



The Inter-American Foundation and Women of African Descent

No. 17

The Inter-American Foundation (IAF) is an independent agency of the United States government that provides grants directly to grassroots organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean for innovative self-help programs. The IAF has a history of working to empower communities to overcome ethnic and gender biases and to foster full participation in economic and civic life. People of African descent, and particularly women, have long been an invisible minority in Latin America. The IAF has worked to raise awareness of the issues faced by this group in addition to providing grants to groups based in communities of African descent.

- In 2001, the IAF organized “Economic Development in Afro-Latin American Communities: Opportunities and Challenges,” one of the first LASA panels on the subject. Four of the five panelists were women of African descent from the United States, the Caribbean and Brazil.
- The IAF funded the participation of Criola, an Afro-Brazilian women’s organization, at the 2001 Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) panel in Durban, South Africa and at the LASA panel in Washington, D.C.
- The IAF’s 2002 panel on grassroots initiatives in Latin American communities of African descent attracted more than 70 people at the National Council of La Raza’s annual conference. Celeo Alvarez from the Afro-Honduran organization ODECO, a former IAF grantee, and Jurema Werneck from the Afro-Brazilian organization Criola, a current IAF grantee, as well as African-American anthropologist Sheila Walker spoke as panelists.
- The IAF is a core member of the Inter-American Dialogue’s Inter-Agency Consultation on Race and has worked closely with the IDB on its initiative on race and gender.

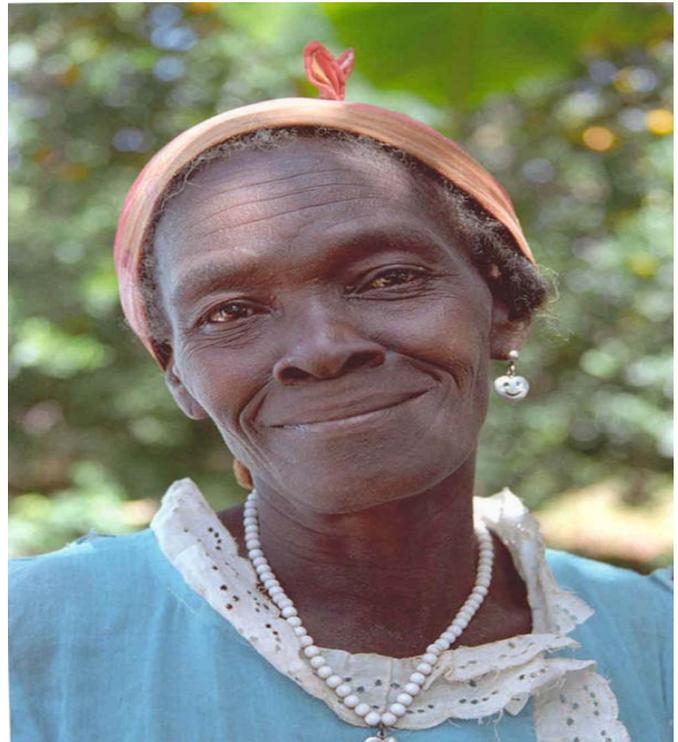


Photo: Rebecca James

The Inter-American Foundation is actively focusing on projects involving significant participation by African descendent women’s groups:

The Inter-American Foundation is granting **Criola** \$171,000 to improve the quality of life of 50 artisans by increasing access to the market, improving the quality of artisan production and building their managerial capacity. Founded and run by Afro-Brazilian women, the organization has received international attention. Two private sector consulting groups, McKinsey & Company and Sebrae, are providing strategic planning and training services to this project.

Centro de Articulação de Populações Marginalizadas (CEAP) has received \$210,685 for a small grants fund for basic infrastructure and programmatic support to low-income groups in Rio de Janeiro. Financial resources from the fund will purchase office equipment and promote grassroots networks. An estimated 4,500 area residents will better their quality of life through improvements to basic program infrastructure. The project manager is an Afro-Brazilian woman, as are the majority of the community leaders.



Photo: Patrick Breslin

Judith Morrison, Foundation Representative for Brazil and Colombia, fields questions with Keisha Khan (University of Texas at Austin) and Dr. Eva Thorne (Brandeis University) at a LASA panel.

Fundación para la Educación Superior (FES) in Colombia has been awarded \$303,000 over three years to establish a development assistance fund for grants to local groups for small-scale projects designed to strengthen community organization, generate employment and increase income, benefiting approximately 1,200 low-income families. Popularly known as Mundo Afro, the program emphasizes equal opportunities for both women and men of African descent.

Fondation La Ruche (FLR) has received \$255,940 over three years toward social investment partnerships that

The IAF is granting the **Sociedade Afrosergipana de Estudos e Cidadania (SACI)** \$362,000 to establish three income-generating projects for extremely low-income rural communities in the Brazilian Northeast, one led entirely by Afro-Brazilian women. Through this project, 540 individuals and their families will have access to equipment and technologies for generating income from brick making, broom making and crafts.

União de Negros pela Igualdade (UNEGRO) will receive \$182,000 over two years to develop a program offering training to 200 young adults in São Paulo, Brazil. Training programs will promote citizenship and local development through arts, community service and projects with income-generating potential.

will mobilize resources for at least five local development projects involving some 2,000 low-income families in southern Haiti. One involves the production and marketing of honey through a local women's group.

The Centro para el Desarrollo Comunal (CEDECO) has been awarded \$307,300 over three years in conjunction with training services from the municipality of Cortés and the Afro-Honduran Chamber of Commerce. The project will help coastal communities recover from Hurricane Mitch through training programs and credit services that will enable municipal development councils and new micro-enterprises to take advantage of the expanding tourist market, thereby benefiting 2,277 individuals and indirectly improving the quality of life of an additional 18,460 community residents.



Address all inquiries to: **Inter-American Foundation, 901 N. Stuart St., 10th Floor, Arlington, VA 22203, USA**
Tel: 703.306.4301 Fax: 703.306.4365 E-mail: info@iaf.gov www.iaf.gov

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