European Commission) seeks to raise awareness and understanding of the connections between the environment and development, drawing in particular on our experience in Central America. The publications mailed to CIIR members with this *Interact* are the first fruits of this project. These publications include a CIIR Comment on environmental vulnerability, a leaflet on genetically modified crops, and a faith reflection on why the environment should be a crucial

concern for people of faith.

The environment – the whole earth community – is important in all world religions and our relationship with the earth should be central to our relationship with God and with one another. Within Christianity, there is a strong element of Christian teaching that reminds us that the earth is the Lord's – and that our role is to steward this precious gift, not to dominate or abuse it. As the theologian Edward Echlin told us,

Solidarity is not simply a feeling but a challenge to our way of life

'All matter, the whole living earth community and all habitats are precious. To hurt the earth is near blasphemy, the rejection of God in God's creatures.'

CIIR seeks sustainable development through placing development workers and raising awareness and advocating for change. At the heart of our work is solidarity with our partners and those poorest overseas. Solidarity is not simply a feeling but a challenge to our way of life: a challenge to us to learn from the people we work with, to learn from our own experience, and to have the courage to speak out and change the way we do things.

Christine Allen is CIIR's executive director.

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Storm warnings: Hurricanes Georges and Mitch and the lessons for development is available from CIIR publications, price £4.95 plus 20% p&p.

People and the environment on the edge: Environmental vulnerability in Latin America and the Caribbean (CIIR Comment) is £1 plus £1 p&p. The faith reflection *Living lightly on the earth* and leaflet on genetically modified crops *What's wrong with GM?* are free on request: please write to 'Environmental Action' at CIIR, email environment@ciir.org or tel 020 7354 0883. All three publications are also available to download from the CIIR website www.ciir.org.

Tony Richardo



Two men survey flood damage in Jimani, Dominican Republic.

Floods cause chaos

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE were killed and thousands made homeless when storms battered Haiti and the Dominican Republic at the end of May, writes *Finola Robinson*.

Torrential rain, mudslides and severe flooding caused extensive damage to houses, hospitals, schools and roads. Many areas remain inaccessible except from the air, making it difficult to distribute food and medicines to

survivors in more remote areas.

Charles Arthur, from the UK-based Haiti Support Group, said the situation in Haiti was made worse by deforestation: 'Without trees, the topsoil is washed away and erosion leaves bare rocks on the mountainsides. When there is heavy rain, the water cannot be absorbed and so cascades down hillsides sweeping away everything in its path.' He called for reforestation programmes and agrarian reform 'in order to relieve pressure on farm land'.

Women face up to challenge

WOMEN AND CHILDREN with disabilities in Somaliland have received a much-needed boost following the launch of a new organisation supported by CIIR/ICD, the HAN Women and Children with Disabilities Organisation.

HAN, the Somali word for ambition, highlights the immense challenges facing women with disabilities in Somaliland as they struggle to overcome severe discrimination, isolation and exclusion.

As the first organisation of women with disabilities in the country, HAN members plan to increase national awareness about the potential of women with disabilities. They will also advocate for increased self-reliance, social inclusion and an end to discrimination.

Nura, a HAN member who lost both her legs during childhood, said: 'We want disabled women to become educated. And if their families cannot help them, then we will.'

CIIR seminar raises awareness of HIV and AIDS

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING, discrimination in Zimbabwe and the crisis in Haiti were key issues debated during a CIIR seminar on HIV and AIDS on 5 June, writes *Finola Robinson*.

At the seminar 'Focus on HIV and AIDS', Ron Norgard, CIIR joint programme manager for Zimbabwe and Namibia, cited Zimbabwe as an example of a country that is failing to address the problem. In a population of 12.5 million, 25 per cent of adults are infected, yet discrimination against those with HIV is widespread and many struggle without vital support or access to treatment.

Anne Street, CIIR advocacy coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean, highlighted the potential for an explosion in the HIV infection rate in Haiti, the poorest nation in the western hemisphere. Haiti has the highest infection rate in the Caribbean region, and there are fears that poverty and the ongoing economic and political crisis could push the rate up further.

Harry Walsh, an expert on HIV and AIDS and the church, said the church could play a key role: 'The church can be found wherever people are and often this means the church reaches places that the government does not.' He said Catholic social teaching encourages Christians to 'look within ourselves, to our own consciences, to know how to respond to the AIDS pandemic'.

One response is to support the Stop AIDS Campaign, of which CIIR is a member. Kirsty McNeill, manager of the campaign, said: 'It is vital that we all become campaigners to raise awareness ... It is up to us to keep [the issue of] HIV and AIDS in the public domain.'

Ballot by the Beach

Join thousands of people at the seaside town of Brighton on Sunday 26 September to urge the government to do more to end poverty and protect our planet. Ballot by the Beach has been organised by the Trade Justice Movement coalition, of which CIIR is a member, and timed to coincide with the opening day of the Labour party conference. Glen Tarman, coordinator of the Trade Justice Movement, said: 'Trade justice must be at the top of the political agenda. The British people want this country to be part of the solution to global injustice, not part of the problem.' For more details of this and other Trade Justice Movement activities, see www.tjm.org.uk.

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To support the campaign against AIDS, visit www.stopaidscampaign.org.uk

Ecuador prepares for first Americas Social Forum

OVER 12,000 PARTICIPANTS and over 500 organisations are expected to take part in the first Americas Social Forum to be held in Quito, Ecuador, from 25 to 30 July, writes Angelique Orr.

According to Blanca Chancoso, coordinator of the forum's secretariat, 'The forum offers civil society the opportunity to build friendships, exchange knowledge about the situation in different countries and above all, to strengthen solidarity – all in the belief that a different world is possible.'

The forum aims to tackle issues affecting the lives of people living in the Americas, including international trade, gender, indigenous rights and environmental issues. Participants will come from Canada, the US, the Caribbean, and Central and South America to attend lectures, round-table discussions,

workshops, concerts and exhibitions organised by the groups taking part.

CIIR partner organisation Ecuarunari – a group that supports the rights of Ecuador's indigenous population – is heavily involved in helping organise the forum. CIIR/ICD has also supported a series of workshops taking place in Ecuador ahead of the forum with the aim of increasing understanding of the event and its central themes, thereby encouraging people from around the country to take part.

In the coastal province of Esmeraldas, for example, CIIR recently worked with partner Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio (FEPP) to organise a one-day workshop which was attended by representatives of 15 local NGOs. A range of issues was discussed in relation to the specific situation in the province,

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For more on the first Americas Social Forum, see www.forosocialamericas.org

such as the effect that the Free Trade Area of the Americas would have on the region. As a result of the workshop, various groups have decided to participate in the Quito Forum, in order to represent the views and experiences of people in Esmeraldas.

A full report on the Americas Social Forum will appear in the next (Autumn) issue of *Interact*.



Blanca Chancoso with the Americas Social Forum banner.

Angelique Orr

Debate rages on corporate social responsibility

SELF-REGULATION of social and environmental responsibility has enabled companies and corporations to 'offend with impunity' over the last 30 years, claims Andrew Pendleton, senior policy advisor with Christian Aid, writes Finola Robinson.

Mr Pendleton was speaking at a debate on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in June organised by JustShare, a coalition of Christian organisations working for global economic, social and environmental justice, of which CIIR is a member. The debate, titled 'Is CSR just PR?', was chaired by CIIR executive director Christine Allen.

Mr Pendleton, who wrote the Christian Aid report *Behind the*

mask: The real face of corporate social responsibility, believes that CSR is just another smokescreen used by companies to control their public image. He outlined the Christian Aid view that international legally binding standards are crucial – and cited examples of companies using CSR to cover up continuing environmental and social abuses, such as Shell in Nigeria and Coca-Cola in India.

Neil Makin, external affairs director for Cadbury Schweppes, responded that 'CSR has not been, and should never be, about legislation. Legislation can stop people doing bad things but it cannot make people do good.'

Mr Makin stressed that, because of his company's Quaker origins, ethical trade is of paramount importance. But he admitted Cadbury Schweppes do not produce Fair Trade chocolate, although he said it supports farmers in other ways. He added: 'Because of our heritage, there is a level of expectation that we have to fulfil. How we live out our values and conduct our business is vital to consumers. Stakeholders' expectations are increasingly global.'

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For more information on JustShare, see www.justshare.org. The report *Behind the mask* can be downloaded from the Christian Aid website at www.christian-aid.org.uk

CIIR Annual General Meeting

CIIR's AGM will take place at 6pm on Friday 15 October 2004 at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London. The focal theme of the event will be the

environment. The main speaker will be Fr Sean McDonagh, a Columban priest, specialist on the environment and author of the CIIR faith reflection *Living lightly on the earth* (free from CIIR: see p5).

To book a place at the AGM please contact Clare Smedley at clares@ciir.org or on 020 7288 8609 or at CIIR, Unit 3, Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road, London N1 7BJ.

A new university in Ecuador is helping indigenous peoples find their place in the modern world by grounding education in the day-to-day reality of their lives, writes **Angelique Orr**

In tune with reality

ECUADOR'S DIVERSE LANDSCAPES are matched by its rich cultural mix. Across the contrasting regions of coastal plains, Andean mountains and Amazon jungle, there are *mestizos* (people of Spanish descent), Afro-Ecuadorians – and 12 different indigenous nationalities, each with their unique identity and language.

The indigenous peoples have endured hundreds of years of subordination and exploitation, working in slave-like conditions on Spanish-owned *haciendas* in colonial times, fighting for legal rights to their land, and facing the ongoing devaluing of their cultural identity and the gradual erosion of the use of their native languages.

In the face of this adversity, however, indigenous people have responded by forming a powerful social movement that has already achieved significant changes to the system that has oppressed them. In the 1980s, for example, the Ecuadorian government recognised children's right to be educated in their mother tongue, and established bilingual schools teaching in native languages like Kichwa rather than only in Spanish. This was a big success in itself, but it also highlighted an important gap: indigenous young adults who successfully completed their schooling had no chance to attend a university where they could continue learning in their native

language. There are 53 universities in Ecuador but each one of them teaches solely in Spanish.

Access blocked

Yet the problem of access to higher education for indigenous people runs much deeper than just the issue of language. Luis Macas, who is Kichwa and an important figure within the indigenous movement, describes his experience of studying anthropology in the 1970s at a leading university in Quito: 'I can remember feeling isolated and discriminated against when I started university. One teacher insisted that I had to take off my felt hat and poncho if I was to enter his class. I tried to explain that my poncho was just the same as other people's jumpers, but he didn't agree and told me that it wasn't appropriate in his "classroom for learning".'





Such outright discrimination is just one example of the obstacles that indigenous people face if they want to participate in higher education. Imagine the problems that an average Kichwa student faces in making the decision to go to university:

- All the universities are in big cities, yet everything I've ever known, including all my friends and family, is here in the countryside.
- How will I pay fees and support myself financially living in the city when my parents can't afford to help me?
- Will I be able to hold down a full time job *and* study?
- How will I cope when everything is in Spanish and my first language is Kichwa?

Of course, in many cases *mestizo* students simply do not face the same difficult questions.

Even if an indigenous student manages to overcome the many hurdles and attend university, he or she often finds that the courses offered are far removed from the reality of their lives. Students of agriculture, for example, are encouraged to specialise in a narrow area – maybe livestock, forestry, maize or rice production. A high value is placed on a western scientific approach, such as the use of chemicals to kill pests. For many people in Ecuador, this type of study simply isn't useful when in reality a farmer with a piece of land will need to nurture cattle, trees, corn, roses, potatoes, medicinal plants and poultry, and will rarely have the funds to purchase pesticides.

Kichwa-speaking people, like these men, are among the indigenous peoples who may benefit in future from new opportunities for learning.

A population excluded

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'access to higher education will be equal for everybody' (Article 26). However, research carried out in 1996 by a leading indigenous rights organisation CONAIE (the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) found that even though 43 per cent of Ecuador's population are indigenous, they formed just 0.65 per cent of the country's university community. The conventional university system was simply excluding Ecuador's indigenous population.

Spurred on by this research, CONAIE recognised the need to establish a higher education institution which would be accessible to all of Ecuador's people. In 1996, the first seeds were sown for the birth of a new institution – the Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities, otherwise known as Amawtay Wasi or 'the house of learning'.

A fresh approach

The team behind the new university, led by Luis Macas, has worked since 1996 to develop a totally fresh approach to study which is very different from the usual theory-based system of lectures, seminars, essays and dissertations. The key to Amawtay Wasi is that the content of courses and the way of learning are in tune with people's reality in Ecuador.

'We will generate professionals who know how to solve real problems – the problems that people in Ecuador actually face from day to day'

Students entering the university will choose between a range of specialisms such as law, health, agriculture, construction or astronomy. Whichever subject they elect, 80 per cent of study is based on practical experience. Julio Olivera, a CIIR/ICD development worker working with the university, explains that in the case of agroecology, students will learn through actually farming a range of products on a small plot of land, identifying problems and finding solutions to them. The ancestral knowledge of Ecuador's people is valued greatly – why use pesticides when farmers successfully used natural biological controls for thousands of years? Only western ideas that are

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To find out more about the indigenous movement in Ecuador, see the website of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador at www.conaie.org (in Spanish)

relevant in Ecuador are embraced: as part of the agroecology course, students will learn how to alter a micro-climate by using a greenhouse.

Since the focus of learning is based on practical experience, students do not have to live near a university campus; instead they will carry out their studies within their communities, supported by visits from teachers, printed materials, videos and possibly even an internet connection. Meanwhile, as students will be coming up with solutions to real problems, they will in turn be contributing to the development of their communities. As Julio explains: 'Amawtay Wasi can play a really important role by empowering our students – but it goes further than that. We will generate professionals who know how to solve real problems – the problems that people in Ecuador actually face from day to day. So we're also empowering, benefiting and developing whole communities.'

In 2003, Amawtay Wasi finally overcame the resistance in the national education system to its proposed model of learning, and was granted university

status. All teachers are gearing up for the first intake of students in the autumn of 2004 by learning Kichwa, so that students of Ecuador's largest indigenous nationality can learn in their mother tongue. However, Spanish and English are given equal emphasis, as these languages are important for the professionals of the future. In this way, the students of the new university will be able to play a role in the country's future and, in Julio Olivera's words, 'help solve the problems that we all face in Ecuador'.

Angelique Orr is an advocacy consultant, working in CIIR/ICD's Quito office. She is British.

Pride and prejudice

Schools in Peru undermined indigenous peoples' sense of identity until they took control of their own learning, writes **Lucy Trapnell**



'**M**Y PEOPLE lost their freedom when schooling expanded throughout our communities,' says Rafael Chanchari from the Shawi people of Peru. 'They were accused whenever they did not do what our teacher considered proper.'

Now himself a teacher, Rafael looks back at how the education imposed on the people of the Peruvian Amazon alienated whole generations from their cultural heritage. 'Our parents and grandparents felt obliged in many ways,' he says. In the process, they lost sight of their own identity.

The Shawi people are one among 40 indigenous peoples living in the Peruvian Amazon who experienced the same kind of schooling that Rafael remembers. In the 1970s I lived among the Ashaninka people and witnessed the impact of formal education on their communities.

Received wisdom

At the time the Ashaninka people thought that school education would help them improve their conditions of life. Parents gave their indigenous knowledge and language little value. They believed that schools could offer their children access to white people's knowledge and language, and thus give

them the possibility of better relations with white people, and better access to their cherished manufactured goods.

As time went by, Ashaninka people became more and more aware that school education was not offering them the opportunities they had hoped for. Their children were being taught everything from a Western world-view, but were acquiring very little Western knowledge. When they finished primary school the majority hardly knew how to read and write and lacked basic mathematical knowledge and skills. Many had only the most limited command of the Spanish language – yet their own indigenous culture was being ignored, even vilified. As a result, children grew up with negative attitudes towards their cultural heritage and with a very low sense of self-esteem.

In the 1980s, indigenous organisations, formed to defend their peoples' collective rights, began to challenge the school curriculum based on the ideas, values and concepts of an urban colonial society. In 1988 the intercultural bilingual education teacher

training programme (Formabiap) was set up to promote an alternative method of teaching based on the country's cultural and linguistic diversity and recognising indigenous peoples' rights.

Teachers trained in Formabiap are selected by their communities and receive a five-year programme of training in bilingual and intercultural teaching skills. This enables them to incorporate their peoples' and other peoples' knowledge and values, as well as the so-called Western ones, into their teaching. The teachers also help their pupils to develop oral and written skills in their ancestral languages as well as Spanish.

Confidence and awareness

There are three key components to Formabiap's training programme. First, it seeks to improve the quality of education so that indigenous children have better opportunities to attend secondary school, university and technical colleges. This is crucial if we want to meet the UN's second millennium goal, which focuses on how education should be used to eliminate poverty and marginalisation.

Second, it fosters an awareness of and respect for indigenous culture and language, and so avoids sidelining the rich heritage of the indigenous people and uprooting their identity.

Third, it promotes environmental education. The urban-based national education system was alienating Amazonian children from their understanding of the region's environment. Formabiap trains teachers in traditional and modern techniques of working with the environment, and they then multiply this knowledge by enabling their pupils to defend the land and to manage its resources.

Sometimes it feels like a drop in the ocean: Formabiap is working with just 15 out of 40 indigenous societies. Thousands of indigenous children from other Amazonian societies have no access to intercultural, bilingual primary education. Yet things are gradually changing. I remember seeing indigenous children at school in the 1970s looking totally uninterested and bored. Now we see them in the classroom looking so much more confident and aware than before, and so much more interested in participating and learning.

Lucy Trapnell is a former co-director of Formabiap.

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For more information on Formabiap see www.cir.org or www.formabiap.org

'OK EVERYONE – group hug on the count of three. One, two, three... together we can do it!' Led by Gerson Nanseb, chair of Otjiwarongo Hai||om (pronounced high-t-khom) Youth League, 20 Hai||om San youth formed a circle, each with their arms around the next person's shoulders.

This demonstration of solidarity came at the end of a workshop in May at which representatives from four newly formed Hai||om youth leagues designed their own working constitution. I looked at these young people and marvelled at what the vision and determination of the young can achieve when they are given the right support and opportunities to develop their skills.

I also remembered the first time I met Gerson. It was during a community visit to Otjiwarongo in June 2003 in my capacity as regional education adviser for WIMSA, the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa. The WIMSA education programme is an integral part of the organisation's goal of 'working towards a more equitable future for San communities throughout southern Africa'.

The meeting was intended for San students in grades 8 to 12, but they were outnumbered three to one by out-of-school youth. These youth desperately wanted to access training and employment opportunities. When given the challenge that they were the ones that must make a difference in the future of Hai||om San communities, their response was: 'How?' Several of the youth present also admitted to being ashamed of being 'Bushman', but did not know about their history or culture. They wanted to know what they could do to find out more.

Within three months of the meeting, this particular group had set up the Otjiwarongo Hai||om Youth League, taken part in an oral history workshop

The Hai||om San people

Until the beginning of the 20th century, Hai||om San lived by hunting and gathering in and around the area that is now known as Etosha National Game Park in north Namibia. By the 1930s, most had to work on the farms springing up around Etosha on land claimed by the 'whites'. As farms became mechanised, many workers were no longer needed and moved to the nearest town, establishing squatter areas. Many young Hai||om who have not completed their education are still forced to work on the farms, often for subsistence only.



Outjo Hai||om youth singing 'Hai||om No. 1' outside the new Hai||om cultural centre.

Custodians of the future

Education and training have inspired indigenous San youth to find their own solutions to the problems they face, writes **Yvonne Pickering**

organised by WIMSA and set up a Hai||om History Club. It was at the oral history workshop that the idea of a network of Hai||om youth leagues was first discussed. The Otavi Khorab, Outjo and Oshivelo Ada Mah-|hao ('Let's work together') Hai||om youth leagues were established in early 2004.

Paulina Ames, a youth facilitator, says: 'Really, life is a struggle in Oshivelo. Often we do not have food and the children are too many times ill. We must help our people to have a better life.' As well as developing cultural awareness and working with the elders, the groups therefore also support community initiatives such as income-generating projects and pre-school facilities, and awareness-raising on HIV and AIDS and planned parenthood.

Supported by a training programme to raise their capacity and skills, some of the achievements of the four Hai||om youth leagues so far include:

- Collecting community statistics, including highlighting the high number of orphans and children out of school.
- Forming action groups to support non-literate adults in acquiring essential documentation and making applications for possible

financial support, and informing them that their children have a right to free basic education.

- Setting up Ada Om-Khāigu ('Let's build together') kindergarten in the squatters' area of Outjo.

The youth have also been working with the elders to develop cultural performances – a mix of traditional and modern versions. At a performance by Otavi youth of a catchy musical version of 'Are you Hai||om...' in Hai||om, elders watched with looks of pure pleasure on their faces.

For these San youth, education is more than just a means to get on in the modern world: it is also a means of preserving and valuing their cultural identity. As Gerson Nanseb pointed out during a powerful presentation at a meeting in Outjo, San youth must accept responsibility as the custodians of San culture for future generations.

Yvonne Pickering is a CIIR/ICD development worker with WIMSA based in Windhoek, Namibia. Yvonne is from the United Kingdom.

interactnow

Learn more about the San people at www.san.org.za

The higher ground

The emancipatory role of education in southern Africa has been usurped by our market-oriented, globalised world, writes **Peter Vale**

ACCORDING TO THE SOCIAL THEORIST Hannah Arendt, 'conservatism, in the sense of conservation, is the essence of the educational activity'. In saying this, she was not dismissing the weaving together of educational practice and political liberation that would later be expounded by the educationalist Paulo Freire. Rather, she was highlighting the real role of knowledge: to examine the past in order to shed light on the present and question the future. Responsible education dares not prescribe the future because the world is a new experience for each generation; it is, Hannah Arendt insists, theirs to make.

Fifty years after Arendt wrote, we are told today that everything has changed. The importance of memory has been dimmed by the declared end of history. In its stead has been placed the promise of a boundless tomorrow that will be delivered by technical innovation, and in which only the means and not the ends are open to question (and sometimes not even the means).

As a result, the emancipatory agenda that was laid at the door of education, not only for Africa, but for humanity as a whole, is regarded as old-fashioned – a relic of a time in which leaders and

their followers were captured by a language that can have no currency in a globalising world.

A question of focus

The result is a strong feature of our times: the absence of a questioning edge to education. Evidence for this is everywhere to be found. Consider the numbers of students who choose to study economics rather than philosophy, or politics, or anthropology, or sociology. Indeed, the absence of questions is to be found within the very study of economics where, with almost no exception, the mathematical and the practical is preferred above any appreciation of the discipline's deep philosophical roots.

Elsewhere in academia, this same drift towards the simplified and the practical end of knowledge proceeds apace. So, for instance, the most desirable qualification for leadership – political, social or any other – is not, as it once was, law, but business administration. Indeed, the attraction of the applied post-graduate qualification – most often at the Masters level – has widened as most academic disciplines have crossed the theory/practice divide.

It is often hoped that this switch will strengthen the discipline by attracting more and more students in order to bolster funding. Ironically, however, the opposite takes place: as understanding slips its conceptual moorings, it drifts towards an organisational rote that must draw on management studies to survive. In this setting there is no space for the kind of knowledge that affirms humanity.

Affirmative action

This pattern contrasts markedly with the days when the search for ways and means of tackling three historical conditions – colonialism, minority-rule and apartheid – lit a fire under activist-academics throughout central and southern Africa during the now increasingly forgotten Cold War.

Those were the days of intense debate at the universities of Makerere, Dar es Salaam, Zambia and Mozambique's Eduardo Mondlane: a time when these universities complemented the intellectual ferment that was felt in places like the Sorbonne, UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) and the London School of Economics. By questioning the dominant social paradigm, Africa's critical universities offered 'Third World' and other perspectives on the great social laboratory that is nowadays all too condescendingly called 'The Sixties'.

Of course there is no going back. But the pathways to empowerment that were opened then have, if anything, been covered over by the promise of a new tomorrow in which the market is the only champion. Judged by events in the recent past – of which the war in Iraq is the best example – this promise has not yielded empowerment, nor rights, nor even fairness, but the direct opposite.

A real revolution in education is long overdue – the kind that Hannah Arendt wrote about: a revolution to conserve the past in order that the new generation can re-imagine what she boldly called a 'New World'.

Peter Vale is Nelson Mandela Professor of Politics at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. He is the author of the recent CIIR Comment Whatever happened to the post-apartheid moment? Past hopes and possible futures for southern Africa (copies available from CIIR price £1 plus £1 p&p, or as a free download at www.ciir.org).

Steps to the future: students at the University of Cape Town in South Africa.

Eric Miller/Panos

Positive influence

Building an awareness of citizenship, social justice and human rights must be a major goal of education, writes **Tina Beattie**

DURING MY 30 YEARS of living in Africa, in the colonial and the post-colonial era, education was a significant and socially divisive issue. I can remember when the first black child – the daughter of a newly appointed government minister – started to attend the previously all-white government girls' school I went to in Lusaka, Zambia. In the post-colonial era, white families – and affluent black families – increasingly resorted to private education and boarding schools, while for the masses of ordinary Zambian people, education became a birthright (at least in theory) for the first time.

Although the social optimism of those early days of independence has faded and universal primary education remains an elusive goal in countries besieged by debt repayments and poor government, for many of the world's people education still holds the promise of escape from lives of poverty, illiteracy and insecurity.

The education divide

Having worked in Britain as a university lecturer in recent years, it strikes me that the global education divide is reflected, albeit in a less dramatic way, in our own society. When I lectured at the University of Bristol, the majority of our students were those for whom a good university education was indeed regarded as a birthright – part of the package deal of being born and raised in the right kind of social and economic environment.

Recently, however, I have been teaching at the University of Surrey Roehampton – one of Britain's most diverse universities with regard to the age, ethnicity and religious, academic and economic backgrounds of our students. Here, I am working with students in whom I see something of that determination and hope that I first encountered in Africa.

New opportunities

For many of them, a university education entails a great deal of personal commitment and sacrifice, but they see it as the gateway to another world. For some, this is the world that opens up when one's horizons of knowledge and understanding are widened – but for others, going to university represents the hope of moving from the margins of society into the centre, with its promise of economic independence and professional security.

Some of our students live with the prejudice and inequality that still constitute daily life for those whom our society regards as being members of the wrong race, religion or economic group. For them, higher education can be an affirmation of self-worth and ability.

In addition, a university like Roehampton provides an environment in which young and middle-aged, black and white, people of all faiths and none, must learn together and from one another. Many of them say that this is one of the richest experiences of being at such a university. It is a place where barriers are broken down, and opportunities for new levels of insight and understanding extend far beyond the academic curriculum.

Empowering people

But whatever a person's background, an educated population must be a population that is politically and socially empowered to take responsibility for civic life and the creation of a just global society. At Roehampton, education for citizenship, social justice and human rights is emerging as a central ethos.

At a time when public opinion is ruled by the tabloid press, when the so-called 'war on terrorism' has created a climate in which fear is used to justify social and political tyranny, and when there is widespread disillusionment with

Nick Sireau/CIIR



Speaking out: an educated electorate will be a politically active one.

the political process, it is even more important to enable people to make informed judgements based on right reason and sound understanding.

The British empire might be a thing of the past, but Britain remains one of the world's most significant economic and military powers. This means that

every British voter exercises considerable global influence, however impotent we might feel as individuals

every British voter exercises considerable global influence, however impotent we might feel as individuals to affect the political process. An educated electorate in Britain, empowered with a sense of justice and good citizenship and motivated by a belief in the possibility of a better future for all the world's people and for the environment we depend upon, is something that all of us involved in education should be aiming towards.

Tina Beattie is senior lecturer (Christian Studies) at the University of Surrey Roehampton. She is the author of the CIIR Comment A culture of life: Women's theology and social liberation (available from CIIR price £2.50).

THE NEWS THESE DAYS is full of stories of 'religious' conflicts. People of different faiths appear to be locked in violent conflict throughout the world. Particularly now, amid the 'war on terror', it seems as if religion is inextricable from conflict and violence.

But the reality that many of today's conflicts occur along religious lines sits uncomfortably with the fact that Islam, Christianity and many other world religions preach peace and respect for other faiths. This raises the question, is religion a source of conflict, or a resource for peace?

CIIR believes it can be both, and has begun a three-year project to promote interfaith dialogue and cooperation for peace and development in South East Asia. The project will be implemented in three areas of South East Asia where there is a history of conflict – and where religion is both part of the problem and part of the solution.

Division and distrust

One area is Mindanao, where war has raged between the Philippine government and armed groups from Muslim Moro communities for three decades. At the root of the conflict are highly political issues, such as Moro aspirations for self-determination, competition for land and natural resources, as well as social injustice. But these political issues also run along social fault lines, causing division and distrust between Christian, Muslim and *lumad* (indigenous) communities.

Like Mindanao, the conflict in Papua has political roots but also impacts on relations between the mainly Christian indigenous people and migrants – many of whom are Muslim and moved to

Weaving the fabric of peace

Jane McGrory describes how religion can be a resource for peace in areas of conflict in South East Asia

Papua following Indonesia's integration of Papua in 1963. In both Papua and Mindanao, indigenous communities feel a strong sense of injustice for having been robbed of their land, marginalised and discriminated against. The different faith traditions of indigenous and migrant populations add to the sense of difference each community feels toward the other.

In East Timor, distrust and division among Muslim and Christian communities is one legacy of the long struggle for independence from Indonesia. In post-conflict Timor, the Muslim identity is easily associated with Indonesia, and Indonesia is associated with suffering and repression. Muslims in East Timor say they are afraid to practise their faith and fear discrimination in this Christian majority nation. The many economic, political and social stresses that East Timor faces in its new nationhood further complicate the task of reconciliation.

Restoring relationships

In Mindanao, Papua and East Timor, violent conflict has given rise to animosity and prejudice between different religious communities. Yet in each of these areas, there are faith-based organisations and other civil society groups working to restore

community relationships and address the underlying causes of conflict. CIIR's new project aims to work with partner organisations to strengthen these efforts to bring about greater understanding between Christians, Muslims and other faith communities in the region.

Advocacy is an essential part of the strategy. CIIR is lobbying for policy change among Northern decision-makers – both in government and business – to help address some of the causes underlying conflict situations in South East Asia. CIIR can also help partners to make their voices heard at international level.

By creating opportunities for skills development, exchange, exposure visits and joint research, CIIR is able to play an important linking role. The merits of this were evident when CIIR brought peace advocates from Papua and Mindanao together for a roundtable discussion last year. They discovered many similarities in the root causes of conflict in Papua and Mindanao, as well as in the challenges they encountered in their work.

Peace advocates from Mindanao also found new impetus for coordination of their efforts. After the roundtable, they created an umbrella forum to bring together seven peace networks in Mindanao under the name of 'Peaceweavers'. By advocating jointly for a ceasefire and securing observer status for civil society representatives at the official peace negotiations, Peaceweavers is becoming a powerful voice in the peace process in Mindanao.

Initiatives like this, weaving a strong fabric of diverse ethnic and religious identities, offer real hope toward enhancing resources for peace – and overcoming sources of conflict.

Jane McGrory is CIIR's Asia research and advocacy officer. She is based in Manila.

interact now

A report of the CIIR round table on interfaith collaboration in West Papua and Mindanao is available free from CIIR publications.

A detail from a poster for the Mindanao Week of Peace held in Nov/Dec 2003.



TWO YEARS after East Timor gained its independence as a nation, East Timorese women still face considerable obstacles to achieving their own independence. Their experience in nation-building has been one of breaking the silence in order to be included in the nation's conversation about democracy and development. As Olandina Caiero, president of Rede Feto, the East Timorese women's network, puts it: 'Development without women's participation is nonsense.'

At present, the national development process falls short of guaranteeing women's participation in creating the country they envision, where women and men are equal. Laura Menezes Lopes, Rede Feto's director, said at a regional women's congress in May: 'East Timorese women live in a condition of poverty in all areas – health, education, politics, economy, and even some aspects of our culture that are like big obstacles for women's own development.'

Speaking out

Making women's voices heard hasn't been easy. Rede Feto was formed in 2000 to give voice to women's issues and push for real participation in the post-conflict peace and nation-building process. 'Even though women faced different challenges, women never surrendered, and this is the power to continue to struggle to survive,' says Olandina Caiero.

East Timorese women are marginalised politically, economically, and intellectually (there is a tradition of discrimination against women in education). The lack of political will and the country's patriarchal culture does little to change traditional practices that are considered oppressive towards women, such as *barlaki* or bride price, which contributes to the violence women suffer.

Yet East Timorese women have many reasons to be proud. Their efforts – including the organisation of an affirmative action campaign that resulted in 27 per cent of the East Timorese parliament being female – have been described by the UN as an example to other post-conflict nations. Women activists also lobbied for the creation of the Office for the Promotion of Equality in the prime minister's office, whose mandate is to systematically mainstream gender perspectives throughout

Building together

East Timorese women are insisting on their right to participate in the development of their nation, writes [Emily Roynestad](#)



Nick Sireau/CIIR

Women at a community meeting in the village of Aileu.

government policies and programmes. On domestic violence, initiatives to improve access to justice for women victims of violence, institutional mechanisms such as draft legislation, and awareness campaigns have ensured this remains a national issue.

Setting the agenda

Four years after it was founded, Rede Feto is preparing to celebrate the second National Women's Congress in July, 2004. Four regional women's congresses have just been completed. Over three days, in four towns, hundreds of women and men came together to share the obstacles they are facing in daily life and set the agenda for promoting gender equality over the next few years.

The second National Women's Congress is designed to bring in the voices of women that remain in the margins. Key areas of concern include education and training for women and girls, effectively addressing violence against women, securing land rights, influencing public opinion on the portrayal of women in the media, addressing the continued low levels of participation of women in politics and decision-making roles, wise stewardship of natural resources, access to credit,

health services, and justice mechanisms to advance women's human rights.

It would have been easy to keep the National Women's Congress an all-woman event. Male participation, however, is an essential element of the process. They are involved from planning, through facilitating, to participating as delegates.

It is impressive how East Timorese women reach out and trust men to advance their struggle for equality.

'I like my culture but some things have to change'

Although they are far from living in an egalitarian society, they are leading by example. According to Olandina Caiero, women have the ability to celebrate cultural identity while at the same time challenging those aspects that negatively affect women: in her own words, 'I like my culture but some things have to change.'

Emily Roynestad is a CIIR development worker with Rede Feto. She is from Maryland, United States.



A Coopasol farmer examines his crops.

Back to their roots

Farmers in the Dominican Republic are growing crops in harmony with nature, writes [Finola Robinson](#)

HIGH UP IN THE LUSH, green Septentrional mountains near the Dominican Republic's northern Atlantic coast, a cooperative of coffee farmers is pioneering a radical approach to agriculture that leaves traditional methods in the shade.

Coopasol (Cooperativa de Producción Agroecológica y Servicios Múltiples de Solimán) is a collective of men and

'every living being has a role to play and a relationship with one another'

women who farm organically, but also use biodynamic methods whenever possible – a holistic approach that follows the lunar calendar to harness planetary rhythms and encourage the land's self-regeneration.

Coopasol received its official organic certification in 2002 but the farmers have not used chemicals for a decade. According to Eloy Cruz, organisation secretary, they are the first group in the country to adopt a biodynamic

approach. Yet the irony is that, in many ways, it is 'about going back to the way our grandparents did it'.

Growing together

'When we started, nobody even knew about organic agriculture,' says Eloy. 'But we have learned that it is all about maintaining a strict relationship with the land and recovering natural resources. The way we see it, every living being has a role to play and a relationship with one another.' This philosophy is intrinsic to the relationship between crops as well as to the relationship between individuals.

During the last 10 years, the cooperative has grown from nothing to the size it is now – 300 families in the area have a link to Coopasol. Men and women are given equal participation in the decision-making and production processes and children are encouraged to get involved so that everything is shared. The cooperative is also helping to regenerate a region crippled during the recent economic crisis: many families who left the mountains to seek work in other parts of the country have now

returned because of the opportunities available to them.

Coopasol also runs a training centre, to which farmers come from different parts of the country to learn organic production techniques *campesino a campesino* (peasant to peasant). In the last year, the collective has passed on its skills to 225 farmers. The aim is that by helping each other to grow and develop, the farmers can support and educate their own community as well as the country at large.

'We are now recognised by the government and the whole country as a practical example of how to develop organic farming, and this is incredibly positive for us,' says Eloy.

Spreading the word

This knowledge is not just confined to country borders, however. Coopasol has been involved in an exchange programme with farmers in Haiti and also attended a workshop with farmers in Ecuador. The farmers are now looking at opportunities in eco-tourism in the hope of attracting visitors to their beautiful, sun-baked mountain.

The outward-looking approach has been cemented by Coopasol's long relationship with CIIR/ICD. From 1996 to 1998, a CIIR/ICD development worker from Germany worked with the collective, while from 1998 onwards Coopasol was joined by CIIR/ICD development worker Gerardo Navarro, a Honduran agroecologist.

Gerardo helped Coopasol forge links with companies willing to market and sell the coffee. He also helped them to diversify their crops so that they now produce mangos, avocados, herbs, citrus fruits, bananas and a wide variety of vegetables as well as coffee.

Gerardo's official time with Coopasol came to an end in February this year, but it is clear his friendship with the farmers will continue. In a tribute speech made on Gerardo's last day, Coopasol president Antonio Gómez said: 'It is a very sad and difficult day to see Gerardo leave. He ... has become a member of the local community and a brother. We have been able to achieve what we have thanks to God, Gerardo, CIIR/ICD and the role we have all played.'

Finola Robinson is CIIR's press and information officer.

ECUADOR, situated on the Pacific coast of South America, covers an area of 283,560 square km and boasts high biological diversity, including the world famous Galapagos Islands. The country became an independent republic in 1830.

The majority of Ecuador's 13.7 million people are *mestizo* (people of Spanish descent) or indigenous. The official language is Spanish although Kichwa is the first language for most indigenous people in the highlands. Indigenous people make up a large proportion of the 70 per cent of the population that lives below the poverty line.

Ecuador's main exports are oil, banana, shrimps, cacao and flowers. The country's foreign debt is more than US\$14 billion.

By the end of the 20th century a combination of factors, including falling oil prices and the collapse of the banking sector, drove the economy into recession. Rampant inflation, the highest in the region, led to the government's decision to replace the national currency with the US dollar in an effort to stabilise the economy.

Politics

In January 2000, an indigenous uprising supported by the army colonel Lucio Gutiérrez overthrew Jamil Mahuad, the elected president. The coup was built on a groundswell of anger including charges of corruption, the banking collapse and IMF-inspired austerity measures such as privatisation.

Gutiérrez spent six months in jail but returned to win the presidential elections in November 2002, riding a wave of support from the impoverished indigenous community who were won over by his promises to end corruption and to fight for social justice.


Gutiérrez's Patriotic Society Party (PSP) forged an electoral alliance with the political arm of the indigenous community, Pachakutik. The PSP signed an agreement that included pledges to end strict adherence to neoliberal economic policies, to resist the proposed Free Trade Area for the Americas (FTAA) and to bring in sweeping new anti-corruption legislation.

Indigenous movement

In August 2003, Pachakutik accused the government of betraying its popular mandate, endorsing neoliberal policies set out by the IMF and swinging to the right rather than representing Ecuador's

country profile: Ecuador

Facts and Figures



Population	13,710,234
GDP	\$1,396
Workforce	agriculture 30%
	industry 25%
	services 45%
	unemployment 7.7%
Maternal mortality	160/100,00 live births
Infant mortality	24 deaths/1,000 live births
Under 5 child mortality	30 deaths/1,000 live births
HIV/AIDS prevalence	0.3%
People living with HIV or AIDS	20,000
Literacy rate	male 94%; female 91%
Population living below \$1/day (1990-2001)	20.2%
Population living below \$2/day (1990-2001)	52.3%



Rainer Stockelmann

Indigenous peoples in Ecuador will have an increasingly influential say in the country's future.

indigenous and peasant communities who brought the coalition to power. The coalition between Gutiérrez's PSP and Pachakutik broke up, and Ecuador's indigenous movement is now in opposition to the government.

The Confederation of Indigenous Organisations in Ecuador (CONAIE), which claims to represent some three million indigenous people, is strong, well organised and capable of mobilising swiftly. Other key social organisations include the Coordination of Social Movements and the National Union of Ecuadorian Teachers.

CIIR/ICD in Ecuador

CIIR/ICD has been working in Ecuador since 1974 and currently has 11 development workers in post. Our partner organisations in Ecuador include indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples' groups and women's groups.

CIIR/ICD works with these organisations to strengthen their ability to promote the rights of marginalised communities. A major focus on supporting and strengthening indigenous knowledge and technology in agriculture and promoting sustainable management of natural resources.



Ahmed Ismail outside the CIIR/ICD offices in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

'The programme mostly covered anger management, conflict resolution, mediation, time management, and so on,' he says.

At that time, Ahmed had no particular plans to return to his homeland – but a short visit to Somaliland in 2001 changed all that. It gave him 'a positive feeling about the country' and made him start to think of ways that he could 'contribute in the area of youth and community development'. His search for a way back to Somaliland ended when he applied for a post as a CIIR/ICD development worker.

Breaking down barriers

Since January 2003, he has been working as a HIV and AIDS youth adviser, based in Burco but working throughout the country. He uniquely combines an understanding of Somali culture with knowledge and awareness of different societies and cultures – something that helps him break down barriers and open up new avenues, particularly on sensitive issues like HIV and AIDS.

'Young people's needs are not understood very well in Somaliland,' he says. 'I started making the risks of HIV and AIDS for young people known to religious leaders, parents and teachers.' He has also helped raise awareness among young people through forums and meetings.

With his confidence and experience, Ahmed is a good role model for the young people he works with. He is also a role model for other Somalis living overseas, through his weblog (see Review, page 20). When he lived in Canada, he had a thirst for news and pictures of 'what my country looked like after the war'. It is a need he is now fulfilling for others in the Somali diaspora by posting pictures on his weblog.

The positive feedback he has received, from people who thank him 'for the pictures and for sparking good memories in them', means a lot to Ahmed – and shows him there are many more who still care for their homeland, no matter where they happen to be living.

Alastair Whitson is CIIR's senior editor.

Homeward bound

Ahmed Ismail has gone back to Somaliland to help rebuild the country where he was born, writes **Alastair Whitson**

IN MANY WAYS, Ahmed Ismail took his homeland with him when he left Somalia in the early 1990s. It lived on in his memories – such as 'of the band playing in the street each independence day' – through phone calls to family back home, and through the links he made with the Somali community in Canada.

So when he returned to Somaliland in 2003, to work as a HIV and AIDS youth adviser, it was like going home. 'It was an indescribable feeling: I was going home to work as a development worker, close to my family,' he says.

Ahmed had been among the many thousands who fled Somalia during the civil war in the early 1990s. Born in Hargeisa in 1973, he was in nearby Djibouti when the civil war started. He says he felt helpless knowing the danger that his family was in – and 'knowing that there would soon not be a home to go back to'. Instead, he went to the United States and then sought asylum in Canada.

'Being always close to my family, it was hard to be separated from them,' he says. But his transition to living in

Canada was eased by the presence of other relatives – and the growing Somali community. 'Adjusting to life in Canada never made me second-guess my Somali identity,' he says. 'I always had Somali friends and lived in neighbourhoods where the Somali community was large.'

Learning experience

Above all, living in Canada was a learning experience – as much about himself as a new country. He discovered in himself 'the ability to adapt quickly to a new environment'; and after finishing college, during a period with the Canadian Reserve Army, he discovered 'innate talents' such as 'leadership skills, patience, and endurance'.

After this experience, he began to consider how he might use his skills to help Somali people. He found work with the Somali Centre for Youth and Community Development in Ottawa, first as a homework club coordinator, then with a programme called *hanad* which mediated in misunderstandings between youths and their parents. He then took over the centre's life skill programme for 'troubled Somali teens'.

*Last Supper (Cameroon).*

Michael Kirwan reflects on Christ as a majestic and unforgettable teacher

The teacher who liberates

MOST OF US have had direct experience of a teacher who has brought out the best in us by showing attention, compassion and patience. Conversely, we know what damage an insensitive teacher can do: discouraging or even sarcastic words can kill off a student's interest in a subject, and wreck their self-esteem. Education – being 'led out' – can and should be another word for liberation.

It is probably not a coincidence that the theology of liberation took off in the sixties and seventies, when theories of radical education and learning were becoming influential. The best known examples would be the work of Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire, while Gregory Bateson's notion of 'deutero-learning' was used by the Uruguayan liberationist Juan Luis Segundo to develop his notion of Christian doctrine as a 'learning to learn'.

These are simple ideas, but if taken to heart they leave us with a new understanding of what it means to be teachers and learners in the church. We cannot be content to be simply passive receivers of a teaching that has already been worked out for us. That would be a continuation of the 'bank deposit'

model of education, which Freire criticised and rejected.

Being a Christian is much more about coming to a new and liberating awareness of who we are before God, and about discovering that we have been entrusted to shape our own lives in freedom. This intellectual adventure has been called 'faith seeking understanding'.

Catholicism has always struggled against two opposed positions, 'fideism' on the one hand, and 'rationalism' on the other. Fideism sees faith as simply a given, to be accepted 'blindly' and without any possibility of appeal to rational judgement, while rationalism holds that we can know God through our powers of reasoning, independently of God's self-revelation.

The truth is that there is a place for the intellect in the Christian life, but it means hard work, and it means opening ourselves up lovingly to the risk of being 'led out' by someone else. It also means making mistakes, and persisting until we get it right.

The healing stories of Jesus – stories of liberation from sickness, blindness, social exclusion, even from death – are nearly always accompanied by some sort

of teaching or instruction. Jesus does not work 'miracles' exactly: he performs 'signs'. These healing and transforming actions point beyond themselves, to new meanings, and a new understanding of God.

In the following passage from a French Dominican theologian (Jean-Pierre Jossua, *The condition of the witness*, SCM Press, 1985) we are invited to recognise Jesus as a host who welcomes us, needy guests, into a new and safe space. I can think of no better evocation of what it means to think of Christ as a majestic and 'unforgettable' teacher:

'The words and actions of Jesus ... are expressions and realisations of attitudes that I love, on which I want to base my life ... Brotherhood, gentleness, service, forgiveness, contagious peace, the purity of a tranquil heart, a concern for human dignity and justice, seem to me to represent the better things of this earth ...

'At the heart of this complex of attitudes we find what has made Jesus of Nazareth an unforgettable figure: unconditional welcome, compassion for all distress, forgiveness for all failing, the reinstatement of the 'impure' in the community, the acceptance of the other as he or she is, no matter what.

'Here we find pity ... a word which expresses total understanding, total solidarity with the suffering of our kin. Here is welcome: all the nobility of someone standing on his doorstep, receiving the stranger, introducing him into his house ...

'Here is hope for others: no matter how shut in, no matter how

Being a Christian is about discovering that we have been entrusted to shape our own lives in freedom

overwhelmed a person may be, a spark of freedom, of love, of beauty can still be born of him or her. Here is obstinate good will, hope without illusion, which goes beyond the contortions of psychology to the depths of the being whom God seeks and calls.'

Michael Kirwan is a Jesuit priest lecturing in political theology at Heythrop College, University of London.

Weblogs

Online diaries can provide a personal window on development, writes CIIR's communications manager **Nick Sireau**



From Yvette Lopez's weblog <http://insidesomaliland.blogtales.com>

A diary for a diaspora

Yvette Lopez's weblog, 18 May 2004, Somaliland: 'The streets are busy as we drive down Hargeisa at around 8.30am, people walking seemingly towards one direction, the *khauria* (public square) where the celebration of Somaliland's 13th independence day is being held.

'We park in a side street and start walking towards the square when police escorts hurriedly pass through the pool of people. We realised we just missed the president. The celebration is over.'

Yvette is a CIIR/ICD development worker from the Philippines working in Somaliland. She runs an online diary – a 'weblog' – in which she describes her work and life in Somaliland. It's been so successful and information on Somaliland is so scarce that hundreds of people from the Somali diaspora around the world have emailed her to ask for more information about their country.

The weblog phenomenon

The weblog – or 'blog' for short – is a personal website with news and views on whatever its owner wants. The weblog phenomenon is a recent thing. In 1999 there were only a few dozen blogs. Now there are millions. So what happened?

Mallory Jensen, writing in the September/October 2003 issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, explains:

'Some of the blogging pioneers built tools that allow anyone, no matter how little internet savvy he or she possesses, to create and maintain a blog. All you need to get started is a name, a password, and an email address.'

Journalists in particular have scrutinised the weblog phenomenon – some seeing it as a dangerous competitor to online newspapers, others as a form of radical media that could positively interact with the mainstream media or provide an alternative source of information.

Jay Rosen is one of the latter. In his highly successful Press Think weblog (www.journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink) he writes: 'Journalism traditionally assumes that democracy is what we have, information



From Lucy Hurn's weblog www.20six.co.uk/looocey

is what we seek. Whereas in the weblog world, information is what we have – it's all around us – and democracy is what we seek.'

Windows on the world

Possibly one of the most exciting aspects of weblogs is this direct and personal angle provided to the reader. For the first time, any person can publish to potentially millions of people whatever they want to say whenever they want to say it (although this does raise major issues over the reliability of information provided).



From Ahmed Ismail's weblog www.20six.co.uk/ahmedgoo (see Interview, page 18)

For development workers, often working in remote places and with little time to email or write to their family and friends regularly, the weblog is potentially a crucial communications tool. Used more creatively, as Yvette Lopez does, it can provide facts, news, figures and photographs on rarely covered issues.

Most of all, it gives a direct insight into the cross-cultural experience that is at the heart of CIIR/ICD's skill-share work. Lucy Hurn, a CIIR/ICD development worker from the UK to Peru, writes in her weblog:

'On Saturday, a group of us went to a photo exhibition commemorating the work of the Truth Commission and showing images from the 20 years of terrorism here in Peru. It was really strong stuff, not just showing the physical effect of all the bombs and shootings, but also the effect on the lives of communities here. I still find it amazing that I really knew nothing about it before I came to Peru, yet 70,000 people were killed here, not just by the terrorists but by the government/security forces as well.'

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To start your own weblog for free, check out the following websites:
www.blogger.com or www.20six.co.uk