

Summer 2009

interact

The magazine of PROGRESS!



**LIVING
WITH HIV**



Our vision of development is about empowering people and listening to them, writes Progressio's Executive Director **Christine Allen**

FAITH IN PEOPLE

I hope you like this new-look Interact. We've changed the size to make it cheaper to produce and distribute. Let us know what you think!

The packaging may have changed – but the work hasn't. If anything, we've tried to focus even more on the stories behind our work: on the people we work with and the development workers who support them. At Progressio, we have always been about people – working through people not funding, empowering people and listening to them.

I was recently in Malawi and met with our development worker Renias Mundingi, who is supporting the Malawi Inter-faith AIDS Association and Manerela+, the Malawian organisation of religious infected or affected by HIV. The level of HIV in Malawi is not of Zimbabwean proportions, and has reduced over recent years from 14% to 12% of the population. But its impact is still devastating – and faith communities and institutions play a key role in how people perceive and respond to the virus and those infected by it.

HIV is still a big taboo and often the immediate response is one of judgement. Renias told me about the work he has done on stigma and discrimination with religious leaders – and how, by urging their congregations to welcome and support people with HIV, they can change people's minds and attitudes to the virus. He has seen instances where a preacher used to tell people to pray instead of taking their anti-retroviral treatment, but now understands that prayer goes alongside medicine. As MacDonald Simbareke of Manerela+ says: "We support without judgement." True gospel values.

Christine

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Cover: Gertrude Usaiwevhu, who is HIV-positive (see p8), and her son Munyaradzi.

Photo: Marcus Perkins/Progressio

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FOCUS

Bringing in the day's catch on the beach at Dili, East Timor. One of Asia's poorest countries, East Timor has the potential to be a land of plenty. But right now 50 per cent of young adults are unemployed, and nearly half the population of 1.1 million struggle to get enough food to eat. More on East Timor: p10, p12.

photo: Marcus Perkins/Progressio



EARTH AND WATER



◀ Luis Gomez

I'm an active member of the local agro-ecological collective [in Intag, Ecuador] and I want to tell you about our lives here. I was born here and the reality is, before this project started our soil was very bad. We had cut down many trees and we had problems with erosion and drought because of that.

When I was little, 12 or 15 years old, I was still working on slash and burn agriculture because that was what my father told me to do. We know now that what we were doing was really bad.

We have also realised that to protect our soil and our land we have to protect water. It is a vital liquid, and we can cultivate nothing without it. CEA [Progressio partner organisation Coordinadora Ecuatoriana de Agroecología] is helping us to recuperate our water and seeds, and we are feeling stronger as families.

▶ Gustavo Piedras

We are worried about governments in other countries. They are looking to take what they can from the environment, without thinking about how they are destroying everything. They come here and want to build mines and we have to say no, no, no. They look at what we are doing [small-scale agriculture] and think it is only small stuff but it's not. If they contaminate our water, we will have nothing.

I'm not someone who used to think we need to take care of the earth – what I cared about was whether my farm produced or not. I followed the advice of others, I used the chemicals they told me, and in the end, it didn't produce. So I looked for alternatives, and now my farm is producing again. Because I was damaging the soil before, it will take time to fix what I did, but things are getting better.



Interviews by Brie O'Keefe, Progressio's Campaigns Officer. Brie visited Ecuador in May 2009 to learn about the 'water poverty' faced by rural communities. Lack of access to water is a major obstacle to the improvement of rural livelihoods, and poses a major threat to the food security of small-scale farmers. Photos: Santiago Serrano/Progressio



▲ **Angel Gomez**

I am already 55 years old, and although I am old, I came to this [agro-ecology] project to see if I could improve my farming technique. I'm not a specialist by any means, I learned farming from my father, and I only have my own experiences.

During my father's time, there was no one saying "this is good, this is bad". So we did what they did, and they did what their fathers did. It was like a law that we followed. Now we understand the damage we were doing to our lands, how scarce the land becomes. If I don't take care of my land there isn't another farm for me to go to.

Even at this age I am learning – how to be conscious of the environment, how to be aware of my actions and whether or not they will be sustainable. I had to learn this through destroying my land, but I am returning it now to what it was.

Soila Baraja ▲

I work two plots of land I got from my grandparents. I worry when I die the land will be abandoned. My daughter wants to sell it, but if I do, what is there for me?

I had an accident 35 years ago, and now my foot hurts me a lot and I cannot grow all the crops I used to grow. It takes a long time to get water and now my grandchildren must help me, but I make sure they can go to school.

I work most days until the sun goes down. The work is hard, but I love it. I grow sugarcane and corn, and I make sure I keep the soil healthy every year.

I won't leave this land until I close my eyes and God brings me to heaven. My daughter wants me to go to the city with her, but I won't go. There is only money in the cities, only money.

I will stay here. I'm old enough now to know where I belong.

Here I have my freedom, I can go anywhere. I walk to the village when I want and when we have fiestas I can dance. I still love to dance.

HIV IN ZIMBABWE



"I was told that when you are HIV-positive you will certainly die. So I thought that AIDS was what God had given me to die from – until I met some people from Batsirai who told me that it is possible to live a healthy and active life." Irene Musarapasi (aged 44; pictured far left) is speaking more than 10 years after a diagnosis of HIV and the death of her husband from an HIV-related illness. Batsirai – a long-standing Progressio partner organisation – helped Irene with medication, school fees for her 17-year-old daughter Tabeth (pictured left, with Irene) and support as she overcame ostracism born of ignorance. Now she is an activist, telling her personal story to others as part of educating people about HIV. "I tell people: You must understand those who are HIV-positive, love them, support them and take care of them. They are just like you."



My country Zimbabwe is known around the globe as a country blighted by HIV, *writes Kevin Ndemera, Progressio's Country Representative for Zimbabwe.*

Our National AIDS Council reports that 3,000 people each week are dying from HIV-related illnesses – a consequence of one in seven Zimbabweans being HIV-positive. This, believe it or not, is progress. In the 1990s one in four of us were living with the virus.

Throughout Zimbabwe's recent economic and political turmoil, Progressio has been at the forefront of tackling the pandemic. Our skilled workers pass on crucial know-how to local organisations for which HIV is an hourly reality, never mind a daily one. From helping get vital messages about HIV prevention out to far-flung villages, to supporting programmes to care for children orphaned by HIV, Progressio's development workers help local organisations carry out life-saving work.

Many of the organisations with whom we work have suffered greatly in the economic crisis. Some of them still exist today only because of the ingenuity of the dedicated people who work for them. By placing development workers in these front-line organisations, Progressio is bringing desperately needed skills to enable people to solve their own problems.

People here in Zimbabwe are hard working and have the potential to lift themselves out of poverty. But often the skills and know-how are lacking – especially after so many skilled and experienced people left Zimbabwe in recent years, due to the country's economic difficulties.

We in Progressio can therefore have a huge impact, because we are influencing whole organisations in order to unlock their potential to tackle HIV – making them far more effective.

Despite the daily challenges I am optimistic about the future. Of course, I could place 10 more development workers with needy organisations tomorrow if I had the resources. But, for the moment, it is one step at a time.



◀ **A group of 15 women** gather for a monthly meeting in Sirewe village, three hours from Harare, to discuss the welfare of 587 children from the surrounding villages who have been orphaned by HIV. The women volunteers regularly visit the children, giving them lessons on growing vegetables and encouraging them to keep up their schooling. Their leader, Gertrude Usaiwevhu (aged 51, pictured), herself HIV-positive, says: "We visit all the villages, monitoring the child-headed households, looking out for newly-orphaned children and watching for abuse or exploitation of the children, which is common. The biggest challenge we face is identifying sources of food and school fees for these orphans because so many people do not have any work or money." The women's group was supported by Batsirai and the Progressio development worker Stancelous Mvrechena.



◀ Progressio development worker

Musa Chibwana tells a story to orphaned children at the Mbuya Nehanda children's home, outside Harare. Despite the smiles, the home has suffered desperately during Zimbabwe's years of economic turmoil. The 95 children survive on the most meagre of rations provided by dedicated staff who themselves have not been paid for many months and who have to virtually beg for supplies of food from 'well-wishers'. Musa, who is helping dozens of similar institutions through his work with the Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children, says: "We can make a massive difference to this home. With the right support this orphanage could be running really well in a few months."

▶ Long-distance lorry driver

Wellington Mkwenya (39) describes what happens when he pulls into truck stops on his 3,000km drives from Durban in South Africa through Zimbabwe to Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo: "The prostitutes come out to greet us in very short skirts. Some of them are even naked and they ask us for a bed for the night." Such is the lifestyle of lorry drivers on cross-continent delivery runs that HIV has threatened to decimate Zimbabwe's transportation workforce. A Progressio development worker will start working with the National Employment Council for the Operating Transport Industry in July, to help devise education and awareness programmes among truckers. Says Wellington: "We can spend three months away from our homes and you can be tempted by prostitutes. We are more aware now about HIV and about using condoms to protect our lives."



Interviews conducted by Keith Ewing, Progressio's Communications Manager. Photos by Marcus Perkins. Keith and Marcus visited Zimbabwe in April 2009.

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To support Progressio's work on HIV in Zimbabwe, go to www.progressio.org.uk/donate

CHANGING MIND

UPDATE

The British government has come out in support of Progressio's campaign to stop the importation and sale of **illegally logged wood** into the UK and EU.

"We agree that effective legislation is urgently needed," said the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on its website.

Illegal logging in poor countries destroys the environment, undermines people's rights, makes people homeless, threatens their livelihoods, weakens their democratic systems, and fosters other criminal activities such as drug trafficking.

Progressio has joined the **Stop Climate Chaos Coalition** which is pressing the UK government to take radical action to cut our carbon emissions and show international leadership. Get involved now by organising local events using the coalition's Summer Action Pack: see www.stopclimatechaos.org/action-pack

Save the date! Nobel Peace Prize winner Professor Mohan Munasinghe, an expert on energy, sustainable environment and climate change, will be joining Progressio on the evening of Monday 19 October 2009 to speak about a combined solution to sustainable development, poverty and climate change.



East Timor: Who Cares?

Our campaign slogan may have begun as a question – but Progressio supporters have answered it for us. Over the past 10 months, from London to Liverpool, Britons have stood up around the country and showed the UK government that they do, indeed, care about East Timor. Progressio campaigners sent hundreds of letters urging the Foreign Office not to let the topic of justice become 'the elephant in the room' in discussions between the UK and the East Timorese government.

Although our campaign is just one step in a much longer journey, the impacts are echoing throughout the UK government. The Foreign Office is regularly communicating with Progressio regarding its policies on East Timor, and the East Timorese government knows it cannot ignore the wishes of its own people forever.

In July, Progressio's East Timor photo exhibition will be displayed at the UK Houses of Parliament, and high level meetings will be held with MPs. A photo collage of every Progressio supporter who cared enough to send in their photograph will be given to the UK government as a symbolic gesture of the will of the East Timorese people.

Thank you so much for building support for this tiny, forgotten nation. While we wait for the East Timorese government to bring justice to the forefront of their own nation's public discourse we will continue to campaign behind the scenes, advising the Foreign Office on its policies and working locally to alleviate the drastic poverty that is a reality for many East Timorese.

EYEWITNESS: PEOPLE POWER

In the early 1990s, the small town of Nahuaterique was the subject of a border dispute between El Salvador and Honduras. In 1992, the International Court of Justice in the Hague ruled that it belonged to Honduras. But since then, writes Juan José Amate, the Honduran state has ignored it...

The story of Nahuaterique is the story of one of the forgotten territories that still exist on our planet – of people who, in this globalised and super-connected world, are invisible.

This weekend, in May 2009, after 17 years of receiving no state assistance or services, the inhabitants of Nahuaterique have taken a bold step: they have organised their own elections in order to set up their own local council.

The obstacles were many, not least overcoming the criticisms of those who have remembered Nahuaterique now, after 17 years, only in order to decry the illegality of the elections and almost intimidate the local people into not participating.

The day was infinitely long, but the satisfaction gained from it was even greater. Arriving at Los Cipreses before dawn to find people already waiting to vote, when there were almost two hours to go until the ballot boxes arrived, wakes you up more than the best coffee that the area produces. And then to see the same scene repeated in El Zancudo, in Carrizal, and in Nahuaterique itself ...

Visiting the different polling stations and seeing elderly people who ask you for a lift, seeing football teams who are off to vote before playing their matches, seeing the banners that commemorate the day, feeling the atmosphere of pride, of history being made ...

Being present at the count and seeing the care that is taken to commit no error, arriving at the main square in Nahuaterique and finding it almost full, hearing the excited discussions, feeling the expectation, seeing the nervousness of the candidates ...

And being at the explosion of jubilation at the naming of the new and first ever Municipal Corporation of the Municipality of Nahuaterique, seeing that until the end, the feeling of community prevails, and that the people are living the slogan: Nahuaterique 2009, United Forever ...

The feeling you get from that is indescribable: like you are on a cloud.



Juan José Amate/Progressio

A resident of Nahuaterique casting her vote.

Juan José Amate is a Progressio development worker in Honduras. This is an edited extract from his blog <http://remendandolabrecha.wordpress.com>

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For more on the elections in Nahuaterique go to www.progressio.org.uk

LETTER FROM DILI



Families sheltering in the grounds of the Canossian Convent at Balide in Dili, the capital of East Timor. At the height of the political unrest in 2006 some 23,000 people took refuge here. Today, many thousands continue to live in camps for internally displaced people, still waiting to begin the process of rebuilding their homes and their lives.

photo: Markus Perkins/Progressio

In Liquica and Suai in East Timor, monuments mark the sites of the two church massacres of 1999. These monuments stand as challenges to Prime Minister Gusmão and President Ramos-Horta's conception of reconciliation as 'forgetting' and 'closure.' On 4 April 2009 hundreds attended a memorial in Liquica, to mark the tenth anniversary of the day when scores of men, women and children were massacred by pro-Indonesian militias. The President and Prime Minister were invited to this memorial; neither attended.

Yet for the people of East Timor, the past cannot so easily be left behind. As Lia Kent, writing in *Inside Indonesia* magazine, observes: "If ordinary people's lives had improved, and the promises of jobs, better lives and development had materialised, perhaps ... people would be less inclined to think about the past. Instead, poverty has worsened since independence and people dwell on their losses: their loved ones who died or disappeared, their lost educational opportunities due to the conflict, the damage to their homes and livestock, their conflict-related injuries, their lack of housing and clean water and the leadership's broken promises of development."

CAMPAIGN FOR JUSTICE

That's why Progressio has been campaigning for justice in East Timor – a country where justice is at a crossroads. The court system and police force function poorly. There is a backlog of over 5,000 cases in the Prosecutor-General's office, and a shortage of lawyers entitled to appear in court. Vigilante justice is common, and some militant groups are reportedly offering themselves as enforcers in communal conflicts and organised criminal activity.

It's also why Progressio is supporting the Judicial System Monitoring Program (JSMP), a local NGO and human rights watchdog. JSMP was established in 2001

to help increase the East Timorese justice system's level of compliance with international human rights standards, particularly those relating to a fair trial, and to contribute to good governance practice.

In carrying out its mission JSMP acts as an advocate for law reform, and uses the internet and radio to disseminate relevant information to the public in Tetun, English and Bahasa Indonesia. JSMP also trains police and community groups, conducts workshops, and assists victims throughout East Timor to access the justice system.

As the Legal Training Officer, my work primarily concerns developing the legal analytical and written communication skills of the four East Timorese lawyers who comprise the JSMP's Legal Research Unit (LRU). We anticipate that later this year LRU lawyers will themselves begin offering human rights training sessions for other East Timorese lawyers.

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

JSMP this year also hopes to set up a national human rights art award. A touring exhibition will promote human rights awareness, engage youth, and enhance the capacity of citizens to communicate with their government.

As Floriana Nunes Saldanha told Progressio, people's hopes for the future still depend on reconciliation for the past. "For the future, I expect the government to help me to look after my kids," she says. "But I want justice too. I don't know who killed my husband, and I'm expecting the government to do something to support me."

Mark Hunter, a Progressio development worker with JSMP, is taking leave from his barrister's practice in Darwin, Australia.

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To find out more about JSMP and justice issues in East Timor, visit www.jsmp.minihub.org/Language_English/index_english.html

Teclah Ponde is a Progressio development worker with the Zimbabwe Association for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of the Offender (ZACRO).

Q: How would you describe yourself?

A: I am a God-fearing woman, and the work that I do in prisons is more of a calling than mere work. I believe that I am an agent of change; that I've touched significant lives through my work. It helps that I am very flexible and adaptable. I can talk to women sitting under a tree, I can sing and dance with inmates in prison cells, and I can sit in a top-level management meeting and be equally at home.

Q: What is your first memory of arriving at your placement?

A: I am Zimbabwean but was living in Johannesburg. So arriving in Mbare (a suburb of Harare) was quite a shock. It was so noisy, busy and untidy! I remember asking myself: "What have I got myself into?" But one year down the line, I am now so used to the hassle and bustle in Mbare that I feel like part of it all!

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

A: Making a presentation to donors, embassies and relief agencies about ZACRO and the challenges faced by Zimbabwean prisons. We succeeded in getting Unicef funding for a food distribution programme for children living with their imprisoned mothers.

Q: And the biggest lesson?

A: That what is waste for a lot of people is a great resource in prisons. The prisoners are so creative: everything has a use. From old tyres, they make sandals; from old newspapers mixed with maize meal, they make chess pieces; from thrown away fruit seeds, they create orchards. There is so much talent within the prisons that given an opportunity, these prisoners could make a real difference to the communities they have wronged.

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

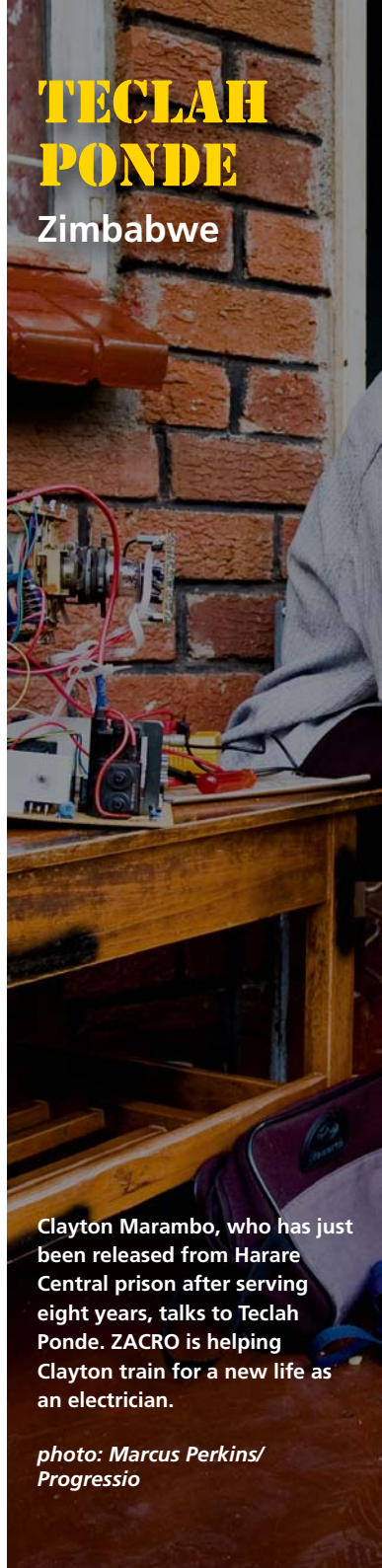
A: I would make prisons a more accessible environment where communities actively contribute towards the rehabilitation of inmates.

Q: What is your favourite motto or saying?

A: "We shall continue to strive until something happens, our God will never remain silent in a crisis such as this one."

TECLAH PONDE

Zimbabwe



Clayton Marambo, who has just been released from Harare Central prison after serving eight years, talks to Teclah Ponde. ZACRO is helping Clayton train for a new life as an electrician.

*photo: Marcus Perkins/
Progressio*



HIV AND THE COMMON GOOD

First appearing on the global stage in 1981, HIV is already the most serious global threat to the development of peoples. The development gains achieved by poor nations are being steadily eroded and undone by the global impact of HIV.

HIV strikes mainly at the young and able-bodied, shatters families, impoverishes communities and undermines development. In short, it attacks society and increases poverty, especially where poverty already exists.

Poverty in turn worsens every aspect of HIV, creating conditions that increase vulnerability to HIV

transmission, making adequate treatment and care (where available) unaffordable,

shortening life spans, and making already difficult social conditions worse. Poverty is, in fact, the greatest barrier to effective responses to HIV.

“There should be an awareness of the duty of solidarity, justice, and universal charity”

EFFECTIVE RESPONSES

Effective responses therefore require from the Church and the international community a multi-level, multi-strategy approach. No one solution alone is enough to bring the spread of HIV under control.

As is well known, the Catholic Church and the international community place differing emphasis on approaches necessary for effective global HIV prevention. For those of us experienced in and committed to the global response to HIV, polarisation of views between the Church and the

international community distracts from the gravity, enormity and complexity of the problem of HIV transmission.

Despite global gains in scaling up access to HIV prevention, treatment and care, for every two people who are able to access treatment, three more people are infected. We must somehow meet this challenge.

COMMON GROUND

What is needed now is for all sides to move forward to develop a greater understanding of how Catholics and others of faith can cooperate with the international community to respond to HIV.

Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* urges us to work in the “spirit of international cooperation” which “requires that ... there should be an awareness of the duty of solidarity, justice, and universal charity”. In this spirit, and in the light of the social injustices and poverty that are intrinsic drivers of HIV transmission, Catholics and non-Catholics are today called to find common ground on effective and sustainable responses to HIV.

Confronted by the complexities involved in a collaborative and effective approach to HIV prevention, here too Jesus speaks to the human heart: “Go and learn the meaning of the words: *what I want is mercy not sacrifice.*” (Matthew 9:13)

Harry Walsh is Progressio's HIV Policy and Advocacy Officer. Progressio will be publishing a series of theological reflections on HIV in July 2009.