

interact

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

Going green

Why agro-ecology is good for people and the planet

Also in this issue:
Building networks in Somaliland
Intercultural education in Peru
Human rights in West Papua



editorial

Going green

The cover of this Interact features Colón Holguin, a farmer from the Anegado community in coastal Ecuador.

Señor Holguin is a member of the community organisation La Trinidad, which is working with Progressio partner organisation FEPP (Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio) to get the most out of its coffee harvest.

FEPP is teaching the farmers organic production techniques, including the 'wet way' of sorting and processing beans (as demonstrated by Señor Holguin). It has provided the community with its own coffee husker, roaster and grinder. It gives loans so they can buy their own coffee harvest, thereby benefiting from the added value of processing it themselves before they sell it. And Progressio development worker Rocío Loyola is helping them develop a marketing and promotion strategy for their high quality, organic coffee.

During my visit last October, I tasted this coffee fresh from the grinder. It tasted so good I had some more, then more again...

I wonder, was that buzz I got just from the coffee? Or was it from seeing this small example of how people, working together, caring for and nurturing the land, could hope to make a better life for themselves?

Whatever it was, as I drank that coffee and looked at the smiling faces around me, it made me think that 'going green' is the way to go.

Cover picture: Graham Freer/Progressio

interact spring 2006

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Published May 2006 by Progressio

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Progressio is the working name of the
Catholic Institute for International Relations

Charity reg. in the UK no. 294329

Company reg. no. 2002500

Editor Alastair Whitson

Director of Communications Nick Sireau

Acting Executive Director David Bedford

Design Twenty-Five Educational

Printing APG (ISO 14001 accreditation for
international environmental standards).

Printed on REVIVE 100% chlorine free

recycled paper. Recycle this magazine!



The commitment to grow

DAYS BEFORE I am about finally to leave Somaliland, Mustafe Khaire, Mohamoud Aqli and I line up the activities we need to finish. Somehow the list of things to do looks endless. Work is never finished in Somaliland. There is just so much to be done.

Mustafe, Aqli and Mohamed Hassan arrive at the house at 6pm, having just returned, tired and worn out, from a trip to Burao. Yet by 7.30pm, they are ready to begin preparations for a workshop to help the member organisations of SONYO (the Somaliland National Youth Organisation) better organise themselves into networks.

We go through the documents, discussing and setting our individual tasks. Each goes to a separate corner of the house, writing and thinking about their part of the preparations. The electricity goes off at 2am: by then most of us have finished our

tasks. At 2.30am we gather together again and discuss our work, then each goes back to their assignments. By 4am, everything is complete.

The workshop is still two days away, but they wanted to finish the preparations for they have other things to accomplish. Working until dawn is not unusual for both SONYO leaders and I. 'Remember what you said before? You will work hard if we work hard,' Mohamed Hassan remarks.

Mohamed Hassan and Mohamoud Aqli were part of the group of 13 who formed SONYO in 2003. Seeing them today, coordinating activities, writing reports, managing projects and facilitating conflict resolution initiatives with minimal assistance, reminds me of how they were years ago when they were just starting. It makes me believe that although there are still challenges facing the organisation, their commitment and

determination to succeed is an important ingredient that will take them to greater heights.

Learning cannot be achieved if there is no willingness and openness to break new ground, to explore new ways of doing things. Capacities cannot be built if there is no commitment to grow.

It is the collective effort of the partner organisations and the Progressio development worker to plant the seed of empowerment, to nurture and to harness victories, however small these may be in the eyes of others. But in the end, it is the changes that are manifested in their daily lives that testify to the fact that the hard work and time invested has been fruitful.

Yvette Lopez was a Progressio development worker in Somaliland from January 2003 to February 2006.

A reason for being

What do farmers in Central America think is the role and future of agriculture?

Voices collected by Elisabet Lopez, Progressio's environmental advocacy coordinator, under a Progressio initiative to give farmers in Central America without internet access the opportunity to participate in an electronic conference on the Future of Food and Small-Scale Producers. The conference, organised by a group of UK-based organisations including Progressio, aimed to bring the voices and priorities of small-scale producers to the international policy-making table.

Eusebio Heredia Vasquez is president of the Association of Agroforestry Producers of Zambrana Chacuey in the Dominican Republic

'The great significance of agriculture is that it is the basis of the economy of a community, a region, a country, the world. The villages which do not have a well-developed agriculture are villages which live plunged in misery. Agriculture is, and will continue to be, the basis of the economy of the whole world.'

Maria Eduviges Sanchez grows maize and kidney beans on a small plot in Llano Verde community, Lempira, Honduras

'I would like women to have better access to, and control over, the lands. There should be soft loans, especially for single women, and women on their own. Good marketing channels should exist, and agroecological techniques should be used.'

Eugenio Antonio Diaz grows coffee, avocados, plums, bananas, plantain, oranges and yams on rented land in the mountainous region of Salcedo in the Dominican Republic

'I live in love with my land. For me, the city is an uncomfortable place. I do not want to leave my land. Organic agriculture gives me security of food, gives me health.'

'My vision is for more self-sufficiency – that people consume food which they have produced themselves, in a healthy manner. The producer should understand their worth, their potential, and the importance of caring for the environment which surrounds us.'

Roberto Martinez from Nicaragua grows maize, kidney beans, sorghum, fruit and wood, and raises livestock

'For me, the farm, the plot, is a harmony, a circle between the animals, the plants, and our family, and a source of food for everyone. By growing trees as well, the farm is a source of water, and this is important because the lack of water is one of the problems in the world now.'

'It is important to stop buying chemical resources, and begin to make the most of the resources we have on our farms. The use of chemicals creates economic dependency; it is harmful to health; and environmentally I am destroying myself, and my neighbours, and my family. If we do not respect every part of the chain, we are not going to survive, economically or environmentally.'

Jose Alberto Cortes is a farmer in Belen Gualcho, Honduras

'Not having my own land is my main obstacle. It means that I cannot apply all the organic crop techniques that I know, as the effects are long-term, and the land can only be rented year by year.'

'Also there is a lack of indigenous seeds. We have to buy hybrid seeds which are very expensive and which are only good for one harvest. In order to improve my situation, I would need to have my own seed banks, or to have community seed banks, and to be able to have a bit of my own land, which would also serve me as a guarantee for loans.'

Franck Tondeur is a Progressio development worker with UNAG (the Nicaraguan National Union of Agricultural and Livestock Farmers)

'The merchants [middlemen who buy produce from small farmers] are part of the problem, but at the same time it is the system. The fact of selling one kilogram of maize for 80 pesos (US\$5) is a scandal. And this is not the price of your sweat, your effort, to be able to sow and get to harvest this little cob which your wife spends the night taking the kernels off. This is an insult, paying you this.'

'So why do they pay you this price? Because the international market says to you, if you do not want to produce at this price, tomorrow I am sending you foreign grain. The government ought to favour Nicaraguan maize, not only because it is more tasty, but also because it has been produced with the sweat of each campesino; but with the Free Trade Agreement, this protection will be completely eliminated.'

'\$5 is not what 100 kilograms of maize is worth. It is worth much more than that, when you are fighting without finance; with bad roads; with technology which does not allow you to get any volume of production; with merchants; with a load of restrictions. And at the end, they pay you a scandalous price for your maize.'

'It is incredible that farmers can survive. But look at Julio: he has been working his farm for 28 years. How is it possible that he should survive with these miserable prices which they are paying him? How is it possible that he has not gone to work on a building site? Or that he has not given up and emigrated?'

'So if he survives in these conditions which are so difficult, imagine how it would be for him if he had just the minimum of support from the government; if he could organise with other small farmers to market and sell his produce; if he could have a minimum level of processing for his products, which would allow him to sell to the international as well as the local market.'

Julio Cesar Palacios farms in Estelí, Nicaragua

'The love of agriculture runs through my veins. If I did not have land, it is probable that I would have gone to Miami or Costa Rica, that I would have left my wife, that my family would have disintegrated. But in the place where I live, I feel that as a farmer I am struggling. Why? Because we lack technology, we do not have government support, we are alone.'

Luis Octavio Obregón is a farmer from Estelí, Nicaragua

'Farming is a source of survival for the campesinos (peasant farmers). I am a campesino by birth, and I have been working since I was able to grasp a machete. I do not have any other profession. From this, I have been supporting myself and my family. It is something essential in my daily life. I do not know if I would leave the countryside. It is my reason for being.'

Elections fail to address Peru's problems

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS in Peru in April have been a backwards step for those concerned with human rights, according to the UK-based Peru Support Group.

The leading contenders all focused on law and order issues and none have raised or confronted the human rights issues highlighted by the 2003 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report. 'The election campaign has not been one in which presidential candidates have dignified themselves by addressing Peru's long term problems, or those of

its long-suffering people,' says the Peru Support Group.

With 90 per cent of votes counted, it seems no candidate will win the over-50% majority necessary for an outright win. A run-off is likely to take place in May between ex-military captain Ollanta Humala and former president Alan Garcia.

The front runner, Humala – who was ringleader of a failed coup in 2000 – has built his popularity on being the 'anti-system' candidate in a country where people have little faith in government, representative institutions, or the democratic process.

According to the Peru Support Group, the conduct of the recent elections shows that the reforming momentum of 2000 and 2001 – when the TRC was set up and there was hope for a transparent democracy – has been largely dissipated. 'The majority of Peruvians feel as powerless as before, if not more so,' says the Peru Support Group.

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Find out more at
www.perusupportgroup.org.uk



David Tanner/Progressio

Agricultural land lies unused on a farm in Zimbabwe repossessed by the government.

Zimbabwe government urged to change policies

PROGRESSIO HAS WARNED that Zimbabwe faces 'increased deaths, insecurity, and possibly violent conflict' unless current government policies are changed.

The warning comes in a joint letter with the Irish agency Trócaire to the Zimbabwe Ambassador for the UK and Ireland, on the occasion of the 26th anniversary of Zimbabwe's independence.

Drawing on the experience of partner organisations in Zimbabwe, the letter outlines the 'devastating social consequences' of the country's 'endemic economic crisis' which the government 'seems incapable of dealing with'.

Expressing concern about the 'erosion of human rights and closing down of democratic spaces,' Progressio, Trócaire and their partners urge the Zimbabwe government to repeal repressive legislation, stop the politicisation of food aid, and create a dialogue on 'a new constitution and the renewal of Zimbabwean democracy'.

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Read the full text of the letter at
www.progressio.org.uk

Corinna Csaky



A woman votes in elections in Peru.

Women of faith come together

WOMEN OF FAITH from West Papua, Mindanao and East Timor came together in a workshop in February organised by Progressio to build solidarity among women working for peace in the region.

Jane McGrory, Progressio's Asia research and advocacy officer, said: 'What was perhaps most remarkable about the event was

the very powerful connections that the women – from such diverse backgrounds – drew among each other and the strength they found in this.'

Bai Liza Saway, from an indigenous faith community in Mindanao, paid tribute to the importance of continuing such exchanges by saying: 'We have found similarities in our music, our dance and dreams, as well as in our struggles, pain and suffering. As women who are driven by our faith and our desire for peace, there is much we share and much we can learn from each other.'

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Find out more about Progressio's programme to support interfaith action for peace in South East Asia at
www.interfaith-asia.org

Religious leaders tackle AIDS stigma in Yemen

MUSLIM RELIGIOUS LEADERS in Yemen learned how they can help tackle the stigma and discrimination around HIV and AIDS at a workshop in February organised by Progressio.

Yemeni culture is strongly influenced by Islamic religious teaching and beliefs and, as a result, religious leaders have an important and influential role in society.

The workshop was attended by 21 religious leaders (known as imams and khateebis) from the city of Hodeidah and surrounding rural districts.

Progressio development worker and HIV and AIDS advisor Irfan Akhtar prepared the material for the workshop and delivered training with assistance from local organisations Jamiat Abu Musa Al Ashari, Al Mustaqbal Organisation and the National AIDS Programme unit in the Hodeidah Health Office.

At the end of the two-day workshop, the imams discussed how best to take the issue forward and communicate lessons learned to members of their respective communities. The

imams were given background material on HIV and AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as well as strategy papers on cultural and religious approaches to prevention and how best to provide care and support for people living with the disease.

They also received a copy of a draft Khutba (Islamic speech) on HIV and AIDS and Islam to be used in a discourse during Friday prayers. The document was debated and reviewed during the workshop to ensure that the Khutba was technically correct and religiously sensitive.

Irfan Akhtar said: 'The experience of organising this workshop for religious leaders has been challenging and exciting for me. The participants were open to discuss various issues related to HIV and AIDS and STIs and sexuality in detail, without any reservations, which was very encouraging.

'They were also quoting religious teachings available in the Islamic teachings (Fiqhah) about the transmission, prevention and treatment of STIs. I had a preconceived notion that they



Chris Stowers/Panos

The minaret of a mosque in Al Mukallah, Yemen.

would be reluctant to talk about this sensitive issue of sexuality and HIV and AIDS but I was proven wrong.'

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Irfan Akhtar has set up a Yahoo Yemen-Aids Group to give people an opportunity to share learning and their experiences of HIV and AIDS. To join the forum, please send an email to: yemenaids@yahoo.com

CHANGING M

Victory for Terminator technology campaigners

The moratorium on Terminator technology – the genetic modification of plants to make them produce sterile seeds – has been upheld by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The decision is a victory for the broad global coalition of farmers, civil society organisations and indigenous peoples who have for months campaigned tirelessly to defend the CBD global moratorium. In the UK, Progressio – as a member of the UK Campaigning Group on Terminator Technology – took a lead role in the campaign.

The governments of Australia, Canada and New Zealand wanted

to undermine the moratorium and open the door to field-testing of Terminator seeds by introducing case-by-case assessment. The UK government supported this despite the fact that 224 MPs from all parties signed Early Day Motion 1300 urging the UK government to defend the CBD moratorium.

However, the 8th Conference of the Parties of the CBD not only re-affirmed the moratorium on Terminator but also strengthened it by making it clear that any future research will need to be conducted within the bounds of the moratorium.

Elisabet Lopez, Progressio's environmental advocacy

coordinator, speaking on behalf of the UK Campaigning Group on Terminator technology, said:

'We are relieved that common sense has prevailed in Brazil and that the case-by-case approach, which would have allowed Terminator technology to get established without the essential global impact assessments, has been rejected.'

She added that Progressio would like to thank all its members who took action and wrote to their MP following the 'Say no to suicide seeds' leaflet and article in the last Interact.

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Find out more about genetic modification and Terminator technology at Progressio's environment website www.eco-matters.org



Miguel Sumba on the farm that he has created in an arid landscape.

TAKING HOLD

The organic approach is proving to be good for farmers and good for the land in Ecuador, writes **Alastair Whitson**

IT'S THE SORT OF HILLSIDE that people would normally climb up on their hands and knees, searching for a hold in the thin, sliding soil. It's not the sort of place where you would expect to find a thriving organic farm.

Miguel Sumba, his wife Maria Margarita Sumba, and their children have painstakingly claimed a livelihood from these barren slopes in the dry foothills near Cuenca, Ecuador. They have built earth terraces, fixed at the edges by a kind of grass that binds the soil and which, when

cut, serves as cattle feed. Sugar cane is also planted on the edges, to fix the soil, provide sugar juice, and feed the cattle.

On the terraces, they grow a huge variety of vegetables, including carrots, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, beetroot, cucumber, onions, tomatoes. Dotted around the farm are medicinal and aromatic herbs, spices, lemon trees. The crops are complementary: some require nitrogen, others produce nitrogen. They use no pesticides or chemicals, only organic fertiliser that they prepare themselves with by-

products from the farm, and dung from their animals: goats, sheep, cattle, and guinea pigs.

According to Progressio development worker Isabelle Robles, such diversity is the essence of agro-ecology. 'It is better for small farmers to grow a variety of things,' she says. 'Then they can sell their produce at the market, rather than relying on just one crop that they sell to a middleman.' It also provides food security for the family, as Miguel points out: 'The first thing is that I have the means to feed my family; second, I have the opportunity to sell produce in the marketplace.'

The healthy option

Organic produce sells in the local market for around twice the price of vegetables grown with chemicals. 'People know that organic products are more healthy, and that is the main reason why they buy them,' says Miguel.

Previously, Miguel used to go to the coast for months on end, in search of work. Now he stays year round, living and working on the farm, supplementing his income with other work: he manages the potable water system for the local community, is a local councillor, and a promoter of a community savings and loan scheme.

Miguel admits he has learned a lot from non-governmental organisations like Fundacion Mazan, with which Isabelle works. 'Little by little they have introduced me to this knowledge,' he says. 'They arranged for me to visit another farm in the north of Ecuador, where I saw similar conditions – and saw what I could do back here on my own farm.'

Focusing on people

Fundacion Mazan was originally set up to help protect the Mazan forest, which was threatened by deforestation due to the huge pressure on its resources from the region's growing population. Nancy Minga, project coordinator for Fundacion Mazan, says they soon realised it was not enough to focus just on the environmental issues. 'We realised we had to consider the economic situation of the people,' she says. 'We started to combine environmental education with social development – providing communities with economic alternatives that meet their needs without depleting the natural resources.'

This was where Progressio development worker Isabelle Robles came in. An agro-economist, her first task was to carry out a diagnosis of the area. 'We needed to understand why and how people were using the forest, what their economic needs are, how they are using their farms,' she says.

The simple fact is that people in the region have little alternative than to seek their

livelihood from the land. 'People cannot just leave this way of life,' says Isabelle. 'There are no other opportunities and there won't be in the future – except perhaps in growing flowers for export, but that uses a lot of pesticides and is bad for workers' health. Migration in search of work is not a long term solution.'

'So in rural areas, it is very important to support agriculture, because there is no alternative, and also because it provides food.'

Isabelle held workshops with farmers 'to show them that it is not their fault that they cannot earn a lot of money'. She says: 'It's not that they don't know how to produce – in fact they are very efficient, and the technology of the North is not, in any case, appropriate here.'

'We needed to help them understand their reality inside the reality of the world, and find a way to do the best they can inside that reality.'

That's why Fundacion Mazan is promoting agro-ecology – because it provides food security and a livelihood, and helps sustain the environment. The foundation's approach includes supporting community-based farmer networks, such as Mushuk Pakarina in the town of Gualaceo. The Sumbas are one of 150 families in Mushuk Pakarina who have an agro-ecology certificate, which enables customers to be confident of the quality of their organic produce.

Fundacion Mazan also supports marketing initiatives, such as radio advertising on the environmental and health benefits of organic production. And it seeks to influence policies that support agro-ecology – for example, supporting local water board management, and county level environmental management.

It is a holistic approach whose benefits can clearly be seen on the Sumbas' farm. If



Graham Freer/Progressio

Maria Margarita Sumba tends to her crops. Most of the crops are grown from hybrid seeds purchased from seed companies. Hybrid seeds are designed to produce only one crop. 'Most of the local seeds have disappeared – it's a fact that now there is a dependency on purchased seeds,' she says. Farmers in Gualaceo, near Cuenca, Ecuador, also struggle to irrigate their land. Miguel Sumba says: 'In previous years, the rains were constant and could be relied upon. Now we are waiting, waiting... The weather is definitely changing, and we are aware that this is happening not only in Ecuador but around the world.'

'People know that organic products are more healthy, and that is why they buy them'

you stand on the edge of one of their small terraces, on one side are rows of crops, bursting with vitality. On the other side, where the earth has not been reclaimed and fixed by organic production, the land literally falls away, the soil thin and dry, shifting and impermanent as the wind.

In this dry landscape, the Sumbas' farm is an oasis of green – a small but vibrant example of the way to a sustainable future for people whose only resource is the land.

Alastair Whitson is Progressio's senior editor.

GROWING TOGETHER

Nicaraguan farmer **Marcial Lopez** describes his vision of a sustainable future for campesinos

I COME FROM A FAMILY of small coffee and livestock producers from the northern region of Nicaragua known as Las Segovias. Since my childhood, I, alongside my parents, have personally shared and suffered the devastating effects of the rural development policies which have been drawn up from outside for our people.

Five years ago, I left my job and returned to farm in a poor rural area. My vision is to strengthen local abilities so that as campesinos (peasant farmers) we can confront the reality of our poverty. Together we can make the rural areas

Together we can make the rural areas into a place of dignity, not a place where the forgotten live

into a place of dignity, not a place where the forgotten live.

On my own farm, I grow kidney beans, maize, sorghum, avocados, oranges, mangos, cashew nuts, etc, but my main area is the breeding of livestock and the production of milk for cheese and cream. I produce everything on my farm, including the food for the livestock: I mix sorghum, I add to it fruit of a fodder species, carbon, vanilla and soya. The only thing which I buy outside is soya.

I would like agriculture to be self-supporting. We should work for an agriculture which enables we farmers to take control of our own destiny, to

be able to depend more on our own resources, and to strengthen our own abilities.

Vision

There must be room for the small producer, because it is in the small units that healthy food can be produced. I have seen large scale, intensive agricultural systems, like soya production in Argentina. The amount of herbicide it needs is incredible: there are warehouses full of herbicides. There is also no campesino population in those surroundings. It is sad, because the rural areas remain isolated and with little diversification. This cannot be the agricultural vision.

When I talk of agriculture, I am referring to a type of agriculture where the campesino families are present, where the role of the woman, of the family, is present, where there is abundant and diversified and organised production. But right now in Nicaragua, there is no policy which is aimed at supporting these productive processes. The small producers and the campesino families are effectively on their own.

In the capitalist system, campesino families are seen as a source of the cheap labour that is required in the city. Therefore there are no policies to promote the stabilisation of these rural families, because this would jeopardise the supply of labour. It is not by chance that the rural areas are

forgotten: it is a strategy, something which has been planned.

Alternatives

But many families are resisting leaving the rural areas. For example, my farm is located in one of the poorest areas of Nicaragua, San Juan de Limay, Estelí department. This area is extremely dry. Many young people are emigrating from this area, to El Salvador, to the United States and above all to Costa Rica. But there are others who are resisting going away: they do not want to leave their family because they know that going away often means never coming back. And there are people who want to maintain their family unit – who refuse to send away their children of 14 or 15 years of age. These are campesino people, with a very deeply rooted culture as regards family identity.

So, they are fighting to produce. There are some who sell their labour, there are some who market their produce. So they have multi-functional survival strategies. And there are some of us who are fighting to find alternatives.

I believe that in order to give stability to the rural areas a large alliance of all those of us who are working in the rural areas is required. In the rural areas there are not just poor campesinos, there are also small and medium-sized producers who would be able to generate local production and absorb local labour, improve local salaries.

On my farm, three campesino families work with me with whom I have an agreement, born of a dialogue. They identify with my production plan and I identify with their reality. So this has allowed us to fulfil the goals on the farm in productive terms. Some have their lands and do not want to have to sell them, and they do not want to have to leave their community. So it is very important for them to



A farmer harvesting a cacao pod in Jalapa, Nicaragua.

be able to find local employment.

In economic terms, the biggest problem is how to enable families to have a sustainable income the whole year round. Without this, the ability to invest in the farm without having to resort to a loan is difficult. And the terms of loans (short-term, high interest) often do not fit into the particular reality of the farms. The lack of investment options which respond to small farmers' needs is a serious limitation.

Motivation

So people turn to the cooperation which comes from NGOs. But sometimes, when initiatives for rural development are not suitable for the reality of the campesino, aid can become a burden. For example, an NGO comes along and puts in some bushing plants, a set of 'improved' chickens, some pigs. But it is not sustainable because the farm does not produce enough food for the

circle to be closed, for there to be a self-sufficient circle. The chickens require food concentrates rich in proteins, which the campesino does not have, so it has to be bought; also, a fence has to be made for the hen, it needs mesh, a roof.... So for the campesino this becomes a drain on resources in a situation where the people are barely surviving.

What is happening is that the reality of the campesino is read more from the point of view of those who are offering and not from a true reading of the local needs and abilities. It is not a participative process but a domineering one. The people receive it because in the end the people accept what is given to them. The result is a hen run with 15 or 20 red hens, which the people maintain simply to please the technical expert who is going to visit them.

If we want the rural areas to develop, they have to be invested in. It is necessary in the first place to help the small producer to produce in difficult

conditions (by means of loans, technical aid, ongoing assistance); and once it is produced, help him to add value to his product. It is also necessary to have a high spirit of motivation, to put an effort into the farm, with honesty, with transparency, with commitment; to create a team spirit with the families who work on your farm.

Resolving the problems is the task of all of us who are in the area. Policies have to be considered which are for the poor, as well as for the small and medium-sized producers. The small producers exist, and they must be recognised and supported. All the wealth that there is in the rural areas could be added up; instead it is dismantled, totally atomised. But if we join together, with good organisation, with transparency, with incentives, just imagine all that we would produce in coffee, in grains, in fruit, in livestock.

Marcial Lopez is a farmer from Estelí, Nicaragua.



Saul Bustillo and a fellow farmer.

DURING MY LAST TRIP to my native country, Colombia, in October 2005, I visited an association of small farmers about 100km west of the capital. From Bogota the road descends 2,500 metres to reach the Magdalena river valleys. As the road spiralled down, I counted at least 10 mudslides where land on the steep inclines had been cleared for farming, and washed away by heavy rains.

It is extreme poverty that forces campesinos (peasant farmers) to try to get some produce from the only land they have. Most of the best farmlands in the valleys are owned by rich farmers, usually involved in big agro-industry projects.

The Incas had a solution: terraces supported by intricately fitted stone walls, incorporating sophisticated irrigation systems. This response to the food security problem facing millions of small producers in Latin America forced to farm on marginal land would still be environmentally valid – but unfortunately, it is no longer economically practical.

Organic approach

My trip to Colombia was actually a flight stop en route to

THE TREES THAT BIND

Farmers in Honduras have found an ingenious way of farming on marginal land, writes **Belisario Nieto**

Central America, most particularly to the Pico Bonito national park in northern Honduras. There I met Marvin Zavala, a Progressio development worker with the organisation that manages the park. An agronomist from Nicaragua, Marvin specialises in organic farming and is supporting all the families that live in the 'buffer zone' around the park.

Marvin's main quality, apart from his technical skills, is that the people see him as an equal: he speaks the language of the campesinos, walks for miles to reach all the families living within the buffer zone, and shares their food and shelter. A farmer approaches me and whispers in my ear: 'Could you please make sure that Marvin stays with us for a long time?'

Marvin takes me to visit the *finca* (farm) of one of the community leaders, Saul Bustillo. On the farm, Saul shows me his cacao trees. Since he introduced organic fertilisers, the yield on beans has increased 40 per cent, he says. The whole *finca* uses environmentally friendly practices, recycling organic material for feeding chickens and fish.

Creating terraces

But the main purpose of my trip was to see the formation of natural terraces that allow campesinos to work on the hillsides that surround the Pico Bonito national park. The secret of these terraces is the *guamo* tree. These quick-growing trees are planted at 50cm intervals along the contour of the hills, forming corridors four metres wide. The roots of the trees

hold together the soil; between the thin trunks branches of the tree are left to gather organic matter, leaves and soil, which slowly forms a terrace, ready to be used as a bed for staple crops.

Once the terrace is formed, the trees are cut back to allow planting. The wood that is cut is used for fuel. The ashes go to the latrine. The produce of the latrine is used as a fertiliser, while other organic leftovers from the farm are converted – with the aid of Californian worms – into first class organic fertiliser.

This is a holistic approach and a shared effort between Marvin, the families, men and women living around the Pico Bonito, the management team of the park – and of course any of you out there who support Progressio's work.

Flying back to Tegucigalpa (the capital of Honduras), I had my last look at the Pico Bonito as it suddenly appeared from the clouds of condensation that rise from its green forested sides. I remembered Saul's smile when he gave me to try for the first time an organic cocoa fruit, and said: 'Next time you come to visit you will have organic bean stew from the hillside terrace you saw.'

And then I said to myself, I have to tell others about this project, because it is a project that shows what having an impact really means. The only thing I regret is that Progressio does not have a programme in Colombia.

Belisario Nieto is Progressio's programme coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean.



Food for thought

Our very survival is at risk unless we change the damaging and unsustainable global food system, argues **Michael Meacher**

THERE ARE FIVE REASONS why our current food system is not sustainable. First, agricultural production is increasingly mechanised, and therefore depends on oil. But the supply of oil is beginning to run out. Oil demand from industrialising countries like China and India is rising so sharply that production cannot keep up with demand. Permanent shortages of oil will kick in within a decade or less, the price of oil will escalate, and oil-driven food production will decline sharply.

Second, the growing shortage of water means that half a billion people already live in water-stressed areas – and

the UN expects this to rise five- or six-fold to include half the world's population by 2025. This will lead to massive shifts of populations and water wars. Frankly, the current use of water in agriculture is extravagant and utterly unsustainable. For example, US prairie farmers and East Anglian barley barons need 1,000 tonnes of water to produce 1 tonne of grain, while 1,000 energy units are used for every single energy unit of processed food. That is just not sustainable.

Third, the intensification of climate change has led to a ten-fold increase in the incidence and ferocity of climatic

You can run, but you can't hide... People run from a bush fire in Sydney. Climate change, exacerbated by our global food system, is one reason why the current food system is unsustainable.

catastrophes in the past 40 years. These include major-scale hurricanes, cyclones, floods, as well as increasing drought, desertification, and inextinguishable forest fires, rendering more and more croplands unusable or infertile. Half a billion of the world's population now do not have croplands on which they can maintain themselves. The latest UN report says that one sixth of countries in the world (up to 30 nations) now face food shortages because of climate change.

The fourth reason is the loss of biodiversity from monocultures imposed by industrialised farming, not least genetically modified (GM) crops. A quarter of the world's GM crops are grown in Argentina, where huge areas

continued overleaf

Climate change ... puts at risk the feeding of up to nine billion people on this planet by 2050

were cleared to grow GM soya, particularly Argentina's pampas, previously one of the most organically productive areas in the world.

Fifth, long-distance transportation of food across the world is incompatible with the requirement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2050. Between 1968-88, world food production increased 84 per cent and the world population 91 per cent, but world food trade increased 184 per cent. The planes and motor vehicles which transport this food are the fastest rising causes of greenhouse gas emissions. To put it in household terms: a typical UK family of four is responsible per year for four tonnes of CO₂ emissions from their house, four tonnes from their car, and eight tonnes from the production, processing, packaging and distribution of the food they eat.

Time for change

So what should be done? First, we need a massive switch from highly mechanised, pesticide-driven agriculture to low-input/organic agriculture. The energy saving of doing this would be up to ten-fold. How can it be done? The current food system is linear in design and treats inputs like energy and raw materials as infinitely available (which they are not) and the environment as infinitely capable of absorbing waste (which it is not). This is not sustainable.

To change this, we need a tax system that factors in the full cost of all these finite items and uses the proceeds to subsidise organic, low input and localised agriculture systems. In contrast, organic production systems are an example of sustainable, circular methods of food production in harmony with the natural eco-system. Is this switch happening? Well, although sales of organic food in the UK have quadrupled from £260 million in 1997 to over £1 billion now, the one million acres now devoted to organic production in the UK is still only two to three per cent of agricultural land in the UK.

Second, developing a sustainable food system should become a major government policy based on setting targets for sustainable food production,

Sustainable food systems should be at the heart of global policy, not a device for the exercise of power by the strongest nations

import substitution, fair trade and local sourcing of food. Specific timescales should be set for achieving these targets. The Government's Organic Action Plan Group, which I chaired, did set a target to increase the percentage of organic food consumed in the UK which was also produced in the UK from 30 per cent to 70 per cent by 2010. But (as so often) the mechanisms to deliver it were delayed and weak – the UK was until recently the only country in the EU15 which did not offer post-conversion aid to new organic farmers. Moreover, none of the other necessary objectives I have listed are currently subject to targets, apart from agri-environmental schemes to encourage broad and shallow adoption of very modest environmental standards.

Third, the very large external/environmental costs of transportation must be internalised. Transporting agricultural products in the UK (mainly by big heavy goods vehicles) emits 1.1 million tonnes of CO₂ per year, and transporting beverages and other foodstuffs emits three million tonnes of CO₂ per year. So, transporting crops and food together accounts for one fortieth of all the UK's CO₂ emissions per year. That is not sustainable.

The real cost of food

We have what is euphemistically called a 'cheap food' policy in this country. It is no such thing: it takes no account, for example, of costs of water purification after agriculture and pesticide run-off, nor of damage to the environment from long-distance transportation and exacerbating climate change.

At the very least, we should require all food products to be labelled to indicate the environmental impact of distribution. Organic and other assurance schemes should take the lead by introducing the proximity principle into certification. But what is fundamentally needed is a revolution in environmental and social accounting, so

that a flat-rate VAT is supplemented by a tax surcharge on over-exploitation of natural resources and on long-distance transport of certain agricultural products (those which can be cultivated locally under EU rules).

Fourth, a sustainable food system should promote human health – and certainly not harm it. There is now increasingly convincing evidence that industrialised farming systems do the reverse. For example, latest government figures reveal continuing massive increases in the use of pesticides, while evidence linking pesticides and brain diseases like Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and motor neurone disease is now compelling. This urgently needs to be followed up by the government.

Fifth, globally, what is making so much of the world's food systems unsustainable is climate change. Drying out of croplands; the growth of continental and Indonesian fires; the rising frequency and ferocity of storms, cyclones, and flooding; rising sea level – all increasingly put at risk the feeding of up to nine billion people on this planet by 2050. Climate change will only be reversed by fundamental changes in the world economy, national societies and our individual way of life. But the minimum requirement is already clear: a massive switch out of fossil fuels to renewables; a system of contraction and convergence between the industrialised North and the developing South which will keep global greenhouse gas emissions within a level which scientists believe safe; and a huge uplift in energy efficiency.

Sustainable food systems should be at the heart of global policy, not (as now) a device for exercise of imperial power by the strongest nations. The pressure for reform could hardly be stronger. If we do not learn lessons from what is facing us, our planet Earth will apply those lessons itself, but at a price which at worst could cast considerable doubt on the survival of our own species.

Michael Meacher is an MP and a former environment minister. This an edited version of a speech delivered at the Sustainable World International Conference held in London in July 2005.

Organic production systems are an example of sustainable, circular methods of food production in harmony with the natural eco-system

From 1975 onwards, Progressio (as CIIR) – and its members – consistently campaigned for an end to human rights abuses in East Timor. Now we need to help stop similar abuses in West Papua.

Stand up for the Papuan people

HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF

Recently, the East Timor Commission on Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) documented the abuses that took place during Indonesia's 25-year occupation of East Timor. One of its aims was to ensure that such abuses did not happen again. Yet Papuans claim that similar abuses by the Indonesian military are ongoing in the Indonesian territory of West Papua. The CAVR report found that the support of the UK government and arms companies for the Indonesian military was a contributing factor to the abuses which occurred in East Timor. This pattern threatens to be repeated in West Papua.

WHAT HAPPENED IN EAST TIMOR?

The CAVR found that provision by the UK of military assistance to Indonesia during the occupation of East Timor 'helped Indonesia upgrade its military capability and freed up the potential for the Indonesian armed forces to use other equipment in Timor-Leste [East Timor]. More importantly, the provision of military aid to Indonesia by a major Western power and member of the Security Council was a signal of substantial political support to the aggressor in the conflict, and outraged and bewildered East Timorese who knew of Britain's professed support for self-determination.'

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN WEST PAPUA?

West Papua is largely closed to human rights defenders and journalists, yet local churches and other local human rights monitors have documented human rights abuses of a similar nature to those committed in East Timor. Human Rights Watch has described Indonesian military operations in West Papua as being 'characterised by undisciplined and unaccountable troops committing widespread abuses against civilians, including extrajudicial executions, torture, forced disappearances, beatings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and drastic limits on freedom of movement' (Human Rights Watch country summary – Indonesia, January 2006 – see www.hrw.org).

WHAT IS THE UK GOVERNMENT DOING?

The CAVR recommended that the UK regulate its military sales to and cooperation with Indonesia, and make such support totally conditional on progress towards full democratisation, subordination of the military to the rule of law and civilian government, and strict adherence with international human rights standards, including respect for the right of self-determination. Yet on a recent visit to Indonesia (30 March 2006), Prime Minister Tony Blair stressed efforts to strengthen military ties. Once again this cooperation will be seen as support for the Indonesian military which has yet to be held accountable for the atrocities committed in East Timor or West Papua.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Write to your MP outlining your concerns about West Papua, and asking her or him to urge the UK government to comply with the recommendations of the CAVR report. Find details of your local MP at www.locata.co.uk/commons
- Write to the UK Foreign Office to ask the government to respond to the CAVR report and implement the recommendations pertinent to the UK. Write to: Rt Hon Jack Straw, MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Downing Street, London SW1A 2AH.
- Write to the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, at 10 Downing Street, London SW1A 2AA. Ask him if he raised the situation of human rights in West Papua with the Indonesian President, and express your concern at the UK's close military ties with Indonesia when the Indonesian military has not been held accountable for previous gross human rights violations.

To receive a four-page summary of the CAVR report, please contact Alison Ryan, Progressio's Asia advocacy officer, at alison@progressio.org.uk



A woman herding sheep near Anyarate village. Anyarate is over an hour's drive from Cusco, along a dirt road that snakes over plunging valleys and sheer ridges. On the far side of a bleak plateau covered with a patchwork of yellow grass, brown earth and grey stone, we descended through fields hoed for planting, and past herds of sheep, pigs and cows, into Anyarate.

Giving something back

Pukllasunchis, a Progreso partner organisation in Cusco, Peru, works to promote intercultural bilingual education. In ordinary words, this means that schools teach in both Quechua and Spanish, and that children learn about indigenous culture and history, not just the colonial version. The aim is that, by helping children in indigenous communities grow up to be proud of themselves and their identity, they will have the strength in the future to stand up to the marginalisation and discrimination that is still so prevalent in Peruvian society.

As well as running its own school in the outskirts of Cusco, Pukllasunchis provides training to teachers, and support to schools in the region that have chosen to follow the bilingual, intercultural model. In October 2005, Susanne Perez, a Progreso development worker with Pukllasunchis, took us to see a school – kindergarten, primary and secondary – that follows this intercultural bilingual model. These images are from that visit.

Words: Alastair Whitson. Pictures: Graham Freer.



Milk being served at break-time in the Anyarate village kindergarten. The mothers of the children take it in turns to come in to prepare the milk, and later, a hot soup for lunch. As the children collect their milk, we stand around talking with Susanne and the two kindergarten teachers, Yudid and Eufelia. 'In some communities,' says Susanne, 'children like to go to kindergarten or school, because they know they will get meals – and also sometimes to get away from their families. In some areas there is a lot of alcoholism and violence, and the children suffer from that.' Such problems can be due to a weakening of cultural identity – a phenomenon in which religion has played a part. 'But here,' says Yudid, 'religion has not entered the village like a plague, mutilating the people's customs and traditions; in fact it is good because it has helped reduce alcoholism and violence.'



Boys taking a break in the yard of the kindergarten. In the background is a play area that is being constructed out of local materials by the children's parents. The school plays a key role in the community, according to one teacher, Primitivo Espinoza Muñoz, who has lived and worked there for 17 years. 'When I first came, there was more poverty, the people were more careless,' he says. 'That has changed over the years, partly due to the influence of the school.' For their part, the parents seem committed to the intercultural model that the school has adopted, supporting the school in whatever ways they can – such as building play equipment at the kindergarten.



A teacher and pupils in the grade 4 class of Anyarate school. Pukllasunchis carries out follow-up visits to schools to see if teachers are putting into practice what they have learned on the training courses. 'It's good that we came today,' says Susanne, 'because I've seen that some of the teachers are abandoning the teaching strategies.' The bilingual model requires teachers to teach one day only in Quechua, then the next day only in Spanish, rather than mixing the two languages. 'This teacher has reorganised her head in a way that does not correspond to the model,' says Susanne. 'She is not teaching Spanish as a second language but simply using it as the teaching language.' On a normal visit, Pukllasunchis would spend a whole day observing the teaching. The teacher would also do a self-evaluation. Pukllasunchis would then discuss with the teacher what he or she is doing. 'We try to reach compromises,' says Susanne, 'to ensure that the teacher does not feel censured, but returns to the model.'



A father demonstrates digging a trench for building foundations. We visited the school at the time of year when villagers get together to fix up their adobe houses. In the kindergarten, the children were learning about the rituals and ceremonies connected with house-building and renewal. 'When taking something from *pachamama* (mother earth),' said the father, 'first we must give something back.' A bottle of Coke had been produced for the *gringo* visitors, and the man took the bottle and sprinkled some Coke on the earth. 'No, no!' shouted the kids. 'We want to drink it!' Despite the ubiquitous influences of the western world, Susanne says that 'people have not forgotten their cultural values and traditional knowledge and ways of doing things.' Intercultural education aims to reinforce and value local culture and traditions. In one project, says Susanne, Pukllasunchis gave teachers cameras to take pictures of local activities. The children asked questions about what was happening, and then collected and recorded the information. The aim is to put everything onto a CD as a future teaching resource – not just for schools in indigenous areas, but also to raise awareness in schools elsewhere in the country.



A teacher in the secondary school, Sonia Vilca Huarca, with some of her students. Sonia is from Arequipa, one of the main towns in Peru. I ask her what motivated her to come and teach at this school. 'My aim is to get the children out of the countryside, so they can live a better life and not be farmers like their parents,' she says. Later, Susanne tells me: 'This shows what Pukllasunchis is up against in terms of teachers' attitudes. We want to reinforce the values of the indigenous community, not take the view that speaking Spanish and working in Cusco is better than staying and living in the community.'



On the road back to Cusco (just visible in the valley in the background), villagers carry out repairs to the road as part of a *faena* or 'shared work'. Other traditions still observed in the community include *ayni* or 'work exchange' – 'you help me today, I will help you tomorrow' – and *minka*, where people help each other without expecting anything in return – where, in Susanne's words, 'people help because it is good to help'.



An act of solidarity

Carlos Reyes-Manzo's photos from Brazil and Latin America are a window into a reality the rest of the world would rather forget, writes **Alastair Whitson**

THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE POLICEMAN: one shoots with a camera, the other with a gun. One gives a human face to the invisible poor, finds the individual story within the nameless, featureless mass of poverty, gives a voice to the voiceless. The other does not see a person, only a problem, and silences that voice forever.

One of the photos in the exhibition *Shooting the poor in Brazil* by Carlos Reyes-Manzo shows five youths in Favela Peixinhos, Recife, Brazil. Shirtless, they stand in a loose group, posing for the camera. At first glance their postures and expressions are a shield: they are not expecting anything from the camera, the photograph, the world; they are not giving anything away. Yet they have consented to have their photo taken, as if they know they have a story, a reality, a life, that matters to them, and should matter to others.

A few minutes after this photo was taken, the life of one of these youths (the second from the left) was taken away, by a military policeman with a gun. Does this change what we see in the picture? In the picture, this youth has a tentative half-smile on his face, as if unsure about this process of being judged (by the people who will view his picture; and perhaps, in a few moments, by the military policeman). As if to say, this is my lot in life, this is who I am; but I am me, and what is that to you?

Photographers, says Carlos Reyes-Manzo, usually work under the pressure to create images that will please the commissioning agent, often an agency or organisation from the global North. Consciously or unconsciously, the agency in the North, and the people it serves, impose their world view on the subjects of these photos.

The latest fashion in development photography – the photos commissioned or used by agencies like Progressio or Oxfam or Christian Aid – is to focus on the real lives of people in developing countries, to try to capture them in dignity and purpose, to give humanity to their lives. It is easy for outsiders to characterise the quality of survival in spite of poverty as dignity and humanity. But perhaps it is more correct to say that survival for people living in extreme poverty is sometimes, more simply, about enduring.

Another picture in the exhibition shows a family at a bus station in the process of

emigrating from the countryside to a *favela* (shanty town) in the city. They have the vacant look of people in transit, people suspended between two places, neither in one nor the other. But there is no suggestion of hope at the prospect of a new place, a better life. It is a look of resignation and endurance. It is not that they are looking forward to a better life, but that this is the inevitable course of life; that this is their lot in life.

Another picture in the exhibition shows a young girl holding a doll, smiling demurely for the camera. The caption tells us the girl was photographed going from house to house asking for food, yet the photo itself does not tell us this. It hints only at the simple essence of the child, the state of innocence that is childhood and that lives on even in such realities as this. If we look closely, we see the doll is incomplete, missing some parts, and we see shadows under the girl's eyes. Perhaps these hint at the life that may lie behind the smile, but in the girl's face, we see only her.

Is this perhaps the point? 'What strikes you when you go to Rio de Janeiro is how beautiful the city is,' says Reyes-Manzo. 'You wouldn't believe how much wealth there is in this city. The poor are completely isolated in ghettos, and they know that if they come out, they will be shot – and nobody cares, nobody knows how many across Brazil are shot.'

Reyes-Manzo's project is to 'put a face on the real Brazilians'. He says: 'When you think of Brazil you think of football and carnival. You don't think of the lives of the people, the transient people passing by.'

Each photo, he says, records a moment in 'the history which is passing by'. And perhaps it creates an iconic image that makes us think about what lies behind that moment, that helps us find the story or meaning that lies behind that image, that moment.

For this to work, the photographer cannot be on the outside looking in, or the inside looking out. The photographer, he says, must establish a relationship with the subject. This can be the work of a minute, or of some hours, or just a glimpse of mutual understanding in the moment of 'shooting'. And with that mutual understanding, the photo is neither exploitation nor intrusion. 'It's the other way around,' says Reyes-Manzo. 'People say to me, please tell our story, tell what's going on here. It's what they want. They are non-people, the voiceless, and they want a voice.'

'This gives me the value of what I am doing. It is not a transaction but an act of solidarity between me and them.'

In another exhibition, *Impunity*, which ran in London at the same time as *Shooting the poor in Brazil* (February-March), Reyes-Manzo documents the extrajudicial abduction, rape, torture and murder of thousands of women in Ciudad Juarez,



© Carlos Reyes-Manzo

Mexico, and in Guatemala City. It is a campaigning exhibition: social documentary photography at its most forthright. There are photos of murder scenes, of graves, of investigators, of protest marches and demonstrators.

But crucially, there are also pictures of people: the hazy identity cards of the disappeared, all that remains of the person they were; and the defiance of the bereaved, in whom the dead live on, in whose hands lies the search for justice.

One of these pictures is of Ileana Peralta and Maria Elena Peralta, sisters of Nancy Peralta Oroxon, a student at the University of San Carlos, Guatemala City, who was abducted, raped, tortured and killed on 1 February 2002. Ileana told Reyes-Manzo: 'When the crimes began we did not think we would be affected, we are students concerned with our studies. The suffering of knowing that our sister will never return makes it impossible for us to live in peace.'

The work of Reyes-Manzo reminds us constantly of this truth: that even if we are not ourselves a victim, it should be impossible to live in peace knowing that injustice exists. Reyes-Manzo's photos are not just images of a passing moment in history: they are an act of solidarity with the ongoing moment that is the life of 'the forgotten people'.

Alastair Whitson is Progressio's senior editor.

***Impunity* was in support of Amnesty International's Stop Violence Against Women campaign. The photos in *Shooting the poor in Brazil* were also a collaboration with Amnesty International. Carlos Reyes-Manzo's poetry collection, *Oranges in times of moon*, was published in February. Originally from Chile, he works as a journalist and documentary photographer with the Andes Press Agency based in London. The quotes are from an interview with Alastair Whitson in February 2006.**



A farmer from Amaranguile community, Olancho, Honduras

Vanessa Kurz/Progressio

ACT TODAY, THINK TOMORROW!

'Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed' – Mohandas Gandhi

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• THE ANSWER

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