

interact

The magazine of **PROGRESSIO**

CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES

A man wearing a white baseball cap and a light blue patterned shirt is working in a field. He is holding a piece of food, possibly a piece of bread or a vegetable, in his hand. The background shows green foliage and a wooden structure.

Seeds of change

How agroecology is improving the
quality of life in Ecuador

Also in this issue:

Say No to Terminator Technology
Vocational training in Somaliland
Keeping the promise on HIV and AIDS



editorial

Seeds of change

I hope you will read this issue of Interact and be inspired. Because I was. By the people of Ecuador who are standing up to the colonisation of their country – their natural resources, their culture and traditions – by multinational companies, international institutions and global capital. By the Progressio development workers like José Jiménez, Alex Amézquita, Rogasian Massue and Chris Nyamandi, whose commitment to their work – and to the people they work with – shines through in the articles they have written for you to read.

But most of all, I hope that what you read here will inspire you to action. Because the people throughout the world struggling to take control of their lives, in the face of the challenges of poverty, need our support. Whether it is practical action such as adding your voice to Progressio's campaign against Terminator technology, or financial support for the Progressio development workers in countries from East Timor to Ecuador, what you do can make – and does make – a real difference.

Cover picture: Nelson Ramon Mamallacta Alvarado, from Lushian Mariposa in Archidona province in Ecuador, grinding leaves to make a natural insect repellent. Photo: Michelle Lowe

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Growing together

I BEGAN WORKING WITH PROGRESSIO in the Dominican Republic in January 2005, supporting the agroecology work of two partner organisations: JUNACAS (The Salcedo Committee of Farming Associations) and CAFESA (Affiliated Farmers of Salcedo). I now also support COOPASOL (The Soliman Agroecological Production and Multiple Services Cooperative). These organisations are made up of male and female farmers in the northern mountain range of the Dominican Republic.

The mountainous zone has many valuable natural resources and is very productive in terms of agroforestry. Yet, despite these natural assets, people in the region lack basic services such as drinking water, electricity, sewerage systems and transport links.

My work with the partner organisations aims to help improve the quality of life of their members, through the management of natural resources, institutional strengthening, organic production and joint marketing of their agroforestry products.

Having had previous experience of working with different farmers' organisations in Ecuador, my home country, I have learnt that the needs of small-scale farmers are similar in different developing countries, as is the state in which the natural resources are found.

The work carried out by JUNACAS, CAFESA and COOPASOL is based on three principal components: socio-organisational, environmental and economic. The economic component underpins the others: joint marketing

and promotion of organic products, and the awarding of small credits, helps finance the socio-organisational and environmental work.

All the work includes a focus on gender equality – seeking to revalue the presence of women farmers and establish equal relationships between male and female farmers – and relies on participation. This promotes a critical presence and decision-making within the organisations, and so aims to ensure that the agroecological approach is sustainable beyond the timeframe in which Progressio works with the organisations.

As a development worker, I have been directly involved in building the capacity of the organisations to develop their agroecological work. Therefore, the most important achievement is the existence of a group of technical promoters, formed of men and women who are responsible for implementing the agroecological practices on members' farms. These practices include: agroforestry management of coffee and cacao plantations; the production of vegetables and other short cycle crops, especially in order to improve the diet of participant families; soil conservation; production of organic fertilisers; environmental assessment and interpretation; reforestation using native species; ecological management of household waste; improvement in the basic infrastructure for the postharvest of coffee and cocoa; and supporting joint commercial activity.

During the last two years, two of the

organisations have received international certification for the organic production on their farms. This has enabled the farmers to increase their incomes, particularly through the sale of coffee and cocoa with an organic stamp. Farmers have also been successful at targeting niche markets for organic and fair trade produce.

The future vision of these farmers' organisations is to develop distribution channels for the products that bear their own agroecological stamp. They hope also that consumers in Europe, the USA and Japan become aware of products which originate from farms which are ecologically managed by producers committed to the development and conservation of the environment. To this end, the production of a video about JUNACAS is being supported.

My time here has been a personally enriching experience, and I can see that the seeds of change are beginning to spread. My counterparts Eugenio Díaz (JUNACAS), José Rosario (CAFESA) and Alejandro Sánchez (COOPASOL) are now recognised agroecology experts and promoters who are starting to act, consciously, as change facilitators. That is, they are working together with people from rural areas on the management of natural resources available to them. They are leading and carrying out actions for a common interest, in order to achieve community development.

José Antonio Jiménez Vélez is a Progressio development worker in the Dominican Republic.

Zimbabwe: the need to bear witness

THE RESIGNATION of Pius Ncube, one of the fiercest critics of the Zimbabwean government, from his position as Archbishop of Bulawayo, came as no surprise, writes Dr Steve Kibble.

The bishop is being sued by a Bulawayo man, Onesimus Sibanda, for allegedly having a two-year adulterous relationship with Sibanda's estranged wife Rosemary. Whatever the truth of the allegations, many Zimbabweans agree with the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference that, like the apartheid regime in South Africa, the state is attempting to smear prominent church opponents with sex scandals rather than dealing with the massive crises affecting Zimbabwe, which can be laid squarely at its door.

The news has been received, by all those who care about the suffering of Zimbabweans, as a

depressing and salutary reminder of what happens to opposition voices. In recent years Archbishop Ncube had become, in a place where opposition is not tolerated, conspicuous as a courageous and effective channel of opposition. He was one of the few church leaders speaking the truth to those in power. Lately the Zimbabwean churches, notably the Catholic Bishops, have spoken out to denounce the current regime. The Easter Pastoral letter 'God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed' compared the plight of Zimbabweans to the Jewish slaves under the Pharaohs.

Tributes to Ncube's role abound. Progressio's executive director, Christine Allen, said: 'Progressio is of course extremely sorry to hear that Archbishop Pius Ncube has tendered his resignation, but the fact that he has done so and the way in which he did so highlights the honesty and commitment he has always shown to social justice for suffering Zimbabweans.' Similar sentiments came from Bishop Crispian Hollis, chair of the Department for International Affairs, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, who said: 'For many years, Pius Ncube has been outstandingly brave in the way that he has confronted the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe.'

The ZANU-PF regime's approach since losing a 2000 referendum has been a dual strategy of maintaining power at all costs and grabbing Zimbabwe's resources to reward supporters in its patronage. This has meant suborning the judiciary and police force, driving farmworkers from

their homes and jobs, attacks on the independent media and NGOs, a series of rigged elections, torture, kidnappings, murders, and 'urban cleansing' of the cities to divide and destroy the opposition. In May Pius said: 'Five hundred people die of AIDS every day, but Mugabe does nothing to improve health. They are a mafia. A few people are stinking rich and the majority are below the poverty line. The people are being fed by the World Food Programme - a third of us would be dead if it wasn't for the help that we're getting - but Mugabe is still berating the West. He never looks into himself and admits his mistakes. And the truth is that 99 per cent of what we are suffering is because of this one man.'

In response to the Zimbabwean crisis, the EU's Council of Foreign Ministers imposed targeted sanctions on Zimbabwe including an arms embargo and travel ban on the elite, and terminated political dialogue in 2002. Progressio commends the principled stand of the prime minister, Gordon Brown, who said he will not attend December's EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon if President Mugabe is going to be present. Any invitation to Mr Mugabe or another ZANU-PF leader on the travel ban list would not only undermine the work of the Zimbabwean church to bring positive change but be a failure of solidarity with Pius who spoke out against injustice and deprivation with such courage and compassion.

Dr Steve Kibble is Progressio's advocacy coordinator for Africa, Middle East and Asia.

According to the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, over 25,000 cases of human rights violations, overwhelmingly committed by state forces, have occurred over the last six years. Nearly four million Zimbabweans are in need of food aid which the government cannot provide and 80 per cent unemployment has driven at least a quarter of the population abroad. The country has one of the highest HIV and AIDS prevalence rates in the world and life expectancy dropped from 61 years in 1990 to 34 years for women and 37 for men in 2006. Zimbabwe's inflation rate is the world's highest at 7,300 per cent, with independent Zimbabwean economists putting it at twice that figure.

Progressio to recruit new Chair

Progressio will be starting a process to appoint a new Chair of its Board of Trustees early in the new year, as the current chair, Helena Molyneux, will be standing down at the AGM towards the end of 2008.

If any Progressio member wants to know more, or would like to suggest possible candidates, then please contact the executive director, Christine Allen, in confidence. Please write to Christine Allen, Progressio, Unit 3, Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road, London N1 7BJ, marking the envelope 'Private and confidential'; or email christine@progressio.org.uk

PROGRESSIO
CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES

Protecting water, land and seeds in Ecuador

A NEW PROGRESSIO PROJECT to help poor communities in the Ecuadorian highlands to establish fair, sustainable systems to manage water, land and seeds was launched in August, *writes Michelle Lowe*.

The three year project is being funded by the Big Lottery and will work with three Ecuadorian partner organisations to support grassroots and indigenous groups to manage and conserve their natural resources.

The partner organisations are the Institute of Ecuadorian Studies, who work on *paramo* (high Andean ecosystem) management; CAMAREN – the national campaigning body for improving access to water; and CEA – the Ecuadorian Coordinator for Agroecology.

The project will be working with small communities where people live in difficult conditions with high levels of poverty and malnutrition. Located at over 3000m above sea level, they farm small plots of land and now face increasing problems due to contamination of irrigation water and soil erosion.

Three Progressio development workers, one based in each organisation, will run practical training workshops, carry out natural resource management activities, and work to enable grassroots organisations to influence policymakers through local, national and international advocacy.

Luis Camacho, Progressio country representative for Ecuador, said: 'We are delighted to be coordinating this project and bringing specialists to partner organisations here to challenge inequality and protect the environment in these very poor communities.'

'The communities currently have no opportunities for training and therefore no way of recording and building on their knowledge to improve their practices in the management of essential resources. They are also marginalised from government discussion and decision-making and their needs are not supported by legislation.'

José Rivadeneira, executive coordinator of one of the partner organisations, CEA, a network that works on sustainable systems

of agricultural production and seed conservation, says:

'We hope that the project will increase seedsaving in communities and promote seed exchanges between families and communities, and that this will improve families' food security, contribute to improving and maintaining diversified systems of food production and allow peasant farming communities to value their culture.'

'We also hope the project will help some small-scale farmers to have a better understanding of the risks of global agriculture and genetically modified crops so that they will take action to protect their resources.'

The project, 'Our land, water and future: natural resources for Ecuadorian communities', aims to reach over 7,000 disadvantaged people in 37 communities in four provinces of the country. All of the communities have poverty levels between 64% and 86%.

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

Cusco says no to GM potatoes

THE REGION OF CUSCO in Peru has prohibited all varieties of genetically modified (GM) potatoes, as well as all transgenic crops, because of the risk of genetic and environmental contamination, the threat to their millenarian culture, and the danger to people's health.

The decision of the regional government of Cusco, passed at the regional assembly in June 2007, aims to protect the genetic diversity of thousands of native varieties of potato and other native crops. It prohibits the entrance of transgenic crops to the region as well as the sale, growth and transport of all GM crops.

The potato originated in the Peruvian Andes and there are more than 4,000 varieties in the

Andean region as a whole, including more than 2,000 varieties indigenous to Cusco.

More than 1.2 million people live in the Cusco region. Many are small farmers for whom the potato is the most important crop.

The decree was proposed because of the fear that the genes of GM potatoes could transfer to native varieties, altering their unique characteristics, and so affecting subsistence farmers and further impoverishing local economies.



CEA

A man holds potatoes indigenous to the Andean region.

We should be inspired by people's hopeful responses to the problems they face, writes **Christine Allen**



The quality of life

PROGRESSIO'S VISION starts with us striving for 'a just world where people can have life in all its fullness'. Life is certainly the theme that comes out of this issue of *Interact*. Life: the quality of life for the poorest, protecting life amongst the harshest of times, and of course, seeking to cherish and nurture the natural life of our planet, upon which we all depend.

I have often heard the phrase, which comes from John's gospel, in the context of development issues and the importance of an active concern for the poorest. Those words of Jesus, however, take on a new depth when we hear the experiences and challenges of people who are poor, marginalised and struggling. What might life in all its fullness mean for the children in Somaliland? What might it mean for the peasant farmers who value the natural earth and its bounty? What might it mean for the sex workers that Christopher Nyamandi worked with as they struggle for survival amidst violence, poverty and hypocrisy? These stories bring home to us that this is not a simple platitude but is deep and complex and also a challenge to all of us.

Meeting the challenge

HIV and AIDS is one area where the concept of living life in all its fullness is a challenge. There are many people in the world who are living positively and fully with HIV but there are, sadly, still too many who don't. It is not just a matter of access to treatment, but also the stigma and discrimination attached to being HIV+. Progressio is pleased to be a member of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance – a broad international network of churches and church organisations working on issues of HIV and AIDS and global trade. In working together, we are all stronger and we are pleased to reproduce (see page 18) part of their advent reflections – 'Advent in a time of AIDS' – for our reflection. I hope you may consider using the resources

yourself or in your own church or community this advent.

Amidst the darkness of many of the issues, there are also many lights of hope. The development workers, in their support and engagement, help local organisations to respond to issues and to take action. On last year's World Aids Day, many of our partners overseas undertook a range of awareness raising activities, including with religious leaders. In Yemen, last year, World Aids Day activity included work with Imams which resulted in many of them speaking positive messages about the issue, and about stigma in particular, in their mosques.

Finding alternatives

Likewise, the hopeful alternatives described in the 'insight' section on agroecology show how local people and organisations are finding means other than becoming dependent on international seed providers or other external forces.

Our own 'Say No to Terminator Technology' campaign is a good way in which you can act in solidarity with poor farmers and help protect their ability to

save seeds. This is very exciting for Progressio as, after many years of high-level advocacy, undertaking a major campaign is something of a first for us. Of course, our direct lobbying and advocacy will continue, but it is great to have ways to engage our members and supporters – and reach out to new audiences too. If you know people who would be interested in the campaign, please tell them!

The Say No to Terminator Technology campaign is Progressio's contribution to the *livesimply* challenge. I was struck by the similarity between the three aims of *livesimply* (to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity) with those of the campaign of the Ecuador organisations (see page 10): to live healthily, securely and with sovereignty. The lessons for us in the rich North are, of course, different to those for the people of the Andes, especially the indigenous, but the underlying purpose is the same. We are all called to value and care for the lives of one another and our planet. This means not monopolising or wasting the earth's resources. It is a sign of true solidarity that we can identify with one another's campaigns!

Seeking to live simply and having a life in all its fullness sound somewhat contradictory, but in fact they both have a similar root. They each require us to reflect on our lives and what is important to us. They ask us to think about the big question: do we want to *have* more or do we seek to *be* more?

Christine Allen is Progressio's executive director.



Finding solutions: a girl selling tomatoes by the roadside in Zimbabwe.

Talking to people in Ecuador whose livelihoods depend on the land, it's easy to get depressed about farming and food. You hear the same story over and over again: of loss of native seeds and biodiversity; of poor small-scale farmers losing out to big agro-export companies, being squeezed by supermarkets, and marginalised by globalising markets and consumer tastes.

But there is another, more hopeful, story that it takes a while to uncover: a network of small projects that aim to put communities and farmers in control of agriculture, use sustainable farming practices, conserve native crops and biodiversity, educate consumers, and build real links of solidarity between consumers and producers.

Report by Progressio development worker Michelle Lowe. Michelle works on advocacy and communications in Peru and Ecuador.

A BETTER LIVING FROM THE LAND

Agroecological markets

‘WE GROW everything agroecologically without using any type of chemical. We've been growing like that for six years. I make a better income now than I did when I grew using chemicals.’

So says Rosa Jara, one of a group of organic farmers in the Octavio Cordero parish in Azuay province near Cuenca. Rosa gets together with other farmers to sell her produce at specialist agroecological markets – one of several such initiatives being promoted by Progressio's partner organisations, the Red Agroecológica del Austro, a network of organisations in the southern sierra of Ecuador near the city of Cuenca, and CEPCU (the Centre for Pluricultural Studies) in Otavalo in the northern sierra.

Rosa feels the markets have made a real difference for her and others in her community: ‘We sell well because people come here because they know us. They know how we grow and they know that it is healthier.’

In Cuenca, the network has



Juliette Mac Aleese/Progressio

Totoracocha market in Cuenca.

supported groups of producers to enable them to set up special agroecological stands in fruit and vegetable markets in the city. It has also helped to establish a market on Saturday mornings, CREA, which sells only agroecological produce.

Previously, small-scale organic farmers didn't have official market stalls and so were forced to sell informally on street corners, making less money and often being moved on by the police or local council. Now, three years after the establishment of CREA, their agroecological produce is recognised and sought after.

The markets are very popular

and the producers are gathering a band of loyal supporters who come back every week. Despite a growing number of stands and increasing amounts of produce, the Saturday morning market is so popular that shoppers need to turn up early if they want to be there before things start running out.

In Otavalo, Progressio partner organisation CEPCU is supporting a similar initiative for local farmers. After organising a few successful markets during the Easter week, they established a regular Saturday market in March this year.

Initially CEPCU paid for

hiring the location, but now that the producers are earning from the market, they are themselves paying to rent the space. There are about 130 families from surrounding communities involved, with around 70 coming each week to the market to sell. They have plans to build special stands, improve publicity for the market, and increase the number of producers involved. CEPCU is running training with producers and hoping to expand the market to two days a week in January of next year.

What is agroecology?

Agroecology is the practice of agriculture in ecologically sustainable ways. In the foreword to the report *Feeding this generation: Agroecological approaches to food production**,

Patrick Mulvany, chair of the UK Food Group, describes agroecology as one of 'two competing visions of agriculture in the 21st Century':

'One vision is promoted by those companies and their researchers and client governments who stand to gain the most from intensifying efforts to industrialise agriculture, that produces tradeable commodities, and to capture the markets, ecosystems and services in the global South....

'The other vision builds on the agriculture developed, nurtured and managed by farmers over millennia. This is the agriculture that not only feeds people but provides livelihoods, living landscapes and the Earth's life support systems.'

According to Progressio development worker Juliette Mac Aleese (see box 'Agroecology is good for you'), in the Austro region of Ecuador agroecology is defined as: 'An alternative option for agrarian development, which is comprehensive and holistic (encompassing technical, social, environmental, cultural, political and economic elements) and which aims to promote a good quality of life in rural areas in conditions of social justice and harmony with nature.' Juliette says: 'This means that it goes beyond production without chemicals and tackles varied dimensions including cultural, spiritual, ecological, social, political, technical and economic aspects.'

* The research for the report was partly funded by Progressio with funds from the European Commission. The report, published by the UK Food Group, can be downloaded from the 'policy analysis' section of Progressio's website, www.progressio.org.uk



Michelle Lowe/Progressio

Food co-ops

Canastas *solidarias* are another example of a small-scale initiative that is taking off in Ecuador. Literally translated these are 'solidarity baskets'. Not unlike food co-ops in the UK, the idea is that families group together to purchase a basic basket of fruit and vegetables as a group, taking advantage of economies of scale to make good healthy food available at reasonable prices. (The idea also echoes the concept – widespread throughout poor communities in Latin America – of community kitchens, where people cook together.)

Many of the projects also have an agenda of supporting local producers, establishing a direct link with particular farmers to cut out middlemen and buy directly from the farmers, guaranteeing them a good income.

Katiuska Aguilar is part of the Canasta Solidaria El Carmen which was the first *canasta solidaria* in Quito, the capital of Ecuador. She explains:

'The aim is to ensure that people have access to the basics for a healthy diet at an affordable cost. It costs US\$6.50 for the basket which should supply the essentials for a family of four for a fortnight. If

each family were to go out and buy the same produce individually, it would be at least \$10 or \$12.'

The idea is simple but effective, and very popular. Katiuska's *canasta* started in 2002 with around 25 families and in two years it expanded rapidly to include 600 families from 115 neighbourhoods in the city.

'The numbers in our *canasta* have now reduced as we are dividing up into other local *canastas*. There are now about 200 families from the south of Quito involved in our group.'

The *canasta* was set up by local families and is run by volunteers who organise the buying, bagging and distribution of the food baskets.

'Every two weeks we put together a basket of produce which includes 15 products. Some are standard and fixed. Others vary with the season and the price and in order to give people variety in their diet – a whole mix of vegetables and fruit.'

The *canasta* is trying to create more relationships with farmers and to buy more agroecological produce. Katiuska explains: 'We are trying to build up alliances between the city and the countryside. We complement

Katuska Aguilar (right) choosing seeds at a seedsaving event.

each other but there is often a big gap between us and a lack of communication. In the city we go and buy foreign products without even knowing it, instead of supporting local farmers. It isn't sustainable.

'We want to build more contacts with producers and work more on educating consumers about what is healthy food and about agroecology compared to industrial farming which uses chemicals. It's all very well to be helping people to provide healthy food for their families, but we don't want to at the same time be supporting monopolies, GM crops and who knows what else.

'The people involved in the *canasta* are not well off, they are vulnerable groups and it is

not easy for them to get information and be educated about the issues. We think that everybody has a right to know though.'

The *canastas* in Quito have formed a network and the idea

is becoming increasingly popular – some like the Canasta El Carmen are grassroots initiatives, while others are subsidised by local government or non-governmental organisations.

Agroecology is good for you

Progressio development worker Juliette Mac Aleese has just completed a nine-month research project with Red Agroecológica del Austro, looking at the connections between agroecology, food and health. She writes:

'My research found that the diet of producers in the Austro region has been improving thanks to agroecology: it is more varied and balanced. Their staple food is still the same (corn, and broad and kidney beans), but the producers now also consume more vegetables and fruit. They have relatively balanced diets, consuming foods of different nutritional categories in each meal.

'Agroecology has also made an important contribution to food security: as producers have become more involved in agroecological production, they have been buying less food to supplement what they grow; instead they are eating more of their own produce.

'Agroecology has improved the income of small producers thanks to the direct sale of produce, from farmers to consumers, avoiding intermediaries. The positive contribution of agroecology to the family economy is demonstrated by the fact that many producers I spoke to had left other economic activities to dedicate themselves solely to farming.'

Seedsaving network

ANOTHER GLIMMER OF HOPE comes from the Red de Guardianes de Semillas, a network of seedsavers in Ecuador. Like Canasta El Carmen, it was established by a group of volunteers committed to conserving their rich biodiversity.

Since 2002 the network has offered support and opportunities to exchange experience and seeds. It is now a national network of small-scale farmers, community organisations (including farmers' groups in Azuay which are part of the Red Agroecológica del Austro) and individuals from all over the country.

The network has 15 seed centres across the country which collect and distribute seeds and knowledge. They have catalogued more than

1,500 varieties of seeds which are being conserved and exchanged.

Javier Carrera, one of the coordinators of the network, explains the importance of the network for promoting and valuing the conservation of seeds and traditional agricultural practices:

'Even though many communities have lost the practice of saving seeds, the idea of a seedsaver is a figure with a long history in Andean communities. When we go to communities we quite often find that there is a seedsaver. Their work is often not valued by the rest of the community, but they do it because of their own commitment.

'The network aims to bring these people together and strengthen their work. Often being part of the network helps seedsavers to be recognised as such by their communities.'

So, despite the grim picture of threats to small-scale farmers and sustainable food production in the country,



Michelle Lowe/Progressio

A seedsaving exchange event organised by Red de Guardianes de Semillas.

there are other more hopeful visions of the future for Ecuador's agricultural producers and environment. The alternatives are evident in small-scale initiatives like these, created by groups on the ground working to protect food security and biodiversity.

interactnow

Turn to page 14 to find out how you too can be a seedsaver – and support the work of farmers in Ecuador and elsewhere in conserving their livelihoods and environment.

Further info (in Spanish):
www.redagroecologicadelaustro.org
www.redsemillas.org



Juliette Mac Aleese/Progressio

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Organisations in Ecuador are uniting to challenge food production that is endangering the environment and poor farmers' livelihoods, writes **Michelle Lowe**

ECUADOR is well known as a fertile, biodiverse country with incredible natural resources – so you would think there would be an abundance of healthy, fresh, natural food for all. However a group of organisations in the country are so concerned that food production systems and

consumption patterns in the country are damaging the environment, poor farmers' livelihoods and the health of the nation, that they are getting together to launch a campaign.

'Eat healthily, securely and with sovereignty' is the campaign message for the coalition of organisations which include Progressio partner organisations CEA, the national coordinating body for agroecology organisations, and the Red Agroecológica del Austro, an agroecology network in the Austro region.

Changing attitudes

The groups involved are planning an ambitious campaign which aims to shift attitudes to food in the

country, making people aware of the importance of food security and food sovereignty. They believe that people, especially in the cities, no longer know where their food comes from. They have become disconnected from the farmers who grow it and the processes used, having no idea whether the produce is genetically modified or produced with pesticides and chemicals.

In their slogan, 'healthily' refers to the right to health and nutrition (for producers, consumers and the mother earth) and a rejection of agrochemicals, genetically modified crops, and monoculture plantations for export. 'Securely' refers to the need to set up fair mechanisms of distribution between the countryside and the city so that everyone in the country has food on their table, and 'sovereignty' refers to a commitment to supporting a type of agricultural production which is sustainable and supports small-scale farmers at the same time as protecting the environment.

José Rivadeneira, executive coordinator of CEA, explains: 'The campaign is focused on the urban population and aims to raise awareness and promote attitude change. The idea is to encourage local initiatives to promote the sale and purchase of agroecological products and links between the countryside and the city.

'It also aims to lobby at the level of national policy to reduce the use of toxic chemicals and promote state policies to encourage, support and strengthen local initiatives. We want to see policies which favour small-scale farmers, food security and sustainable development included in the constitution and in political decision-making.'

Policy change

These campaign issues have seen concerted lobbying work in recent years from civil

Pictures above, below and right: farmers in Azuay province, Ecuador.



Juliette Mac Aleese/Progressio

society groups including indigenous groups. In 2006, for example, the Ecuadorian government decided not to sign a free trade agreement with the USA after strong popular lobbying on a range of issues including food sovereignty and the rights of small-scale farmers. This new campaign aims to keep up the momentum and ensure that the issues have a high priority in the new constitution which is to be drawn up for the country.

The coalition is beginning the campaign now with local events across the country to build support and encourage local involvement, and in January 2008 they will launch the campaign at a national level.

Although the campaign is primarily targeted at influencing consumers in cities, its real focus is supporting the small-scale farmers in rural Ecuador. Most agriculture in the country is still small or medium scale with farmers producing for their family and selling the surplus in markets.

However, these producers are finding it harder and harder to survive in an increasingly globalised world where there are strong pressures to grow for export markets, to sell land off to big agro-export companies, and to give up on traditional practices and become dependent on pesticides and fertilisers. Organisations like CEA and others involved in the

new campaign support these peasant farmers but there is a lack of government assistance. José says:

‘The campaign is not just about eating healthy produce or even about eating Ecuadorian products: it is about supporting agroecological and small-scale peasant farming. We want to really make it clear in the campaign that the aim is to support this type of agriculture and a closer relation between consumers and producers – and to promote food security for all.’

Overcoming threats

According to José, the major issue for food security in Ecuador is not about quantity but quality, and is threatened by pressures to convert to export agriculture:

‘Food security is threatened by quality issues. We do not have a shortage of food but we do have problems with people, especially those on the lowest incomes, having access to good quality food. Malnutrition levels are high in some areas and we have worryingly high levels of gastric cancer. We fear that may be linked to high levels of pesticide use and a lack of control on the usage of chemicals.

‘Ecuador is seen as an exporter of primary agricultural products. In some areas food security is now threatened because of the expansion of areas of cultivation for export. In the short term people can



Michelle Lowe/Progressio
José Rivadeneira,
executive
coordinator of
CEA.

make more money from growing for export, but this system modifies peasant farming practices and means that people aren't growing for their own consumption, so they lose that security. They also end up using more chemicals to grow monoculture crops and levels of contamination increase as does competition in the area.

‘These patterns lead to the concentration of ownership and control of resources including land and water in fewer hands, as companies buy up large areas of land. In terms of food security we have to look at the distribution of income from agriculture as a key issue.’

There is clearly a long way to go before Ecuador can be converted into a country with real food sovereignty, where communities and farmers really have control over their own resources. José says:

‘The campaign will be a long term campaign. We want it to be run in a very decentralised way so that local areas can come up with their own campaign plans and we can really create a widespread genuine involvement across the country. There are still many hurdles to overcome but we are determined to really make it work and to build up momentum, relationships and projects.’

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



Juliette Mac Aleese/Progressio

Back to their roots

Agroecology is not a new approach imposed on a reluctant population by development organisations and local NGOs. For many people in Ecuador, who have been farming without chemicals and in a holistic way for as long as they can remember, it is a return to their roots.

Yet responding to the demands of the modern world is not a simple matter. Some choose to focus on self-sufficiency, while others also grow the non-native vegetable crops that the market demands.

Whatever the approach, all are insistent that agriculture is about more than just profit: it is a way of life.

Interviews and pictures by Progressio development worker **Michelle Lowe**



José Campos is president of Asociación Bajo Invernadero, one of the small producer groups in Azuay province

We grow associatively – combining corn, kidney beans, pumpkins, and native root crops – growing them together. The majority of us grow crops in this way.

But we have also started to grow vegetables [to sell in the markets]. Before, no-one here grew vegetables, just corn and beans and so on, but now we work year round in vegetables. We have become unused to eating and growing some of our traditional native crops such as *senteno* wheat, which is native to here but we hardly have it now, or barley. But all these things grow really well here.

Everything which is from here we save the seeds, but everything which is foreign we cannot save because there is no way of doing it – it doesn't work.

We have our own native potatoes too. A while ago we collected 48 varieties of potatoes locally and we were growing them. But we have started to lose them because there isn't the demand in the markets. People are used to a different type of potato now and so we only really grow three or four varieties. If people don't want to eat things, it is a waste of time. You are wasting your work – that is the problem.

Magdalena Grefa (in blue shirt, with some of her family) lives in San José in the province of Archidona (in the Napo region of the Amazon jungle)



We grow agroecologically and we produce yucca, plantain, palm trees, guava, cocoa, coffee, peanuts, rice. I have about two hectares right in the village and 10 further away. We grow slightly different things in the two plots because the soil in the further plot is more sandy – but it is more that we grow here the things we want to have ready to hand near the house.

We grow for our own consumption. Very rarely we take produce into Archidona to the market.

There are 15 of us in the house including grandchildren. The majority of the men work away from the community. It leaves just the women to do the farming here. It used to be different – a couple used to farm together. But times have changed and people need cash now to buy things or send the children to school, or for medicines.

We save our seeds to resow the next year for everything we grow. We do it so that we don't have to be buying seeds each year. We have always saved seeds. That is just the way to produce – we have never done it any other way. It is not a new thing for us.

A while ago, we did almost change over to different ways of producing, as people were starting to grow entirely yucca in one area, sugar cane in another, peanuts in another – in order to produce more to take into the city to sell. But then we sat down and thought about it and asked ourselves why we were losing our traditional way of farming – our native farms where we mix everything together in one plot. So we stopped doing that...

Edmira Vangari farms in Octavio Cordero in Azuay province



We are noticing big impacts from climate change. We have one season where it is hugely hot and then one where it is hugely cold and rainy. Now it is really rainy but it is supposed to be summer. It has really changed; it should not be like this. The sun now really burns.

What is happening now is that we are losing our native seeds and seeds from elsewhere are coming in. They [the seed companies] come saying they are great seeds, but they are not our own. They are not from here. It is great for them [the seed companies] because they can sell, sell, sell and we have to buy again and again. This is our problem.



José Nacipucha farms with his wife, Edmira Vangari, in Octavio Cordero

Everything we grow is pure organic. No chemicals. We sell the products twice a week at the market. We have stands as agroecological producers – there are 280 of us, 150 of us from this province.

Of course we produce for our own consumption too. From this land we eat and we sell as well. Most of what we eat, we eat from here.

We used to buy everything from the city – everything. We used to buy chemicals but now we use things we have produced – garlic, rue, nettle, verbena, and other local herbs. It takes us time – it's not like just going to buy a chemical product from the shop. That may be easier but it's bad for your health, and costly. On the other hand what we produce here is good for us: it is natural.



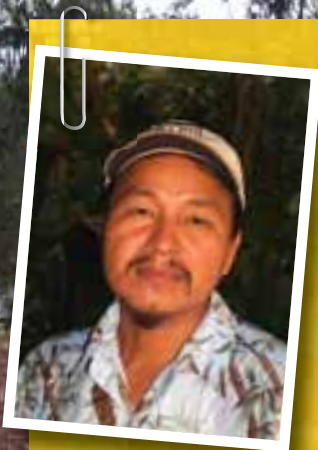
Narcisa Sinchi also farms in Octavio Cordero

I grow broccoli, cauliflower, beetroot, lettuce, carrots, cabbage, onions: a little bit of everything. We have been growing organically for years and years. We grow for our own food and for the market – the corn on the cob and the beans when they are ripe – just a few and the rest we keep for us to eat – because otherwise we'd have to go out and buy it in the market!

The grain seeds come from our own harvests. Every year we sow from the seeds from our own harvest. They are native seeds from here – we have always saved the seeds.

But because we are selling in the market, we can't use just native seeds. We have to use hybrid seeds because we have to provide what people want now. They want new produce – like the different types of lettuce they can buy in Supermaxi [the supermarket].

It would be great to be able to save and exchange seeds to avoid buying these types of seed – otherwise we are just supporting the big companies.



Nelson Ramon Mamallacta Alvarado is from Lushian Mariposa in Archidona province

We farm without using chemicals – agroecologically. We grow food plants and we also hunt and fish. We also grow lots of traditional medicinal and sacred plants. We don't have to go to the chemists to buy vitamins or drugs.

On our farm we plant within the secondary forest and we maintain primary forest too where the animals can live. We don't plant in tidy rows. Instead we spread different plants out so that they complement and protect each other and so that if a disease strikes a particular plant in one area it does not kill all the examples of that plant that you have.

We grow to sustain our families, not for the market. We are not trying to commercialise our produce and we don't want to cut down more trees to grow more.

We grow a wide variety of crops. But we have lost many varieties. We used to have many more varieties of rice, for example, but now people think it is too much effort to grow it and just go to the supermarket to buy it. People go and buy soya imported from North America and in our schools they feed our children a 'modern diet' that they can buy in the supermarket, and the children learn that that is the way to get your food.

We try to save all the seeds we can and to promote others doing the same. Many indigenous communities have lost their seeds and their traditional practices. It is a hugely important issue. We have to save seeds – it is not just about agriculture, it is about culture and our ancestral practices.

We, my family and my community, are protecting our food security and saving our seeds but others are losing it entirely and have become dependent on buying food and buying seeds.

I feel it is another incursion into our lands and our lives, like the petrol and government projects. It is all about big companies trying to make money, not about improving the quality of our lives. But it isn't that we are poor either – we are rich in natural resources and nature, we just have to recover our farming practices.

SAY 'NO' TO TERMINATOR TECHNOLOGY

What are Suicide Seeds?

'Suicide Seeds' is another name for Terminator technology – plants that have been genetically modified to produce sterile seeds. Terminator seeds present a real threat to the livelihoods of the 1.4 billion farmers around the world who depend on their ability to save seeds for their food security.

Who is developing Terminator seeds and how do they justify it?

Multinational seed companies are developing Terminator seeds (despite a current UN ban – which the companies are working to overturn – on their further development and sale). They claim that this technology is necessary to prevent contamination of normal or organic crops by genetically modified (GM) crops.

Why are they dangerous?

Like any other GM genes, Terminator genes could spread to other crops by cross-fertilisation and by accidental mixing. So the Terminator genes could contaminate non-GM crops, meaning farmers who are not themselves buying or using Terminator seeds can find their own crops producing sterile seeds. This could result in significant yield losses and potentially destroy farmers' livelihoods.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, 1.4 billion small-scale farmers in developing countries depend on the seeds they save and exchange with neighbours as their major source of seeds. Terminator technology will increasingly force poor farmers to buy new seeds from seed corporations, boosting seed company profits, but spreading poverty and hunger.

What are Zombie seeds and how are they different to Terminator seeds?

Zombie crops are genetically modified to produce sterile seeds, but these seeds can be brought back to life if treated with a special chemical. Farmers would therefore have to pay, not for new seeds, but to make the ones they saved viable. Zombie seeds, just like Terminator, would create a new perpetual monopoly for the seed industry.

What will happen if the ban is lifted?

Terminator technology presents both an economic and environmental threat to people all over the world. If companies were to be given permission to field test or market Terminator seeds, the economic independence of farmers would be threatened, as would global food security in general. Cross-contamination and market demand for these seeds would slowly push indigenous non-GM seeds out of the market. We would become dependent on a few select varieties of seeds and farmers already living in poverty would be forced to contribute to the large profits of biotechnology companies.

What is happening now?

In 2008 the Convention on Biological Diversity will meet again in Bonn, Germany to discuss Terminator

technology and whether the ban will be upheld. Biotechnology companies and certain governments want the ban to be lifted. Progressio and like-minded organisations are trying to prevent this from happening. The Progressio campaign is part of the *livesimply* project, which calls on people in the rich North to examine our lifestyles and take action to stand in solidarity with the struggles of poor people around the world. We are asking people to mobilise and act in solidarity with poor farmers to fight against Terminator seeds.

What can you do?

Use the form provided in the seed packet enclosed with this Interact to write to your local MP asking for the ban on Terminator technology to be upheld.

Join our campaign!

- Visit www.seedsaver.org.uk to find all the different ways you can make a difference for poor farmers all over the world.
- Get your friends, neighbours, parish or workplace involved with the campaign. At www.seedsaver.org.uk you can order a campaign action pack with further advice and resources.
- Visit www.livesimply.org.uk – make or sign a promise to stand in solidarity with poor farmers all over the world, and promote Progressio's campaign.



Training for life

Two boys in Somaliland have seen their lives move in a positive direction after completing a vocational training course, writes Progressio development worker **Rogasian Massue**

POVERTY is the main factor denying children access to education in Berbera, the main port town in Somaliland. So says the aunt and carer of two 16-year-old boys, Muuse Ali Elmi and Abdikarin Adan Ahmed, who have just completed a nine-month vocational training course with Progressio partner organisation GAVO (the General Assistance and Volunteer Organisation).

The vocational training programme targets young people aged 15-25 from poor communities and families. The aim is to teach them skills which will help them secure self-employment or employment in the private sector in Somaliland. Since it was set up in 2001, the programme has benefited more than 500 young people.

Muuse and Abdikarin are just two of 150 young people – 60% of whom are girls – who successfully completed the GAVO training course in September 2007. The programme conducts vocational courses for five different trades: for Muuse and Abdikarin, their choice was plumbing.

Thirst for education

Muuse and Abdikarin come from rural areas in a district called Hagal in the Sahil region of Somaliland. They left their village for Berbera in 2002, having had no formal schooling. They told me: 'Our parents' priority was never education for us... As children we found ourselves engaging in looking after goats and sheep near our homesteads.' This experience is typical of many vulnerable young people in rural Somaliland. In Somali culture, children under seven are responsible for young livestock grazing around the house, while those between the ages of seven and ten are sent out to look after the adult livestock, leaving in the morning and coming home in the evening.



Abdikarin (left/above) and Muuse outside the small shop owned and run by their aunt.

The boys came to Berbera to quench their thirst for education, but soon encountered an ironic obstacle: they did not know how to read and write, one of the criteria for being accepted on the GAVO vocational training programme. Recognising the high rate of illiteracy in the country, GAVO responded by establishing a literacy and language programme targeting children and adults, of which Muuse and Abdikarin were beneficiaries. Having learned to read and write Somali language, and gained some basic skills in the English language, Muuse and Abdikarin qualified to join the plumbing course in January 2007.

Seizing an opportunity

Now they are back in their village, cared for by their aunt who runs a small shop with which she supports the family. They have decided to return to formal education, and with the help of GAVO's vocational training manager, Abdiqan Mahmed, they have been offered free education at the local school. They explain: 'We thought of getting knowledge on such subjects as mathematics and science while increasing our knowledge in Arabic and English languages. We missed this opportunity in our childhood.'

Meanwhile, they have already utilised their plumbing skills, as their aunt explains: 'One day I linked them with a professional plumber to assist him in some work here in the village, and the feedback from the plumber was that these boys have good skills as far as plumbing is concerned – but they are very young to manage heavy work.' A further problem is that they have no tools. Their aunt says: 'I have a plan to buy these boys plumbing tools one day.'

Life skills

The boys themselves are thankful for the support they have received from GAVO, but they add: 'We have gained plumbing skills but we have no tools, and so we look for support one day to go back to our plumbing work.'

The challenge ahead for GAVO – and other institutions involved in youth training – is to focus beyond the provision of skills to consider providing basic working tools to trainees, and providing some 'seed capital' (grants or loans) which would help them start small businesses. The economy of Somaliland is still very much under reconstruction and opportunities for paid employment in the nascent manufacturing and construction industries are still limited.

Nevertheless, the training has given Muuse and Abdikarin belief in themselves, and some hope for the future. It has given them not just vocational skills but also life skills: for example, they have gained an awareness of HIV and AIDS and the routes of HIV infection. They describe GAVO as 'an organisation that helps children in difficult situations', and conclude: 'A lot of young people need the same help we got here.'

Rogasian Massue is a youth HIV and AIDS advisor with GAVO. Interviews were conducted with the assistance of Abdiqan Mahmed, GAVO's vocational training manager.



Alexander Amézquita/Progressio

The focus group at a school in Jipijapa.

Turning experience into knowledge

Young people in Ecuador have produced a radio programme which addresses the issues of concern to them, writes Progressio development worker **Alexander Amézquita**

NEAR TO JIPIJAPA, in a little community called Montecristi, the buildings for Ecuador's new Constituent Assembly are being built. The members of the assembly were just elected on 30 September this year. Investment in infrastructure and other parts of the region's economy have been diverted into this event, but a quick stroll down the streets of Jipijapa shows that very few of these resources are trickling down into the community's economy.

The winds of political and economic change, not just of the shifting governments in the country, but also of neoliberal transformations, have left Jipijapa as an area which is suffering from very high levels of poverty, high rates of teenage pregnancy, education problems, and violence.

In this small community, a project developed by the youth group Talofito is thriving. The group is being supported by Radio Alfaró to produce a radio soap opera which covers the topics of teenage pregnancy, gangs, family relationships and other themes which the young people have identified as being at the core of their daily life.

Speaking out

I arrived in Jipijapa to take part in two focus groups which aimed to evaluate

how the radio soap opera, *Sunday 7*, would be received, and how to involve other people in the project. The first group, doctors and medical students doing a year's rural placement in the community, committed to help their organisations use the soap opera to help offer a better service to adolescents in relation to sexual and reproductive rights and HIV and AIDS.

The second exercise was with a group of young people from a school in Jipijapa. Accompanied by their teachers, they took part in a debate generated by a clip from the radio soap opera. From their experiences at school, at home and in the community of Jipijapa, they talked about their daily lives from the perspective of controlling and taking care of young people's bodies. They made reference to the use of language, the school's attempts to control them, their small resistances and their visions of being young.

Tackling problems

Sunday 7 was developed with sponsorship from PCI-Media Impact and production and content support from PRODH, an NGO which works to defend human rights in Ecuador. PRODH, together with the United Nations Population Fund, has tried to offer the

young people in the Talofito group the necessary tools to tackle the problems which the young people see as key in their lives.

PCI-Media Impact has been developing edu-entertainment methodologies for more than 20 years. Recently they have been promoting the 'My Community' project which offers radio, edu-entertainment and social marketing training as well as financial support and technical assistance to produce radio soap operas on the topics of HIV and AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, human rights and the environment.

Since the beginning of 2007, PCI-Media Impact has set up a strategic alliance with Progressio partner organisation ALER (the Latin American Association of Radio Education) to offer support based on the association's 35 years of radio experience in the region.

Expressing their vision

Sunday 7 is a successful initiative because the young people who participated in its production developed skills to express their worldview and their vision of themselves. This allows them to recognise their experiences and turn them into knowledge.

The young people from the youth group Talofito have not only learnt about radio production. They have also learnt about their own ways of managing their own bodies, relating to others and facing up to a society which classifies them as 'populations with risky behaviours'. They were able to face up to these risks and talk about them amongst themselves.

The connections which they stimulated between different authorities, such as the Presidency of Jipijapa's social welfare body and health authorities in the area, shows that young people can overcome forces which try to pigeonhole them as 'risky behaviour' groups; and that cultural projects which support local experiences, and ways of narrating and depicting their ideas, can work as strategies to promote the empowerment of marginalised populations.

Alexander Amézquita is a Progressio development worker with ALER's education and research team working on communications training for radio networks. He is a communications specialist from Colombia.

An HIV and AIDS training session gave **Christopher Nyamandi**, a Progressio development worker in Zimbabwe, a different perspective on the lives of commercial sex workers

Open eyes, open mind

RELECTING BACK on my work during the past few months I have a feeling that many times we take things for granted. We always have an outside view which is blinkered by our past and culture. We are always judgemental about certain groups. We judge youths, we judge orphans, we judge widows, we judge AIDS patients, we judge commercial sex workers and many other previously marginalised or stigmatised groups. Our view is blocked because we are far from the situations. Being in the situation changes your conviction. Recently I ran an HIV and AIDS awareness session with a group of commercial sex workers (CSWs) in a remote rural area. This interaction changed my mind and perspective about this particular group. I was surprised and shocked that:

They are caring...

I always imagined that this group of people was misguided and utterly destructive. This view changed when I realised that, far from that, most CSWs are caring. They care about their future. They care about their children and are at pains to explain to their children the true nature of their profession. They also care about protecting their clients from HIV and AIDS. In fact, they insist on condom use and are disappointed that in most cases their clients seem indifferent about protected sex. I also realised that most of them had been sucked into the profession by their love for their families and the need to provide for them.

No-one likes them...

CSWs are generally regarded as social outcasts especially within the context of the African and faith cultures. Hardly does a socio-cultural lesson or a faith sermon end without reference to prostitution in a degrading way. In general no-one likes them and I was appalled to realise that they also despised and loathed their profession.

Despite being one of the very oldest professions there is no respite for them from the legislative, socio-cultural or economic perspective. For example, in Zimbabwe women are prosecuted for 'Loitering for the purposes of prostitution', but nothing happens to their clients.

They are hard working...

Most of the CSWs do not entirely depend on their trade, they have other sources of income and put in long hours to augment their incomes. Some are involved in the formal sector while some are involved in small income-generating activities. This means extra work round the clock since most of their sex work is done at night. Most of them hoped to leave sex work once they had other viable income-earning options. This led Batsirai [the Progressio partner organisation with which Christopher works] to negotiate with the District Aids Action Committee for further funds to support training on income-generating activities for this group. Hopefully their ability to translate this training to their lives may assist those committed to leave sex work.

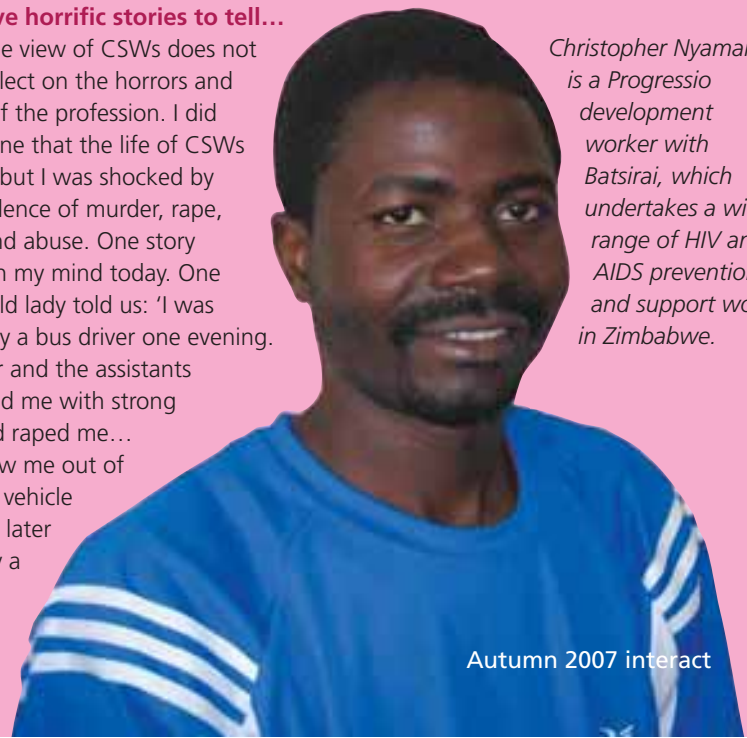
They have horrific stories to tell...

An outside view of CSWs does not totally reflect on the horrors and hazards of the profession. I did not imagine that the life of CSWs was easy but I was shocked by the prevalence of murder, rape, assault and abuse. One story remains in my mind today. One 19-year-old lady told us: 'I was hooked by a bus driver one evening. The driver and the assistants intoxicated me with strong drugs and raped me... They threw me out of a moving vehicle and I was later helped by a good

Samaritan who took me to the hospital. I was unconscious for four days, suffered from memory loss and serious internal bleeding.' It is common to hear such stories – and even more candidly horrifying ones – among sex workers. HIV is one danger that has devastated this particular group. Over 80% of those tested during the week's training were HIV positive. Some are showing signs of illness while some have already succumbed to AIDS-related illness.

My experience has changed me a lot. I feel renewed and more open minded. Many times I took the quality and quantity of my life for granted. Sometimes you think about your sisters and daughters. What shall become of them if they are faced with poverty of the current Zimbabwean scale? Where shall they get jobs in a country of 80% unemployment? Where shall they get protection from HIV in a morally bankrupt environment? Above all, this experience taught me gratefulness: to be grateful to parents, teachers, friends and relatives who gave me a future with hope. I felt so important to the future of other women and girls. I feel I am a better development worker after that workshop!

Christopher Nyamandi is a Progressio development worker with Batsirai, which undertakes a wide range of HIV and AIDS prevention and support work in Zimbabwe.



An advent calendar with daily reflections beginning on World AIDS Day, 1 December, aims to inspire Christians to help meet the challenge of AIDS

Keep the promise

Carl Hiebert/Presbyterian World Service & Development



Advent in a time of AIDS

Advent is a season of hope and expectation set amidst the poverty, violence and injustice of the world. Since AIDS was identified in the early 1980s, the joy of Advent has contrasted sharply with the suffering of people living with or affected by HIV and the deaths of over 27 million people due to AIDS-related illnesses. Over these decades we have learned that everyone is affected by AIDS, and our calling as Christians demands leadership in demonstrating love, compassion and practical support to all in need.

This is also a time of real hope. Medical advances mean that people living with HIV can live full lives. Comprehensive prevention approaches are known. The inclusion of people living with HIV at all levels of the response has helped to make our words and actions more caring and effective.

Promises by world leaders have also given hope that over the next several years concerted efforts by all levels of society will bring universal access to treatment, care, and prevention. Yet we wait for these promises to be fulfilled. The Keep the Promise campaign of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and wider civil society calls on all leaders – and all of us – to be accountable to the promises we have made and fulfill the hope of life for millions of people around the world.

The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance is an international network of over 100 churches and Christian organisations (including Progressio) committed to joint advocacy on HIV and AIDS as well as on global trade. It has produced an electronic advent calendar with daily reflections on HIV and AIDS (one of the reflections is reproduced in the box opposite). The full calendar is available to download from www.e-alliance.ch. Progressio will also be making the reflections available daily from 1 December on our website www.progressio.org.uk.

The reflections can be used as individual devotions or to initiate group discussion or prayer. May our prayers then be the foundation for action to keep our promises, and hold others to theirs, so that future generations will not live in a time of AIDS.

For whom are you waiting?

Matthew 11:2-11: 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' (v. 3)

When an opportunity arises to speak out or to make a decision that will change many things, many of us hesitate. Is this the right time to speak? Is this when I am supposed to act? We want all of the pieces in place before we risk speaking or acting. We need some assurance, somewhere to place our trust.

John the Baptist needed assurance from Jesus too – "Are you the one we are to follow?" Jesus' response is wonderful! He asks the disciples to tell John what they see and hear: the lame walk, the deaf hear, lepers are cleansed, and good news shared.

Jesus broke down stigmas and responded to people in need of love and healing. He spoke out against injustices and offered a new way of life. As disciples in this time of HIV and AIDS, the call to see, hear, and respond is ours as well. We have Jesus' Word. The time is Now.

Loving Jesus, I ask for the courage to speak and to act.
Amen.

*Sister Maria Cimperman OSU,
Assistant Professor of Moral
Theology and Social Ethics at the
Oblate School of Theology in San
Antonio, Texas, USA.*

Another colonisation

Fernando Ruiz, a Progressio development worker in Ecuador, laments the loss of biodiversity in the Ecuadorian Andes

TRaversing the Ecuadorian Andes, from the northern border with Colombia to the southern border with Peru, you can see the results of a shocking, and almost unnoticed, colonisation.

On the mountainsides, for as far as the eye can see, the only trees are long stretches of eucalyptus and pine. The native, once-magnificent, diversity has turned into monotony. Huge areas of Andean cloud forests have been turned into a home for a few species of foreign plants.

In the cemetery in Tulcán in the far north – a national treasure – all we see are cypresses from North America. There is not a single native plant. Heading south, the whole route is an endless display of eucalyptus that only changes in the Chota valley where, from trees, we pass into sugar cane: another monoculture.

Continuing south, Imbakucha (lake San Pablo) is surrounded by an infinity of eucalyptuses; while in the *paramos* (high moorland) we find pine reforestation, done in the name of carbon capture without thinking about the damaging effects that this can have on the high Andean ecosystem.

From here to Quito, the land is covered with thousands and thousands of eucalyptus and pines. The eroded soils of these areas makes us think about the relationship between exotic plantations and the disappearance of the natural layer of top soil rich in vegetable matter. In Quito itself, public parks are dominated by eucalyptus, acacia, pine, cypress, poplar, ash and African grasses, with little space for native plants.

We leave Quito and we head towards the south between interminable eucalyptus – all this interAndean zone is saturated with eucalyptus – and we arrive at the Cotopaxi Natural Park. The slopes of this great mountain are full of pines that have displaced most of the

original flora and fauna. There are thousands of hectares where pine predominates and where the Andean species are absent.

The cities that we come to in the south – Ambato, Latacunga, Riobamba, Loja – are overwhelmingly full of European, North American, Australian species. Pine, eucalyptus, palms of the Canary Islands, figs and ash from China, poplars, maples and cypress, own the green spaces: fences, gardens, urban parks, national parks, commercial plantations, even the trees in our streets. NOTHING IS NATIVE and everything is artificial.

The diverse forms of native forests with their rich and varied colours and textures are absent. There are no forests, only plantations of exotic species. The forest culture has been colonised. Ninety-five per cent of the Andean native forests of Ecuador have disappeared.

And with the native trees, cultural significance is also disappearing: the myths and the traditions about native trees, visions of the living Andean forest that accompanies us as a place of shelter,

diversity, and animal life. The forest is no longer our inspiration; it is no longer forest, it is plantation.

This colonisation leaves our soul like an uncultivated land, without water for the forest; without forest in which to embrace trees – trees where animals live; without animals; without life.

And if we descend towards the Pacific coast, we notice a frightening deforestation on the Andean slopes: the cattle ranch with exotic grass replaces the forest, destroying everything and eroding everything.

Now on the coastal plain, the plantations of African palm, teak, banana (and shrimps) have erased natural habitats without consideration for our essence. We were once countries of forests and biodiversity, but now we don't have the opportunity to experience this diversity except in very specific sites. The loss is incommensurable.

The people do not remember this invasion. Their thoughts are being colonised too – reforested – and the future is being wiped out with the forests that no longer exist.

Ecuador was once revered as the country with the highest number of plant species by area in South America. But will this continue to be true? Or is this biodiversity now only to be found in some areas of the Amazon?

It is a situation of loss of self-esteem and rights over the future of our own land, our cultures and our families. We must take notice of the colonisation which is happening to us, and begin to reclaim our green spaces.

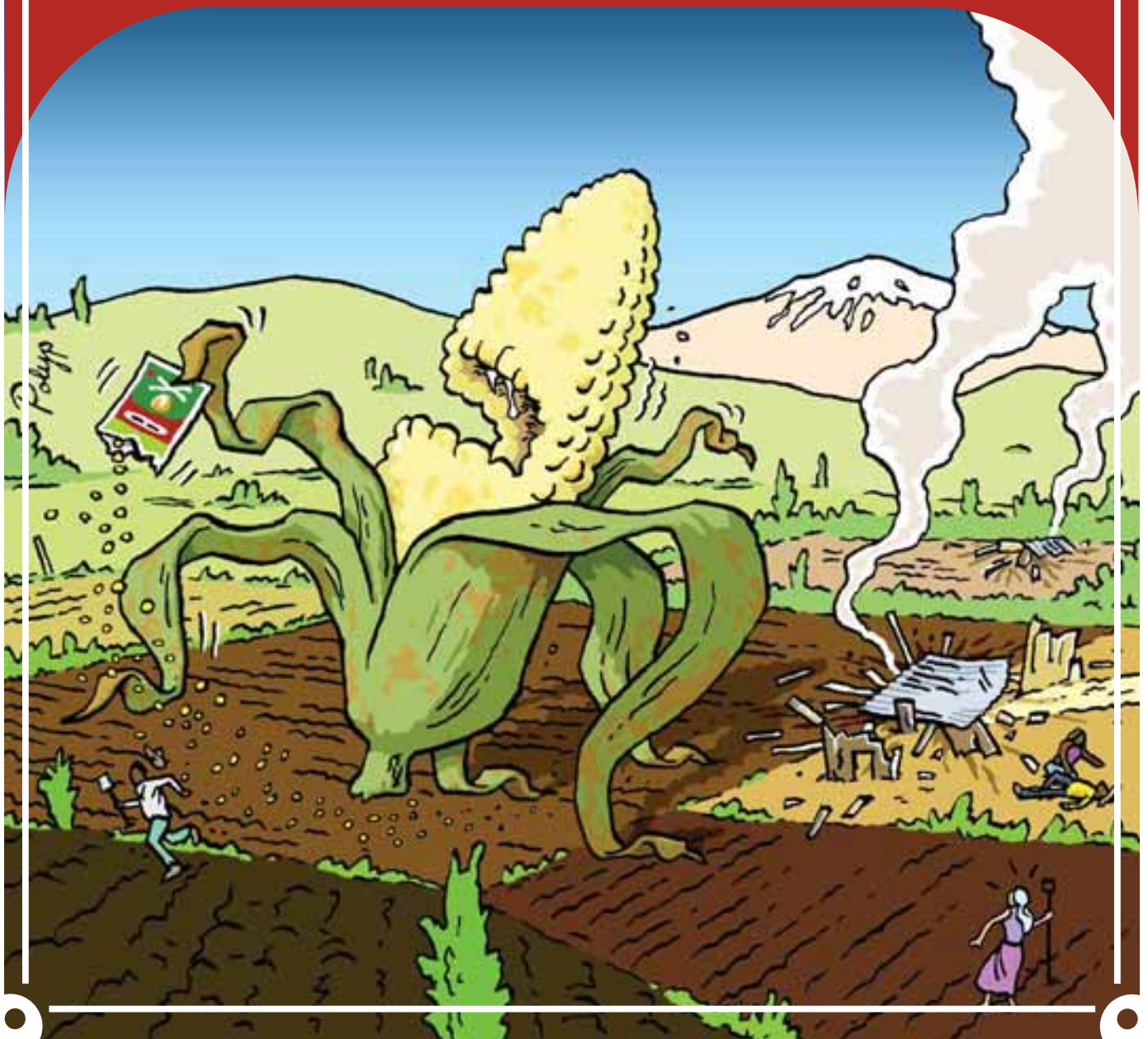


Fernando Ruiz leans on a tree from a small stand of native species on a patch of common ground in Otavalo, Ecuador. Fernando, who is from Colombia, is a Progressio development worker with the Institute of Ecuadorian Studies.

Graham Freer/Progressio

WARNING: TERMINATOR SEEDS MAY EXACERBATE WORLD *HUNGER* AND *POVERTY* IF RELEASED INTO THE ENVIRONMENT!

SAY NO TO TERMINATOR SEEDS



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