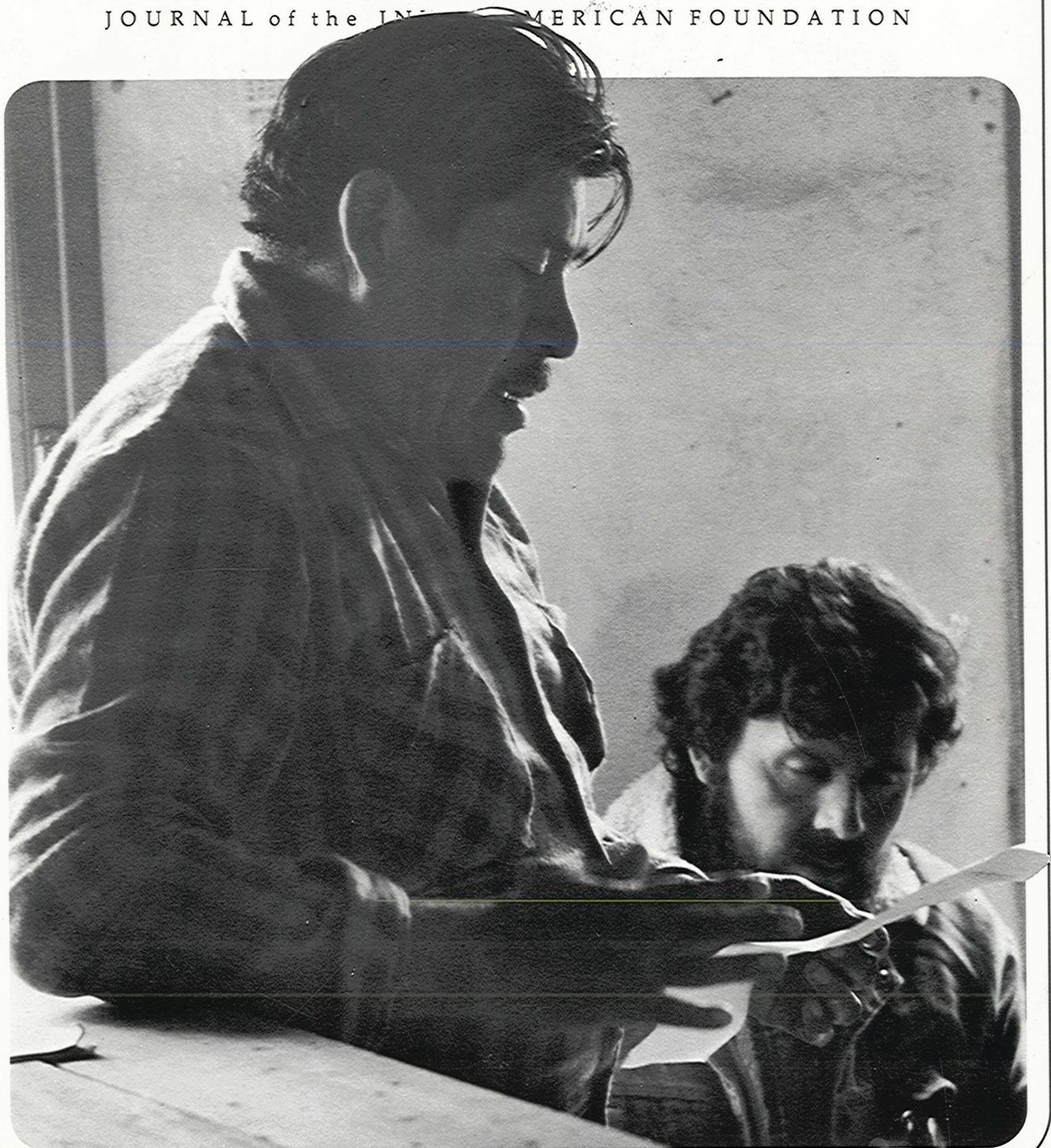


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# grassroots development

JOURNAL of the INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN FOUNDATION



**FOCUS: Grassroots Leadership**

The Inter-American Foundation, a public corporation created by the United States Congress in 1969, provides direct financial support for self-help efforts initiated by poor people in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Foundation makes about 200 grants a year to support projects carried out in more than 25 countries. Approximately half of its funds are appropriated by Congress. The remainder comes from the Social Progress Trust Fund administered by the Inter-American Development Bank.

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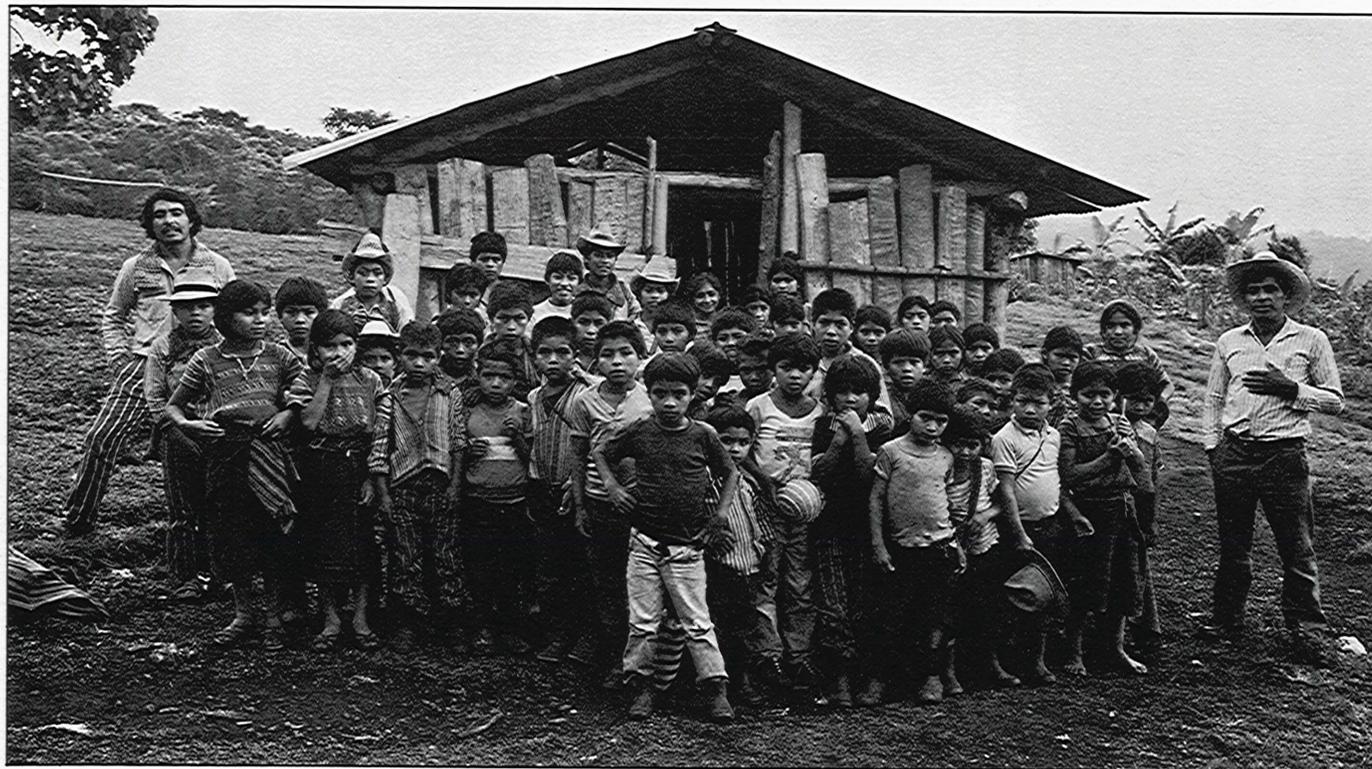
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*Cover photo:* Community organizer Juan Huayquillán explains the benefits of a cooperative store to other Mapuche Indians in Neuquén Province, Argentina (see article on p. 36). *Photo by Patrick Breslin.* *Opposite:* Pablo Fernández and Ernesto Martínez gather with their students outside the schoolhouse in La Rochela, Guatemala (see article p. 16). *Photo by Daniel Chauche.*

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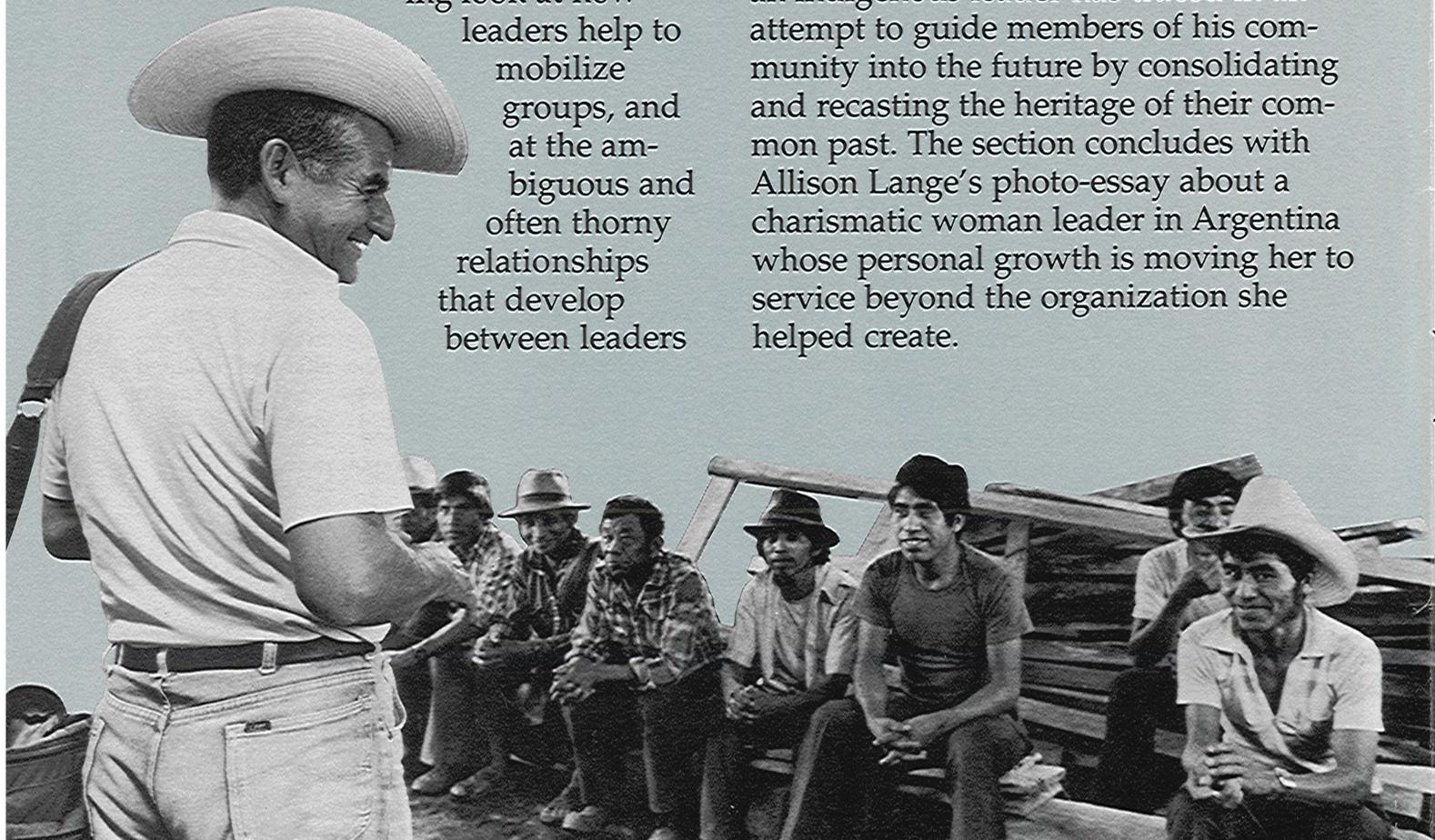
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Since its inception in 1977, *Grassroots Development* has published numerous articles about how individual grassroots leaders have sprung up, seemingly spontaneously, to inspire development programs among the Hemisphere's poor. Whether it is Ramón Aybar in the Dominican Republic, Juan López Díaz in Guatemala, Juan García in Ecuador, or any of a dozen more in the oral histories collected by Robert Wasserstrom, such stories provide models of hope to sustain others through the crises and failures that frequently plague development projects.

In this issue, we offer a more penetrating look at how leaders help to mobilize groups, and at the ambiguous and often thorny relationships that develop between leaders

and their newly organized constituencies. The first article, by Jan Van Orman, identifies two kinds of leaders, explains their position within evolving organizations, and reviews briefly how the IAF has crafted its grant making appropriately. The next article, by Jonathan Fox and Luis Hernández, examines how large regional organizations can avoid the pitfalls of entrenched leadership through "intermediate" organizational experiences that link diverse communities together, encourage widespread participation, train new leaders, and keep regional officials responsive to the needs of local members. The article by Victor Perera explores the zigzag path an indigenous leader has traced in an attempt to guide members of his community into the future by consolidating and recasting the heritage of their common past. The section concludes with Allison Lange's photo-essay about a charismatic woman leader in Argentina whose personal growth is moving her to service beyond the organization she helped create.



# LEADERSHIP & GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT

## *Reflections of an IAF Representative*

Jan R. Van Orman

A milestone in my education at the Inter-American Foundation came years ago when I was presenting a proposal for a large, complex rural development project to a screening committee for possible approval. After a thorough review, the committee chairman asked an unexpected question: "Is this a *person* project, or a *thing* project?" The scope of the proponent organization and its track record of services were indeed impressive—it was doing good "things." But when the project was finally approved, I realized it was primarily because we had been moved by the vision and persuasiveness of the organization's leader.

The decision was not naive. We knew it took more than leadership for an organization to advance. Nevertheless, it was not enough for a project to be well staffed and technically sound. The IAF was also looking for vision, moxie, mystique. We were looking for people with the brass to want to change the world and the energy to try. We were looking for new grassroots leaders.

With youthful idealism and a far-sighted mandate, my colleagues and I pursued our lofty commission to find a new, people-centered approach to development. Looking off the beaten path, we found, and were inspired by, people who exemplified qualities we

Can leadership be too much of a good thing?

wanted to develop in ourselves—in innovation, independence, and courage in assisting the poor. Intuitively, the Foundation funded—and still does—people who are as it would be. The IAF's personalized style of management and optimistic outlook derived in large part from the dynamic community leaders it met early in its search for a new development model.

In the quest to avoid becoming another bureaucratically hamstrung government agency, it soon became clear that creative leaders were vital to—perhaps the most essential ingredient of—grassroots development. Too often, donor agencies look for quantifiable indicators such as program models, sophisticated technology, and institutional partnerships to predict eventual success, while overlooking the qualitative human factors that provide the fuel for making project machinery run. Experience has taught us that successful projects require different levels of leadership, depending on the grantee's stage of organizational growth. While I am less predisposed than before to say

that poor people already know what their problems are and how they can best be resolved, it has become steadily clearer that the IAF's approach of responding to initiatives shaped by local leaders is valid. However elegant or primitive the technical solution, people must first learn to lead their own development programs for lasting change to occur.

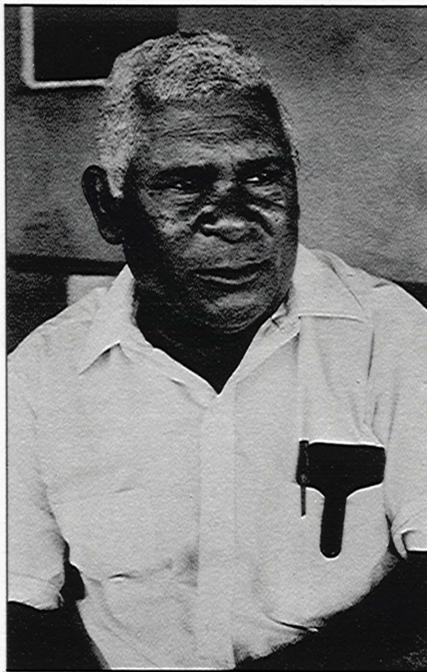
In nearly two decades, the IAF has funded approximately 3,000 organizations of all types and sizes. This experience has taught us dynamic leaders are needed to kindle enthusiasm among the poor and keep it blazing long enough for competent community action groups to be forged. Once opinion has been mobilized, judgment and finesse are essential for surviving the external conflicts that often follow with local power structures and for mediating internal conflicts among members themselves. Patience and skill are required to manage projects that face long odds in the best of times and have few if any reserves to buffer against sudden shocks in national political or economic systems.

In becoming acquainted with poor people throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, I have watched countless groups survive and even thrive because they could tap extraordinary leadership abilities. I have been astounded by unschooled men and women who could articulate issues so

clearly that they defined not only the reality of a community problem but opened a way for its solution. I have listened to simple people—some verbose, some shy—who spoke so compellingly that followers were moved to risk their meager savings, and even their security, to pursue goals that a moment before seemed unattainable. Such people teach their communities to change the habits of generations, convince oppressive authorities to make concessions, and bring order to fledgling organizations. These leaders are quintessentially charismatic, inspiring not only their immediate followers, but sometimes even creating regional and national social movements.

Whatever their eventual scale of operation, successful grassroots leaders must understand some basic realities. First, development begins as a small-scale proposition—its foundation rests on the individual, the family, and the neighborhood, and its first product is hope. Able leaders listen to their communities and crystallize prevailing sentiments into a realizable course of action. For instance, the Dominican peasant leader Ramón Aybar convinced his neighbors to pool their resources and form a funeral society so families could guarantee their deceased decent burials (see Vetter, *Grassroots Development*, Vol. 8, No. 1). Development planners tend to see such efforts as economic dead ends, but Aybar understood that people are paralyzed without a sense of self-worth and dignity, and he tapped the energy released by this primitive insurance fund to eventually organize an “association of neighbors.” The association went on to build a mill, a warehouse, and drying docks to process and market rice, increasing family incomes and providing seed capital for other community projects.

Second, grassroots leaders know that although poor people work to move mountains if they see something concrete beginning to materialize from their efforts, they remain realistic about what works and what does not. They have to be, for if crops fail, people may starve. The need to temper risks creates a fundamentally conservative attitude among the poor that outsiders can misread as passivity. Several years ago, for instance, I met an agricultural technician, freshly



Stephen Vetter

Preceding page: Juan López Díaz speaks with members of a coffee co-op in Guatemala. Above: Community leader Ramón Aybar founded the *Federación de Asociaciones de Vecinos de la Comunidad de Rivera de Payabo* in the Dominican Republic.

trained and dispatched from his country's capital city, who was frustrated by his inability to convince local farmers that they could expand production by clearing additional land to plant crops. Although they were receptive to new techniques for enhancing yields and had begun to diversify crops to improve diets and earn additional income, whenever he tried to explain to co-op leaders that their fields along the riverbank were nearly worn out from overuse, the men would stare silently or politely change the subject. Whatever the technician said, the farmers desperately clung to their ancestral patches of land. Then, in the project's fifth year, a severe drought struck, reducing the river to a trickle. That year, the farmers went to the humid upper reaches of the valley and carefully planted their subsistence crops. These peasants knew that drought recurred in the region periodically, and they followed the practice of their forefathers in keeping the upper valley fresh for the years when it would spell the difference between survival and starvation. Finally, the technician

understood that local leaders were not merely conduits for force-feeding new ideas to their communities, but were also the repositories of community wisdom. They were leaders not only because they could persuade but also because they could be trusted not to act irresponsibly or without seeking a consensus.

Third, grassroots leaders are often mediators, human bridges, between two worlds, two cultures. It is their task to lead their communities forward while preserving the shared cultural legacy that provides the bedrock of identity and self-worth needed to anchor effective community action. Such leaders acquire knowledge of how the outside world works, and the contacts to put that knowledge to work on behalf of their local constituencies. The Guatemalan peasant Juan López Díaz, for example, got a job handling horses for a small Maryknoll mission, was recruited to attend a leadership training course in Guatemala City, returned to his hometown to start a co-op, became the head of the local school and then mayor, and finally was elected president of FEDECOCAGUA, a national federation of small coffee growers (see Morgan, *Grassroots Development*, Vol. 10, No. 2). During this long journey of personal growth, he became a valuable resource for his community, helping to build roads, schools, health outposts, and libraries, and an invaluable intermediary for people trying to make contacts for advanced schooling and medical help and with donor organizations to fund development projects.

The danger exists, of course, that leaders will lose their balance walking the tightrope between two worlds, and be co-opted by outside interests. López Díaz appears to have avoided that fall by keeping his origins firmly fixed in his sight. Although he moved for a time to the capital city, he never forgot the people of his hometown, and continued to plan on returning there one day to pick up the threads of local development left dangling when he moved away.

Another story amplifies this theme, suggesting that peasant leaders are often symbiotically connected to their communities (see Healy, *Grassroots Development*, Vol. 12, No. 1). One of the first agricultural extensionists

trained by a dynamic rural federation in the Alto Beni region of Bolivia left to take a job with a state agricultural research station. After a brief period, he returned to his position at the federation, explaining that "over there . . . no one knew how to work with campesinos, and no one was very interested in listening to this one." Like fish dependent on the sea, leaders often remain loyal to their grassroots constituencies because their own sense of self-worth, effectiveness, and identity depend on the mutual reinforcement supplied by a shared sense of culture and community.

This sense of solidarity is crucial because grassroots projects encounter numerous obstacles, and resilience is needed to stay the course. Leaders need a tolerance for ambiguity, a flexible management style, and the adroitness to uncover alternative routes around unexpected roadblocks.

Not all leaders, though, are marathon runners. And they need not be. If grassroots development is a long distance race, it can also be run in relays. During their formative stages, grassroots groups are often characterized by a personalized style of leadership. The new organization can seem indistinguishable from the lengthened shadow of its charismatic leader. Later, however, as the size and complexity of the organization grow, the need to coordinate actions brings a more task-oriented, managerial style of leadership to the fore. Each of these stages has different requirements that deserve examination in closer detail.

## CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

One of the most intriguing grant requests I ever received was only a few sentences long, in barely intelligible handwriting on a scrap of paper torn from a student's notebook. Essentially it said: "I am Severino. I live in the sugar cane zone. My friends and I are poor, hardworking farmers who need a tractor."

There was nothing in the request itself to justify a grant. Nonetheless, on a hunch, I went to visit during my next field trip. When I met Severino, he explained how he had heard about the IAF and obtained our address. Unfortunately, no one in the community could write, so he had persuaded

a schoolteacher to come and give literacy lessons. After a period of painstaking study, Severino wrote his first letter—the grant request that brought me here. With similar determination and ingenuity, he had already persuaded the landlord of the plantation, where he lived with 40 indentured peasant families, to allow them to begin sharecropping. Severino had organized the families and, realizing how much a tractor could help them, volunteered to work on neighboring plantations to learn how to drive one. Then he persuaded a tractor dealer in a nearby city to offer him a good deal. All he needed was \$13,000. He persuaded us, too.

There is a moment when personalized, charismatic leadership is essential. Usually, it occurs during the early stages of a group's formation, when aspirations must be articulated and ideas for bringing them to fruition must be spelled out clearly and forthrightly. At that moment capable leaders must step forward to guide the way.

Such people often seem self-appointed. They inspire others by displaying confidence, intelligence, and courage, becoming living proof to the poor that it is possible to overcome the anxiety of change, act effectively,

"The Lawrence of Arabia Syndrome"—to describe it. But unlike many agencies, the IAF has not shied from dynamic, charismatic people who energize social action—the "Lawrences" of the countryside. We have supported many of them, but we have also learned to make sure that their followers are real.

In my experience, poor people in Latin America find their voice through such leaders and the organizations they found. Their spontaneity, value orientations, and sensitivity to local customs and people spring directly out of peasant culture, inspiring confidence and trust. On the other hand, it is also my experience that once a group has organized around a clear purpose, established a routine for accomplishing that purpose, and overcome the most threatening challenges to its existence, a shift in leadership style becomes important.

## MANAGERIAL LEADERSHIP

For one organization, the crisis came after five years of dynamic growth. The extensive rural development project was well established, and its staff of more than 100 people offered a wide range of credit, marketing, and training services. It had overcome

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If charisma is a necessary catalyst for creating institutions, managerial ability is essential for making them work.

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and endure. To outsiders, many of them seem enigmatic, nonconforming, and even brash—qualities that are at times brilliantly manipulated to mobilize popular enthusiasm and unity in order to confront unresponsive or oppressive authorities. Such leaders seem to rely on innate abilities rather than formal training, and their organizations often develop a similar ad hoc, spontaneous operating style.

Many donor agencies are reluctant to work with charismatic leaders. I have heard them described as whimsical managers who dominate their followers and sidestep all accountability for their actions. Indeed, IAF field representatives who have witnessed this grassroots phenomenon many times have coined a phrase—

confrontations with powerful landowners and local politicians, only to find itself internally wracked by conflicts between the uplifting leader who created the organization, and the staff he had recruited and inspired. The organization's founder still articulated, indeed embodied, the ideals that gave the group its direction, but new needs were making themselves felt ever more insistently. Someone was needed who could negotiate with and broker support from other agencies, supervise the myriad operational details of a far-flung program, and manage the personnel who had become the organization's biggest asset. A fledgling organization was growing up and struggling to become an institution. It had grown beyond the

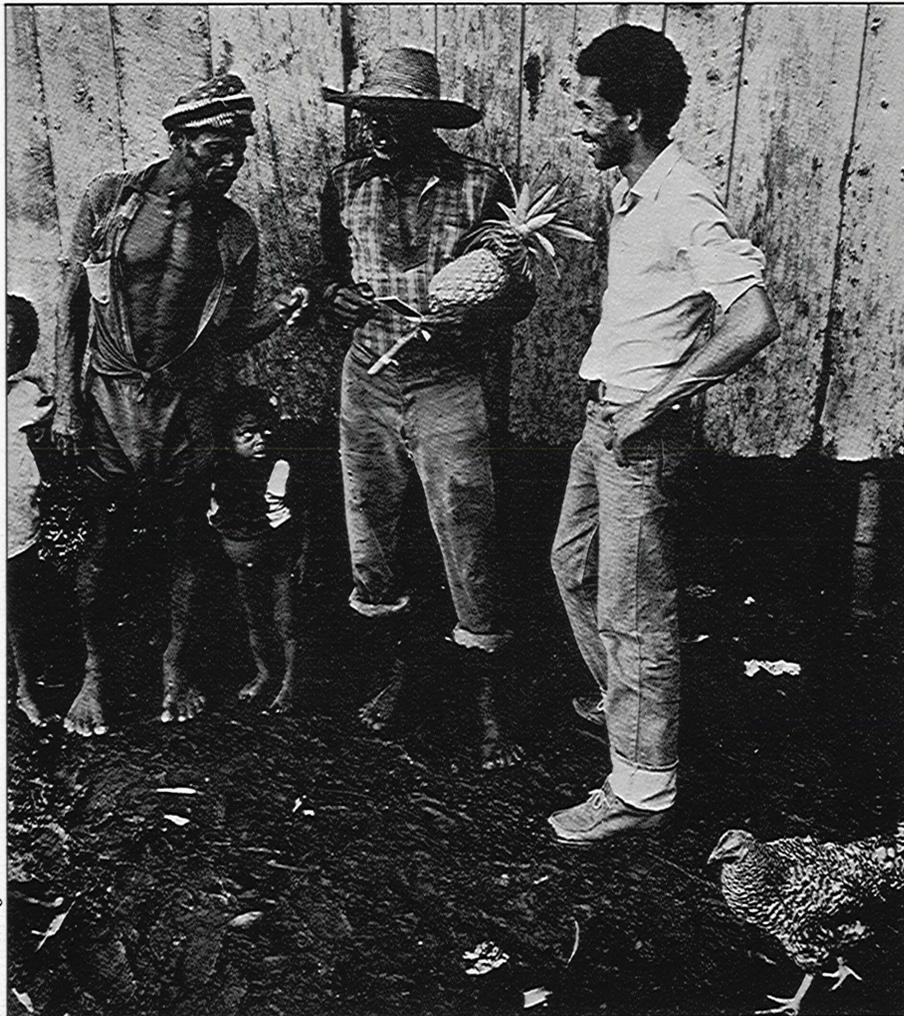
shadow cast by its idealistic founder.

If charisma is a necessary catalyst for creating institutions, managerial ability is essential for making them work. Sometimes leaders possess both qualities, but usually grassroots organizations that are successful arrive at a crossroads where the transition to a new leadership style involves a shift in leaders. The managers who inherit established organizations tend to be more pragmatic than visionary. They are preoccupied with the nuts and bolts of stabilizing the flow of resources, brokering reciprocal exchanges with other organizations, standardizing operating procedures, and training staff. Their first concern tends to be the bottom line rather than seizure of the moral high ground.

To paraphrase Shakespeare: Some people are born leaders, some become leaders, and others have leadership thrust upon them. Development agencies cannot do much about the former, except to identify charismatic figures when they appear, and provide the necessary support for getting worthwhile projects under way. As for the last category of leaders, they tend to emerge in sudden moments of profound crisis whose very unpredictability makes it unlikely that outside assistance can arrive in time to have significant impact. But if leaders can be made, which appears to be true of most managerial leaders, then the middle category would seem to be a natural candidate for training programs. Such assistance, however, need not be confined to organizations that have already made the transition to a managerial style of operation. It is also important to build a reservoir of skilled people in fledgling organizations so that there is a pool of talent to tap when the moment arrives for charismatic leaders to change their style of operations or step aside.

## NONDIRECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

For many people, history remains the biography of great men and women. Their stories illuminate an often dismal world and provide models of hope for those who would follow in their footsteps. When the IAF began funding projects, the charismatic spirit was a kind of litmus test for



Mitchell Denburg

*The work of oral historian Juan García (right) contributed to the creation of fishing cooperatives in Esmeraldas Province, Ecuador.*

identifying the level of commitment among potential grantees. Later, as the Foundation gained experience in the variety of developmental contexts in Latin America and the Caribbean, as we became a full-fledged institution ourselves, other criteria emerged to judge how grassroots organizations grow.

The importance of leadership training soon became obvious. Our initial presumption that experience—a poor man's on-the-job training—would be the only necessary teacher proved to be inadequate. Recognizing that unexamined behavior is difficult to improve, we began funding training and technical assistance activities, particularly emphasizing new approaches to nonformal education specially geared to people who lacked schooling. We also began to fund workshops, conferences, and on-site field exchanges

so that project leaders could share information about their common problems and news about innovative solutions. Other grants supported university seminars and coursework to strengthen the business and managerial skills of staff from organizations that had grown in size and were trying to streamline operations for maximum efficiency. All of these programs were intended to not only strengthen individual organizations, but to encourage the thickening network of informal cooperation that had begun to emerge among grassroots organizations throughout the Hemisphere.

More recently, we have formalized the process of learning through networking by making it integral to the In-Country Support (ICS) programs maintained by the Foundation throughout Latin America and the



*Women's activist Ana María Condori from Oruro Department, Bolivia, takes a break from her duties as an instructor at a skills training seminar to pose with her daughter.*

Caribbean. In Honduras, for example, new grantees are invited each year to participate in workshops where community leaders can gather to compare notes on their progress and the problems they are encountering. Technical advisors from the national ICS office facilitate the dialogue, and encourage systematic analysis of the grassroots development process that is drawn from participants' own experience. Every year, a new workshop group of 15 to 20 organizations is convened, while workshops from previous years continue to meet not only among themselves but with representatives from government and nongovernment organizations, widening the network of available contacts and deepening the understanding of development issues.

It should also be said that the IAF continues to support programs that

specialize in finding and nurturing charismatic leaders in an effort to encourage the unorganized poor to find their voice and launch their own self-help initiatives. In Guatemala, the Centro de Autoformación para Promotores Sociales (CAPS) has received nearly a half-dozen grants in the past 16 years to support its work among the poor. According to a 1985 study by Gerald Murray of the University of Florida in Gainesville, CAPS training programs are based on "a belief in the necessity of first developing the individual in the realm of ideas." Murray observed that trainees who are well-developed personally will help develop their own families, then their communities, and finally the nation. It is not a trickle-down or a bottom-up theory of development, but a process that "radiates outward." Among the more than 16,000 pro-

motors from remote villages who have come to Guatemala City for training was Juan López Díaz, the charismatic campesino who not only inspired his own community, but the same man who grew up to manage a national federation of small farmers. We hope that the ICS encounter groups and similar activities throughout the region will help other charismatic leaders hone their management skills, and provide new information on how community groups can not only invent but sustain their own institutions. ♦

*JAN R. VAN ORMAN, currently the IAF representative for Honduras and Belize, has worked in more than a dozen countries during his 15 years at the Foundation. He collaborated with contributing editor Ron Weber to write this article.*

# Offsetting the Iron Law of OLIGARCHY

## *The Ebb and Flow of Leadership Accountability in a Regional Peasant Organization*

Jonathan Fox and Luis Hernández



Panel taken from *Historia Campesina*, a comic book created by the Unión de Ejidos Lázaro Cárdenas (UELCL) after research and interviews by the authors of this article sparked local interest. The UELCL's illustrated history recounts its defense of members' interests in response to fluctuating governmental rural development policies since 1974. This panel describes the fledgling organization's mobilization to counteract a monopoly by the region's fertilizer supplier.

Most leaders of large membership organizations tend to put their own interests ahead of those they claim to represent. This is no surprise; it is one of the perennial problems of representative democracy, affecting institutions as varied as legislatures, labor unions, and local parent-teacher associations. Leaders seem to "take off" from their base with considerable frequency in membership organizations, and this is a problem of special concern for those who contend that national development in the Third World depends on the emergence and consolidation of a dense web of democratic grassroots development institutions.

Ever since Roberto Michels wrote of the "Iron Law of Oligarchy" in his 1911 book *Political Parties*, some social scientists have maintained that large membership organizations inevitably evolve from democratic intentions to bureaucratized, elite control. The problem is especially pronounced for poor people, who must organize to express and defend their interests. Their only inherent strength lies in numbers, and their greatest potential strength is in self-reliance. To take advantage of both, organization is required. Organizations take on their own dynamics, however, as leaders and staff develop interests that differ from those of the members. Opportunities to pursue political power, to benefit economically, or to pursue hidden agendas seduce leaders and staff away from representing membership concerns. In this view, new elites always manage to entrench themselves.

Familiar as this problem sounds, exceptions also spring to mind. In many cases, larger grassroots groups undergo a series of swings toward and away from democracy, with changing degrees of leadership accountability at different points in their history. What was posed by Michels as an all-powerful "law" turns out instead to be a strong, but far from invincible, *tendency*. Research into the dynamics of membership participation throughout the histories of large grassroots organizations can help to refine our understanding of changing degrees of leadership accountability.

In an effort to understand better

why democracy defeats oligarchy at some points in an organization's history and not at others, a study of a large, regional, Mexican peasant organization in the state of Nayarit—the Unión de Ejidos "Lázaro Cárdenas" (UELC)—was undertaken with the support of the Inter-American Foundation. This study analyzed a key dimension of organizational decision-making: accountability. Accountability involves rank-and-file oversight over leadership, is usually bolstered by direct membership participation in group decision-making, and has a major impact on the extent to which grassroots organizations reflect the priorities and concerns of their members.

## FRAMING THE STUDY

To frame research questions, it was necessary to refine the concept of accountability. "Accountability" refers to the members' capacity to hold leaders responsible for their actions. This requires the free flow of information, input into key hiring and firing decisions, some say in resource allocation, and a degree of veto power over leadership and staff actions.

Accountability also requires autonomy. Organizational autonomy is inherently relative, referring to a group's control over setting its own goals and making its own decisions without external domination, whether by governments, political parties, religious groups, or development agencies. But autonomy can cut both ways. It is essential if leaders are to fend off external threats and remain responsive to membership concerns, but it may also permit leaders to build up their own sources of bureaucratic, economic, political, or charismatic power, becoming autonomous from the membership as well.

Assuming, though, that an organization is relatively autonomous and its leaders representative, direct membership participation is still crucial to maintaining leadership accountability. When considering participation, it is useful to distinguish between membership and "followership." Conventional indicators of mass participation do not necessarily tell us much about this distinction since either active members or passive followers can produce large turnouts at public events or oc-

casions calling for voluntary labor. Nor does the operation of formal election procedures for choosing leaders necessarily either indicate active membership or guarantee accountability.

Active membership is difficult to define and identify. This study contends that the kind of membership action that is most likely to increase leadership accountability in large organizations occurs through channels that bring leaders and members closer to each other. To explain changing degrees of accountability in a large, consolidated, relatively democratic organization, this study charts the rise and fall of *intermediate instances of participation*, defined as formal or informal opportunities for members to make, carry out, and oversee important group decisions. When the rank and file has a role in making these decisions, the boundaries between leaders and members begin to break down.

The idea that participatory subgroups are necessary to keep larger groups democratic is not new. Democratic theorists have long held that national democracy depends on the checks and balances in society as well as in government. Classic political science contends that power must be decentralized among competing interest groups for democracy to work fairly. Relatively few researchers have looked at the workings of these social counterweights in terms of the "Iron Law of Oligarchy," however. Seymour Lipset, Martin Trow, and James Coleman's landmark 1956 study, *Union Democracy*, is a notable exception. They explained a successful case of union democracy by analyzing the countervailing tendencies that offset the otherwise powerful and ever-present oligarchical pressures. This study pursues countervailing tendencies further, suggesting that within large organizations they result from opportunities for membership actions, that is, intermediate instances of participation.

Intermediate instances of participation refer more to processes than to particular events or formal interventions. Specifically, they are formal or informal opportunities for those other than the established leadership to exercise power within large organizations. There are four preconditions for the kinds of intermediate instances of

participation that reinforce leadership accountability: autonomous local-level free spaces; effective vertical and horizontal information channels; active participation of membership groups in project decision-making and oversight; and decentralization of leadership through systematic training and opportunities for leadership competition.

First, members need opportunities to get together on their own, to set their own agendas, to determine their own needs, to choose their own leaders, and to come to their own conclusions about how to defend their interests. These opportunities may be available through, for example, village assemblies, union locals, or neighborhood meetings, if they are sufficiently democratic.

Second, members need two-way communications channels to find out what the leaders at the top of the organization are doing. Only with a steady flow of information downwards will members be able to evaluate leaders and keep them "on track," if necessary. Only with a steady flow upwards will leaders be able to make decisions that are right for the members. Even democratic leadership selection every few years does not guarantee that leaders will know or respond to the views of the majority of the membership. While regular and frank mass assemblies are usually a part of the package, deliberate efforts are often needed to reach beyond the most interested core group. To make fully informed decisions, members also need to know what other members think about the leadership, which is especially difficult to discern in organizations linking many dispersed communities.

Third, to make sure that organizations focus on meeting members' needs, the members themselves must have opportunities to decide what the group should do and how. This means direct membership involvement in setting the organization's agenda and in overseeing development projects, as opposed, for example, to voting yes or no on a fait accompli without input beforehand or afterwards.

Fourth, decentralization of power through the development of new generations of community leaders is critical. Not only do community-level leaders link the rank and file to the

top leadership, they can also become an alternative to it if it ignores membership concerns. Decentralization of responsibility reduces the membership's dependence on any one leader or group of leaders. Community-level leaders usually need training and experience in region-wide activities, however. If this is to occur, some degree of power must be devolved to decision-making bodies that are relatively autonomous from the established leaders.

Together, this overlapping array of horizontal and vertical linkages encourages members to become active participants in decision-making, blurring the boundaries between leaders and members. Because the conditions encouraging intermediate instances of participation are rarely all present and effective at once, loss of leadership accountability and group autonomy are constant dangers, even for apparently successful grassroots organizations.

## SELECTING THE RESEARCH SUBJECT

While the issue of accountability is problematic in all kinds of membership groups, we focused on regional peasant organizations, key actors in the development process, for two principal reasons. First, regional organizations are crucial in democratizing the rural development process. In much of Latin America, the major obstacle to rural development is the entrenched power of allied regional elites from the public and private sectors. They often monopolize key markets, preventing peasants from retaining and investing the fruits of their labor. Regional peasant organizations are frequently the only groups that can free these markets and push for more broad-based rural development policies. Regional organizations are also crucial for defending freedom of assembly, creating a hospitable environment for further community organizing. Either local or national peasant groups arguably could do the same, but local groups are easily isolated by their enemies, while national peasant organizations are usually democratic only insofar as they are made up of representative, regional building blocks.

This study defines "regional" as describing an organization that brings together so many communities that it

is too big to be run by community-level direct democracy alone. Face-to-face forms of accountability and decision-making are therefore insufficient, and some degree of delegation of authority is required. The second reason for focusing on regional organizations, then, is that accountability is especially vulnerable in them because the leadership is often the only link among the many dispersed and diverse member communities. Except where indigenous traditions survive, horizontal linkages among remote communities rarely develop spontaneously, and require deliberate organizing efforts to be sustained.

The Unión de Ejidos "Lázaro Cárdenas" is nationally known in the Mexican peasant movement, and was selected as the subject of this study for three reasons. First, it is a large regional organization, bringing together 15 agrarian reform communities with over 4,500 families (about half of them indigenous), and is a longstanding, major, political and economic actor in the region. Second, it has a solid organizational track record, with clear evidence of significant membership participation and a willingness to engage in mass direct action as well as lobbying. Its history reveals wide swings between independence and governmental control. Third, the UELC's leaders and advisors were generously willing to collaborate with the study despite the sensitivity of the research questions, many of which dealt with internal operations.

Mexican agrarian reform communities, or *ejidos*, are both political and economic institutions, to which the government cedes land-use rights while retaining a "tutelary" role. *Ejidos* are governed by decisions of regular, ostensibly democratic, mass membership assemblies, but government officials also supervise ejido elections and often intervene. In practice, the formal institutional structure does not guarantee that ejido leaders represent the majority of the members. This depends on the actual balance of power between democratic forces within the community and political and economic elites, both inside and outside the community.

By the majority decision of assemblies, several *ejidos* can form unions to carry out regional agricultural

EN EL PUEBLO DE JOMULCO, SE CELEBRÓ LA BODA DE 2 MIEMBROS DE LA BRIGADA PIDER. FUE AHÍ DONDE SURGIÓ LA IDEA DE FORMAR UNA ORGANIZACIÓN.

¡FORMAR UNA UNIÓN DE EJIDOS!

APROVECHAR QUE LA GENTE ANDA ANIMADA...

Y GESTIONAR UNA CONCESIÓN DE FERTILIZANTES. ¡CONTROLARLO A NIVEL REGIONAL!



The idea to form a union of ejidos emerged at the wedding of two members of PIDER.

development projects. Assemblies elect delegates, who in turn elect the union's leadership and oversight committees. Rank-and-file members who are not delegates can participate in union meetings but cannot vote. Delegates to ejido unions are usually elected from outside the ranks of the ejido officers, creating parallel authority structures that often serve as counterweights.

Because of the often heavy hand of the state, most ejido unions either wither away or become government-run bureaucracies. For 15 years, the UELC has been among the exceptions, vigorously defending a wide range of member interests. From its birth, much of the UELC's history can be seen as a series of creative responses by a new generation of peasant leaders to changing government rural development policies.

The research methodology used to examine the UELC depended on extensive participant observation and on oral histories gathered from a wide range of people inside and outside the organization, including regional and local leaders, advisors, rank-and-file members, local, state, and federal officials, as well as independent development analysts. The case study is organized around a series of turning points in the UELC's history, which are defined as moments when key intermediate instances of participation either rose or fell, setting the stage for

subsequent patterns of relations between leaders and rank-and-file members.

#### A QUICK AND EASY BIRTH: WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM SOME FRIENDS

Southern Nayarit had experienced three previous waves of peasant mobilization before the UELC emerged: the unsuccessful 1857-1881 indigenous insurrection, the victorious 1933-1939 land reform movement, and the largely successful 1960s *comunero* movement by indigenous communities for the restitution of lands that had been usurped by private farmers and ranchers. The UELC emerged shortly after the *comunero* movement. After decades of government neglect of peasant agriculture, renewed rural development efforts included occasional support for increasingly independent peasant movements. In 1974, under the auspices of the federal government's new Programa de Inversiones en el Desarrollo Rural (PIDER), a dynamic team of community organizers brought leaders from several agrarian communities in the region together for the first time.

The reformist political climate had encouraged this new generation of younger, more representative community leaders to organize mass protests, pressuring the government to

break its alliance with local elites and end their monopoly on official credit and fertilizer supplies. The movement's quick successes showed that unity could mean strength, and the communities joined together to found a union of ejidos in 1975.

The UELC came together in spite of the existence of the official Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC), which had long neglected producers' concerns in favor of electoral patronage. Joint teams of new ejido leaders and PIDER promoters convinced skeptical campesinos that the main purpose of the new organization—the UELC—was economic development rather than party politics. The UELC's combination of protest actions and lobbying, with help from PIDER, won the rights to a major government fertilizer distributorship. Mass participation continued, as the UELC built a huge new fertilizer warehouse with voluntary labor.

The birth of the UELC was the result of intermediate instances of participation at the local and regional levels. First, the ejidos themselves were revitalized as the new, more representative leadership came to power at the community level. Second, as these leaders joined together to demand a fairer deal from the government, their first ad hoc meetings laid the foundation for the formal delegate assemblies that later would lead the first peasant-managed, region-

wide development organization in the area.

## ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK: GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

The involvement of some community leaders and PIDER promoters in the popular 1976 Nayarit gubernatorial opposition movement led the UELC to be identified with the unsuccessful electoral challengers, in spite of its officially nonpartisan position. The political climate shifted, and the new governor expelled the PIDER organizers from the state. The UELC's loss of federal allies opened it up to intervention by the state government. This vulnerability was heightened by the leadership's overtly confrontational stance, which went beyond the position of much of the membership. The UELC's president even publicly refused to shake the new governor's outstretched hand.

The tide turned against the UELC when an official audit resulted in imprisonment of the leadership for fraud. In exchange for the leaders' release, the government used elections to impose its candidate on the Unión. Half the delegates, already aligned with the official CNC, supported the charges of fraud, while the rest defended the imprisoned president, largely as a matter of principle against government intervention.

The members were never able to come to their own conclusions about the fraud charges since the government confiscated the relevant records. Government officials imposed their candidate, a pliable CNC supporter little known outside his community. He promptly turned the UELC's principal asset, the fertilizer outlet, over to the government agricultural bank. At the same time, authorities cracked down on the two largest, poorest, and most active communities in the UELC, reportedly imprisoning over 50 people and issuing arrest warrants for many more, ostensibly because of conflicts about land boundaries with private farmers and ranchers.

This second turning point resulted from a swing toward over-centralized leadership with insufficient member support to compensate for the loss of federal allies. The leadership's failure to account adequately for its manage-



The UELC's multifaceted housing project encouraged beneficiary participation and decentralized decision-making, milestones in the Unión's development.

ment of UELC finances made it much easier for the government to pursue its divide-and-conquer strategy. The UELC lost its autonomy largely because of lack of leadership accountability and weak intermediate instances of participation, especially in the ejido delegate assembly.

## OPENING FROM ABOVE, REDEMOCRATIZATION FROM BELOW: THE COMMUNITY FOOD COUNCILS

The state government tried to reinforce its control over the UELC with huge infusions of resources for devel-

opment projects, but without grassroots participation in their design or implementation, the projects quickly failed. After a wave of demoralization, suspended assemblies, and the government takeover of the UELC's fertilizer outlet, a new federal food distribution program brought fresh external allies to the region in 1980. Community organizers came to form democratic, autonomous village-store management committees, which would in turn form a new, region-wide community food supply council to oversee the government's rural food distribution efforts. With access to trucks, organizers, and political legitimacy, inchoate dissatisfaction

with the UELC leadership crystallized into discreetly organized opposition, as communities regrouped and prepared to redemocratize the organization.

One of the promoters, a committed community organizer, took 15 ejido leaders to visit the most dramatic success story of peasant-managed regional development in Mexico at that time, the *Coalición de Ejidos Colectivos de los Valles del Yaqui y Mayo* (CECVYM), which is located in Sonora. This direct exposure to a practical alternative vision of the future inspired the community leaders to broaden and deepen their efforts to revive the peasant movement in the region, and to begin to network with other broad-based community food councils in neighboring states.

Representative leadership regained lost ground in the next round of ejido elections. The rising parallel leadership, based in the food council, was then able to confront the government-installed authorities in the UELC, informally relieve them of power, ratify the change through elections, and begin the process of reviving the UELC's autonomous economic development project.

This leadership transition was a key turning point for the UELC, setting a pattern it would follow for years to come. The community-based network that gained power included both new and more experienced leaders. They achieved a high level of unity and coordination in the process of organizing the food stores and the community food council, and of recovering control of the UELC itself. The alternative leadership meetings became open and formalized as the UELC's technical council. Their meetings came to play a key agenda-setting role for the next several years.

The UELC seemed back on track, but the alternative leadership had not agreed in advance on who should direct the organization. Two candidates emerged: one from UZETA, a small, relatively wealthy ejido that had always played a key role in the UELC leadership, and the other a venerable leader of the much poorer indigenous community of Jomulco. Although Jomulco itself accounted for the majority of the Unión's membership, this gave its candidate no special advantage since delegate voting power is by ejido or indigenous community

only, not by population. Nevertheless, Jomulco's leader won by a small margin, ushering in an extended period of broadened participation in decision-making.

The food council program created new opportunities for community-level and region-wide intermediate instances of participation that were effectively seized by UELC members. Organizing around one issue unleashed "social energy" that spilled over into other arenas. After the new round of ejido elections, the village store committees and the community food councils created, in effect, a democratic counterweight—a springboard from which to launch the revitalization of the UELC. The redemocratization of the Unión was the result of members getting together in legitimate free spaces within and across communities to decide the best way to defend their interests.

### DEVELOPMENT SPILLOVER: THE COMMUNITY-MANAGED HOUSING PROJECT

The UELC launched its rural community housing project in 1985, with government loans and lessons learned from the CECVYM's prior experience. Most UELC activities had been production-oriented, helping landed heads of households, but the housing program benefited many landless members of the community, especially adult children of ejidatarios. The UELC's team of four advisors, two of whom were veterans of the CECVYM experience, settled in the region and co-managed the housing project with peasant leadership. The close working relations between the advisors and the UELC deepened, reinforcing a relationship in which the advisors were clearly working for the organization, rather than vice versa.

The design of the housing project encouraged direct beneficiary participation and trained intermediate-level campesino activists to forge stronger links between the communities and the UELC leadership. Ejido assemblies decided who would receive construction loans and, together with the individual participants, decided how to manage the construction process.

The housing project was a turning point for UELC because it was the

organization's most decentralized, participatory development project. Equitable and efficient project implementation was reinforced by the systematic decentralization of decision-making. Creative leaders and advisors organized a wide range of intermediate instances of participation connected with the oversight and implementation of the project. The sharp contrast with the failed injection of government development resources during the official takeover of the UELC reinforced the view within the organization that project success depended on accountability and participation.

### TAKING IT TO THE STREETS: PUSHING FOR HIGHER CORN PRICES

As inflation soared and government subsidies fell during the mid-1980s, growing corn became more and more of a losing proposition. Across the country, coalitions of small- and medium-sized grain producers took peaceful protest actions to encourage agricultural policymakers to give more attention to the soaring costs of production.

Three waves of crop price mobilizations became the most dramatic expression of the UELC's power, as producers took over dozens of government warehouses. The movement peaked in a massive 10-day blockade of the Pan American Highway in 1987. The decision to take over the highway was made in mass ejido assemblies, and the one-hour-on, one-hour-off blockade involved over 3,000 peasants. The UELC then organized ejido assemblies alongside the highway, followed by assemblies of ejido delegates to the Unión. While this form of organization probably limited input from the many non-member participants, it also blocked reported efforts to infiltrate and disrupt the action, guaranteeing an autonomous decision-making process.

The ejido assemblies provided the crucial intermediate instances of participation in the crop price mobilizations. These democratic spaces kept the leadership in touch with the base and blocked possible external provocation. Membership participation was essential in maintaining the discipline needed to avoid giving the gov-

ernment any pretext for possible repression.

## THE "TRENCH ECONOMY": PEASANT WOMEN BECOME ACTORS

As prospects for making corn production profitable grew increasingly dim, the UELC's advisors elaborated a development strategy known as the "trench economy." This strategy was designed to increase regional self-sufficiency through household and community production of basic goods, especially food, in order to buffer the impact of inflation "imported" from the rest of the economy.

Peasant women were major actors in the local informal economy, but most lacked organizing experience. At the urging of wives of active ejido members, women met in their communities to analyze the cost of living as part of the campaign for higher crop support prices. With UELC advisors, the women developed a series of projects that revived the traditional "backyard economy." The Inter-American Foundation supported this development strategy through research on soils and organic fertilizer to deal with declining yields, a women's turkey production project, and a related feed-grain-mixing operation. Women of the UELC thus became crucial to the organization's "trench economy" strategy.

Defining women's roles in a male-controlled organization proved easier said than done, however. Some Unión men put obstacles in the women's path and blocked their access to the governmental and IAF funds assigned to their projects. Official politicians also got involved and attempted to control the movement. With the help of two veteran advisors, the women still managed to form a regional network of their 15 community-based groups, which were known in official parlance as Unidades Agroindustriales de la Mujer (UAIMs).

Traditional male distrust of women's empowerment changed when the UELC leadership realized that it, too, could gain valuable political capital from the movement. The women's network of UAIMs won official representation to the assembly of Unión delegates, the first case ever in Mexico. As federal funds then became available, the UELC leadership, allied with

its traditional rivals in the CNC, managed to win over most of the UAIMs leadership from its original, more independent-minded organizers.

The difficulty of creating space for women's projects within the Unión highlights the constraints of an organization legally limited to "heads of households" with access to land. How can it—or should it—attempt to represent the interests of other groups, be they women, the landless, or young people? Autonomous community-based networks can be more attuned to the needs of these unrepresented groups, although it may be in their interest to work with or within larger and stronger regional organizations. In the case of the UELC, however, the politicization of the UAIMs led to an impasse in the progress of the economic projects themselves. The UELC's eventual incorporation of the UAIMs was a turning point because it involved expansion of membership and broadening of participation in response to grassroots demands. However, the future of the UAIMs depends on the women's capacity to maintain their autonomy in a context of shifting alliances.

## ELECTION TIME: PEASANTS FINALLY GET TREATED LIKE CITIZENS

The UELC's demands had always been primarily economic, and electoral politics were widely seen as corrupting. As Juan Franques put it when he was president: "We're independent because we don't get involved in politics. For the progress of the organization we should be united like one single man, united as peasants. Outside the door, people can follow the path they please, whatever party they want." But the rise of the nationalist opposition made the 1988 presidential race genuinely competitive in many regions of the country for the first time. Previously unseen differences between the UELC leadership and rank-and-file membership emerged.

The official candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, made substantive concessions to peasant demands in his platform, and personally visited the UELC to show his support for its approach to rural development. He even invited the president of the UELC to speak in a public campaign

event, proclaiming, "Let's hear what Nacho has to say." The UELC's leaders were greatly impressed, and moved to take advantage of this opportunity to leapfrog over their conservative local rivals in the CNC. The UELC's leaders supported Salinas's policy proposals, while many members sympathized with the principal opposition candidate, Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas, son of the UELC's namesake, Lázaro Cárdenas, who as Mexico's president had redistributed most of the land in the region in the 1930s.

Both candidates made serious appeals to peasants as producers and as citizens, and the choice strained leadership-membership relations. Some were concerned that the leadership's support for Salinas implied a loss of autonomy for the organization. Others were convinced that real concessions to peasant organizations were in the offing. The UELC leadership appeared to have chosen its political strategy autonomously, without significant external intervention, but they had not extensively consulted the membership either.

Electoral politics strained the UELC, as they had in 1976. As a development organization, it was committed to defend its members' common interests, but leadership involvement in party politics tended to divide the membership. In most cases, the leadership tried to avoid conflict by ostensibly participating as individuals rather than UELC representatives, but they put more energy into consolidating alliances with politicians than into building a consensus among the membership.

Since the corn price movement, the new UELC leadership tended to centralize power. They were very cautious, for example, about sharing crucial financial information to prevent possible manipulation by political rivals. By election time, membership dissatisfaction was still too dispersed to be expressed through the delegate assembly, but members could make their views known through other channels, such as the ejido elections and UAIMs. The long-term impact of this turning point on the shifting balance of power between leaders and members remains uncertain. It is clear, however, that it reflects a swing away from responsiveness to member concerns.

## THE EBB AND FLOW OF MEMBERSHIP PARTICIPATION

Representative leaders have dominated most of the UELC's richly textured history. They were not ideologically motivated to encourage membership empowerment for its own sake, but their commitment to representative democracy and to meeting the felt needs of the membership, and their ongoing competition with the official peasant federation, made them care about member interests. When leaders strayed, members organized both formally and informally into intermediate and parallel groups to bring pressure for increased accountability. Yet accountability mechanisms did not operate automatically, and members acted unevenly when dissatisfied with leadership. These lags may be due in part to the decentralized and seasonal rhythms of agricultural life, but the inconsistent development of opportunities for active membership participation in the UELC's ongoing activities is a larger part of the explanation.

The UELC pressed its demands by using sophisticated combinations of mass direct action and lobbying through elite back channels and the UELC's "friends in high places," often in alliance with its counterparts in the Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autónomas (UNORCA) network. The balance between the two strategies varied, however. The positive turning points were the repeated cycles of mass participation in campaigns for key membership demands. The

UELc's founding fertilizer access movement, its redemocratization through the community food council, the self-managed housing project, the campaigns for higher crop prices, and the women's network all created or reinforced intermediate instances of participation outside the regular Unión and ejido assemblies. While the emphasis on elite lobbying that followed the 1988 presidential election provoked controversy, the Unión's vital internal political life continues.

## CONCLUSIONS

Since rural elites often centralize power at the regional level, rural membership organizations must also concentrate power regionally in order to become effective counterweights. Yet to remain internally democratic and to reduce vulnerability to external intervention, regional organizations must, at the same time, decentralize power internally. These twin imperatives pose a contradiction: How can a grassroots organization both centralize and decentralize power simultaneously?

This study found that while regional control over development activities is often economically necessary, it inherently creates a source of leadership power not directly linked to the membership assembly, thereby potentially distancing the leadership from its base. To carry out regional economic projects while minimizing loss of leadership accountability, then, community-level organizations must take conscious and deliberate steps to sustain their own autonomy

and membership participation. Because of these built-in tensions, it is not surprising that the balance of power between an organization's leadership and membership shifts back and forth over time, as it has in the UELC.

This study began with the premise that regionalizing grassroots development organizations puts democracy at risk, and searched for patterns of participation that created checks and balances to offset the "Iron Law of Oligarchy." It found that the ebb and flow of intermediate instances of participation, especially autonomous membership actions that horizontally link otherwise dispersed rural communities, helps to explain changing degrees of leadership accountability. The reasons for the ebb and flow of the intermediate instances of participation themselves remain to be more systematically studied. ♦

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In this concluding panel, Unión members link arms to emphasize how popular participation is the glue that binds ejidos and communities together to ensure economic and social progress.

# The Long Journey HOME

## *Pablo Fernández and the Discovery of La Rochela*

Victor Perera

A Guatemalan peasant leader finds the seeds of the future in his indigenous past.

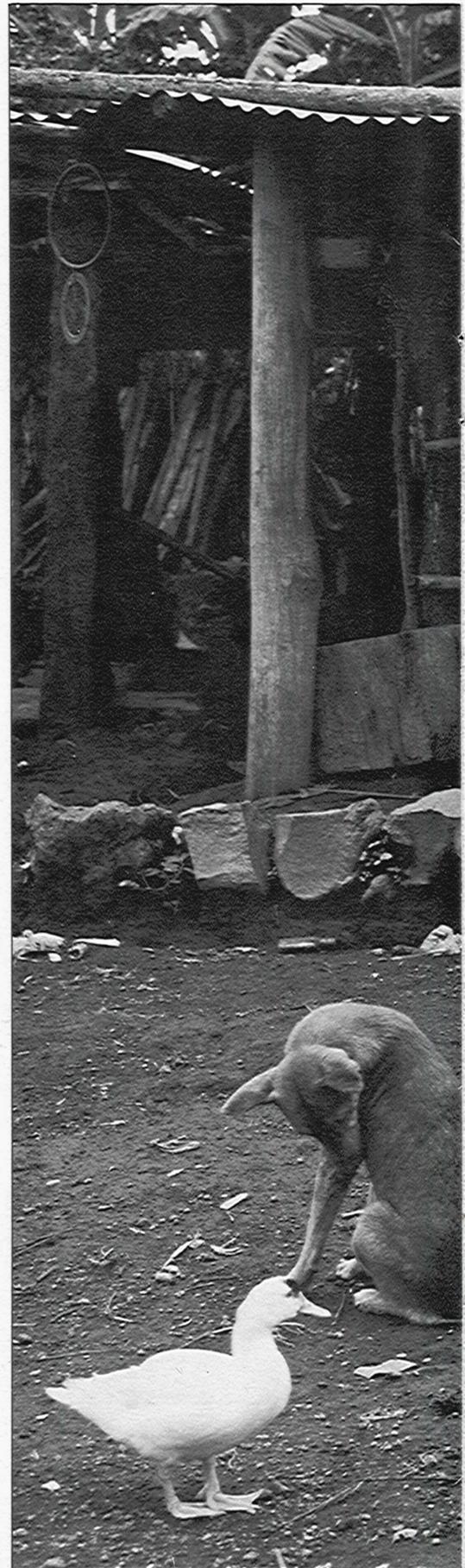
I heard of Pablo Fernández by happenstance, during a visit two years ago to his hometown of Todos Santos in the Guatemalan department of Huehuetenango.

Although the purpose of my first visit to the high alpine villages of the Cuchumatán, or Sierra Madre, was to gather material for a book on how Mayan communities were surviving the aftermath of a bloody guerrilla war, I had set out on my journey to Todos Santos years before. I originally learned of the marvels of the town in the books of Maud Oakes, an intrepid traveler and social scientist who lived there during the mid-1940s. In *Two Crosses of Todos Santos*, and the more personable *Beyond the Windy Place*, she rivetingly described a proud Mayan farming community perched on the edge of a remote mountain valley that time seemed literally to have forgotten. Its only access to the outside world was by foot or mule or on horseback, and Oakes led her readers through an enchanted landscape strewn with hedgerows of the giant agave, houses with thatched roofs like Chinese pagodas, and steep cultivated terraces set against craggy peaks nearly 12,000 feet high. The

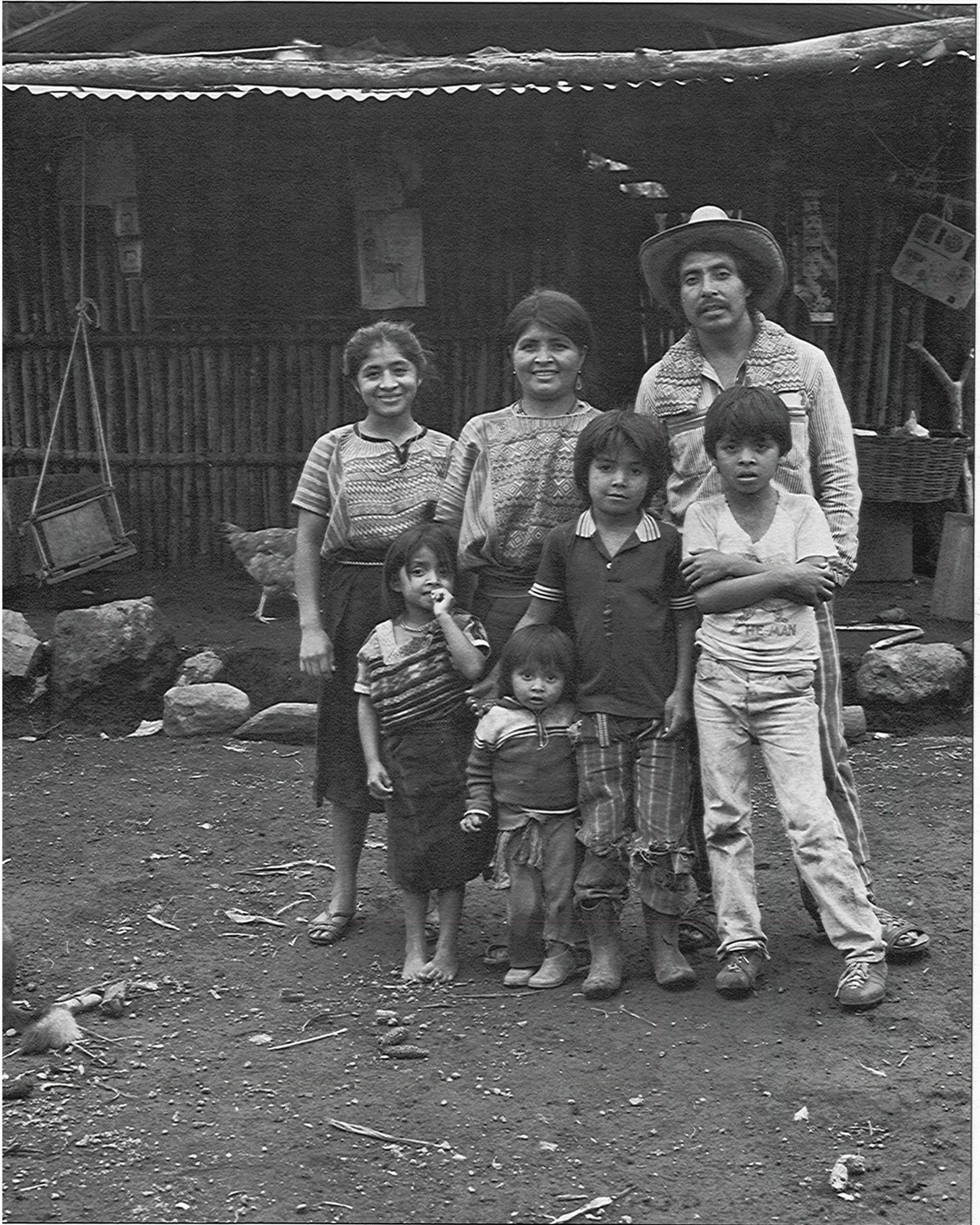
daily lives of Todosanteros seemed equally exotic and unfamiliar, dominated by shamans who knew the world of appearances concealed an invisible universe of dark and beneficent spirits who could be induced to assist one's family and friends or harm one's adversaries.

In her two singular chronicles, Oakes made clear the impossibility of remaining an objective observer; and she chose to play the role of healer when townspeople visited her house to request cures for their ailments, both medical and metaphysical. What she usually dispensed, along with samples from her western medicine chest, was a hefty dose of Yankee common sense. And yet, by the end of her residence, Oakes learned to see the world through the eyes of a *natu-ral*, and she became at least part Todosantera. Her neighbors referred to her as *la chimancita*, or little shamaness, and believed she was the "owner" of one of the four mountain peaks sacred to the Mam Indians.

In 1982, when I made my way to Maud Oakes's home in Carmel, California, her conversation teemed with images of Todos Santos, its rituals and myriad other presences, corporeal and incorporeal. In talking about



Daniel Chauche



the difficulty of an outsider penetrating the complexity of life there, she explained that the two crosses cited in her first book stood at the entrance to the town's church. The first, a tall one made of ancient wood, symbolized the Mayan rites and beliefs associated with *costumbre*, or ancient custom; the second, made of stone—which has since been removed—represented *ladino*, or non-Indian, authority and the Catholic Church. When I asked if she still heard from the townspeople who had admitted her into their world, she said word had filtered out that the war in the altiplano had reached Todos Santos, but none of her friends had, as yet, been killed.

Shortly after she completed her journal of personal transformation, *The Stone Speaks*, which appeared in the fall of 1987, Oakes suffered, quite suddenly, an almost total loss of memory. When I last visited her, later that year, she was still under round-the-clock care by a nurse whose name she could not remember. Maud Oakes, lean and spry still at 84, with her indomitable will intact, could recall the colors of Todos Santos and two or three names—Petrona, Domingo, Basilia. As for the rest, her only comment was, "They never got in my way." Despite Oakes's memory loss, she gave signs of acknowledging the reality that had befallen the place she called her spiritual home. As we sat together that afternoon, she looked out into her sun-filled patio at the leaves falling from her Japanese maple and remarked, "Are those bullets?"

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When I visited Todos Santos for the first time in 1987, I learned that a third, wooden cross had been erected on the old Mayan ruins above the town, in commemoration of the victims of the violence in 1981 and 1982, when the army responded to guerrilla recruitment in the area by killing at least 50 villagers and burning over 100 homes.

Although the struggle seemed to have subsided, its shadow remained. Conversation about that time was guarded, and my initial questions were circumspectly deflected. I was told that all local men between the ages of 15 and 50 were still expected to participate in the Civil Defense Patrols instituted by former President

Ríos Montt to secure military domination of the highlands, taking 24-hour shifts at least once a week with orders to "seek out" subversives.

It was on my second visit, later that year, that I remembered Pablo Fernández. His name had been mentioned before, but only in passing, almost dismissively. Then, during a conversation about migration from the area, someone said how this same Fernández had recently led a group of 50 local families on a 210-mile trek south to the lower slopes of Fuego Volcano, where they had founded a pioneering agricultural settlement called La Rochela.

Gradually, I began to learn more about this charismatic schoolteacher and social reformer, discovering that his reputation—tinged with notoriety—had traveled far beyond his hometown. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Fernández had taught school in Tubicoy, a remote *aldea*, or hamlet, nestled 11,000 feet up on the Paquix Plateau, where guerrillas were actively recruiting supporters. In 1982, at age 30, he came down as a delegate to the Council of State that was convened by the new administration of Efraín Ríos Montt, an evangelical general who had seized the presidency in a palace coup. Fernández was one of only 10 Indian delegates named to this ad hoc consultative body, and he used his position to lobby for legislation to benefit his community. High on his agenda was a law to protect nursing mothers from pesticide poisoning, particularly on the lowland cotton plantations where indiscriminate spraying had led to the highest concentrations of DDT in mothers' milk in the Western Hemisphere. When Ríos Montt was himself overthrown by a palace coup in August 1983, the Council of State was abolished, and Fernández left to study history for a year at del Valle University with a grant from the American Friends Service Committee. After a short stint working in a rural cooperative, he returned to Todos Santos in 1984 before setting off on the expedition to Fuego Volcano.

The Todosanteros I spoke with described Fernández in terms that mixed admiration and apprehension, heightening his enigmatic elusiveness. They praised his initiative in seeking out new opportunities for

himself and others, but many were suspicious of his links to ladino outsiders. How could he have survived for five years in that isolated hamlet unless he had made some sort of pact with the guerrillas? What kind of ties to the military had entitled him to serve on the Council of State? On the other hand, my conversations with the relatives of settlers in La Rochela were full of glowing reports about Fernández's leadership, about an almost Edenic place with rich soils and a temperate climate that was blessedly free of the bloodshed and violence haunting Todos Santos and nearly every other community in Huehuetenango.

My curiosity was piqued. Father Jim Flaherty, a U.S. Maryknoll missionary who had served in Todos Santos, deepened the mystery, describing Fernández as a quixotic character—too smart for his village—who had seized every chance to better his lot, only to find each adventure returning him to his native roots. A fellow teacher from Todos Santos who became a regional supervisor of schools labeled Fernández "an inspired troublemaker." To an Indian linguist who had studied with him at the university, Fernández was a kind of seer who had anticipated the army reprisals against his community and the exhaustion of arable land that would eventually force thousands of Todosanteros to leave their homes.

In fact, mass migrations were not new to Todos Santos. In the mid-1960s, land shortages had driven over 2,000 families—nearly half the population of Todos Santos Municipality—to emigrate. Their promised land lay to the north in the Ixcán, the fertile lowland region just below the Petén rain forest. Most of the settlers joined a cooperative venture under the auspices of a Maryknoll priest, Father Bill Woods, who had purchased thousands of acres for a pittance and was turning them over in small plots to families from Huehuetenango and northern Quiché. The cooperatives flourished for several years since the soil and climate were ideal for diversified farming. Under Father Bill's guidance, the homesteaders cleared forest, built schools and churches, and gained clear title to their lands.

After the Guerrilla Army of the Poor moved into the Ixcán in the mid-1970s, the situation deteriorated dra-



Preceding page: Pablo Fernández and his family gather outside their home in La Rochela, Guatemala, a pioneering agricultural settlement founded by Fernández. Above: A festival in Todos Santos. Members of the new settlement often return to their native community of Todos Santos for such celebrations.

matically. The Guatemalan army concluded that the cooperatives were becoming part of the rebels' popular support base, and set out to eradicate them. They began by eliminating co-op leaders and other select targets. After Father Woods was killed in a mysterious plane crash in 1976, the army carried out massive sweeps of the area. During the next few years, hundreds of transplanted Todosanteros were killed indiscriminately. The survivors fled across the border into Mexico, swelling the tide of 100,000 Indians seeking refuge in makeshift camps in Chiapas.

During my several visits to Todos Santos, I learned how deeply the community had been traumatized by the violence in the Ixcán, how it had eventually caused repercussions at home. In April 1982, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor had raised its black-and-red flag above the municipal hall in Todos Santos, and eloquent spokesmen for the guerrillas recruited many villagers to their cause. Most of

these Todosanteros appeared months later on the death lists of the Guatemalan army, and were among the first people to be killed by soldiers during their house-to-house searches. After the army decamped, the survivors returned from their mountain hideouts only to have the guerrillas take reprisals. Among those executed as suspected army informers was the son of Petrona, who had been Maud Oakes's friend and neighbor in Todos Santos. In a cycle of violence that lasted for years, the structure of the community began unraveling.

The *cofradía*, or religious brotherhood, of Todos Santos, which included most of the shamans Maud Oakes had befriended years before, had been badly damaged. The violence undermined a structure that had already been weakened by the inroads of U.S.-based evangelical sects. Following the devastating earthquake of 1976, which killed 26,000 highland Indians and left hundreds of thousands homeless, funda-

mentalist and Pentecostal churches like Alpha and Omega and the Assemblies of God sent missionaries to the area to minister to the victims. Staying on, they built new churches from the rubble of the Catholic churches that had been destroyed. When the guerrillas began to encroach into the highlands, several of these evangelical sects widened their agendas to openly combat the "satanic" teachings of Marxism and liberation theology.

Don Pascual, the octogenarian chief prayermaker of the *cofradía*, whom I met on a later visit, voiced his bitter opposition not only to the evangelicals but to the catechists of Catholic Action. Waving his hands in the air, he vilified the militant young partisans of both sides whose determined opposition had reduced the *cofradía's* membership to a half-dozen cantankerous elders. "They call us superstitious old men," he shouted, leaning close to my ear. "But it is they who have broken the com-

munity's laws and turned their backs on the old teachings. Without those laws, passed on to us by our ancestors for hundreds of generations, our people succumb to murder, theft, and other crimes, and the world itself is reduced to chaos, just as you are witnessing today."

Don Pascual then opened the smaller of two *cajas reales*, or royal coffers, which contained worn, leather-bound land titles and various ritual objects. The larger or "true" royal coffer, which cannot be opened in the presence of strangers, was thought by Maud Oakes to contain torture implements from the colonial era, tools belonging to old *curanderos*, or medicine men, and an ancient parchment with colored figures. Don Pascual held passionately to his conviction that the true *caja real* contained the laws and teachings of his ancestors that maintained order and balance in the universe. Leaning close to me once again, he shouted the names of the four peaks sacred to Todosanteros, where he insisted the *dueños*, or guardian spirits, still reside, and keep alive the holiest days of the traditional Mayan calendar. "Catechists and evangelicals come and go," he bellowed. "Even shamans pass from the scene—both the true and

has come to value the truth of our traditions. The last time he was here, he told me of his plans to turn La Rochela into a spiritual aldea of Todos Santos, a new outpost where respect would be paid to our ancestors, and the old ways would be observed. We shall see if he keeps his word."

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In July 1988 I finally met Pablo Fernández, during one of his periodic visits to Antigua, Guatemala, where he was collaborating with young Indian linguists of the recently founded Academy of Mayan Languages in their efforts to produce a standardized alphabet for the country's 23 Mayan dialects. A relatively tall, robust man in his thirties, Fernández was dressed in the colorful garb of Todos Santos. He seemed out of place in the old colonial city, the last bastion of post-conquest ladino culture. His answers to my questions about La Rochela carried the same mixture of opposites—a subdued optimism short on details. When he invited me to visit the settlement to see for myself, I quickly accepted.

The next month I set out from Antigua with a companion, the photographer Daniel Chauche. The drive took

vegetation gave way to small farms of coffee, banana, and cardamom. Below us stretched the hot coastal plain, or *tierra caliente*, dotted with sugar cane and cotton fincas extending all the way to the Pacific. Above us loomed the lava-furrowed cone of Fuego, which last erupted in 1978, sending a cloud of cinder and ash into the sky, eventually circling the globe. Through the cloud cover we could make out a growing bulge and the huge, fiery-red gash that herald another major eruption within the decade.

Turning a bend in the narrow, rain-soaked road, we glimpsed two men working on a line of coffee trees. Realizing that their red-striped trousers and gaily colored shirts identified them as natives of Todos Santos, we pulled over to ask directions.

After reassuring us that we had indeed found La Rochela, the men struck up a conversation. The younger man, whose name was Teodoro, explained that he, his wife Juana, and their seven-year-old son were among the first families from Todos Santos to settle here, on idle land that had been nationalized from its German owners during the Second World War. When I asked why he had moved here, Teodoro denied any fear of the guerrillas or the army, adding that his family had fortunately been spared by the violence. Like the thousands of Todosanteros who had moved to the Ixcán in the mid-1960s because land was scarce or worn out and the supply of firewood was dwindling, Teodoro had left home some years ago to find a better life. At first, he had gone to the coastal plantations, perhaps one of those glimmering in the heat far below us, to find work as a seasonal laborer, picking coffee or cotton, or harvesting sugar cane. During one of those seasons, their first child had died of a fever brought on by the harsh conditions of finca life. The following year, renewed need forced them to return, yet again, to the coast, where Juana lost a second child, weeks after he was born. It was soon after this second death that they heard of a new settlement on the slopes of Fuego from a neighbor in Todos Santos who had been awarded a parcel of land by the Instituto Nacional de Transformación Agraria (INTA). Determined to break out of the grim cycle that bound him and his

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**"We want to ensure that our children are not only well educated, but that they are also better fed and healthier than their cousins back in Todos Santos."**

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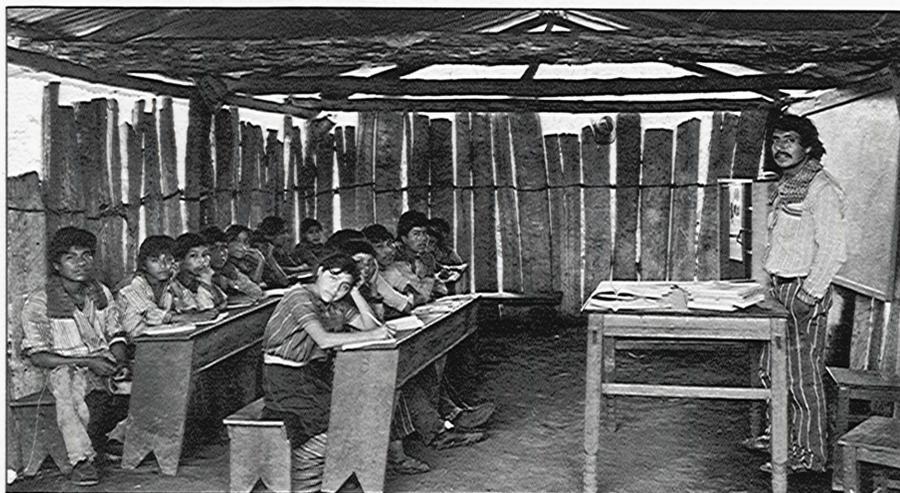
the false—but the guardians of the four mountain peaks endure forever."

After his unburdening homily, Don Pascual and the *cofrades* performed costumbre with mortar bowls, tall candles, and votive rum. For an added nominal contribution, he proposed sacrificing a turkey in my honor, an offer that I politely declined.

To my surprise, Don Pascual was among the Todosanteros who supported Pablo Fernández and his decision to leave in search of greener pastures. "Pablito is a rash young man who has made many mistakes," Don Pascual said. "In the past, he has mingled too closely with the ladinos, and many feared he would become corrupted. But Pablito is smart, and he

us through the oldest towns of colonial Guatemala—Ciudad Vieja, Dueñas, Alotenango—as we traversed the fertile corridor between two giant volcanoes, Agua and Fuego, whose explosive activities have helped shape the nation's history. (Ciudad Vieja, for instance, the second colonial capital, was destroyed barely four months after its founding by a huge mudslide from Agua Volcano.)

Turning right in Alotenango we passed by coffee plantations that were formerly owned by foreigners and now have local names like El Zapote and Trinitaria. A few miles past Ceilán we began to ascend the northwestern flank of Fuego Volcano. Approaching 4,000 feet, the lush



*Fernández teaches a botany class in La Rochela about herbal medicines, a curative method still practiced by traditional shamans.*

family, Teodoro visited La Rochela in 1984 and soon applied to INTA for 19 hectares of his own land.

While working as a migrant laborer, Teodoro had learned as much as he could about coffee and cardamom cultivation. Showing us around his small farm, he explained that after clearing the land, his first step had been to plant shade trees for the coffee he planned to grow. His arabica coffee trees were still too immature for harvesting, although they had reached five feet in height and bore clusters of green berries. His cardamom plants had produced two crops, which he had sold in nearby Ceilán for 50 quetzals (about \$20) per *quintal*, or hundredweight. Eight years ago, the return on cardamom was 10 times higher, but burgeoning production in Guatemala and Brazil had driven the price down. Fortunately, Teodoro had discovered a third cash crop to take up the slack until the coffee trees matured: Banana plants were bending over with bunches of ripening fruit, which he sold to truckers from El Zapote, the huge finca we had passed earlier in the day.

It was hard not to be struck by the seeming abundance of this place, a sentiment echoed by the older man, standing by Teodoro's side, who had been silent till now and who also turned out to be a visitor. Teodoro's father had just come from Todos Santos for a short stay, and he was already enamored with the virtues of La Rochela. The soil was loose but fertile, and required no chemical fer-

tilizers to grow potatoes, beans, and corn like his own fields did. And the climate was temperate year-round, with no danger of killer frosts or scorching droughts.

Teodoro agreed that irrigating his fields was not a problem, but cautioned that the shortage of potable water soon would be. The nearest river was a 45-minute walk away, which meant that villagers would not be able to wash or process their coffee when the trees were finally ready for harvesting. He said the community had already drilled a well 40 feet down, and still had another 60 to go.

Struck by these examples of community action, I asked if local farmers planned to market their coffee together, if La Rochela was envisioned as a cooperative venture. Teodoro responded by cheerfully referring my questions to the president of the community, Pablo Fernández, the very man we had come to see.

We were told we could find Fernández at the community school, where he was teaching a group of older children. The schoolhouse had two rudimentary classrooms with wooden sidings and thatched roofs. In the larger room, Ernesto Martínez, vice president of the community, was teaching 36 first and second graders a lesson in civics. All the girls wore the traditional garb of Todos Santos—brightly woven *huipiles*, or blouses, and ankle-length *cortes*, or wrap-around skirts. Only the oldest boys

wore the red-striped trousers with black chaps and the floppy-collared striped shirts of their forefathers. In their notebooks they wrote sentences defining the functions of an *alcalde*, or mayor, of a municipal officer, of a military *comisionado*. As the students diligently practiced assembling letters into words and words into sentences, Ernesto assured me that their five-hour schoolday—from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.—met the requirements of the Ministry of Education, and so did the contents of the core curriculum.

On my last visit to Todos Santos, I had met with the supervisor of schools, a Todosantero named Benito Mendoza, who had lamented that only 25 to 30 percent of the children attended classes because their parents needed their help in the fields. Ernesto, a wiry man in his mid-30s whose gentle eyes had not been hardened by years of scratching for work on the coastal fincas, beamed proudly when I congratulated him on what appeared to be nearly total school attendance among the young of La Rochela.

"We want to ensure that they are not only well educated, but that they are also better fed and healthier than their cousins back in Todos Santos," he said. Ernesto, who has taken on the responsibility of starting a health clinic, said that for now they were getting adequate medical attention from volunteers of the European-based NGO, Medicine Without Frontiers. Two doctors stationed in nearby San Andrés Osuna visited La Rochela once a week, weather and road conditions permitting. I noted that the children not only looked robust, but full of excitement. In two months, they would all be traveling to Todos Santos for the *fiesta patronal*, which falls on All Saints Day, November first.

"We are entering a soccer team and a dance group for the feast day," Ernesto explained. "We've already selected the masks and costumes for the traditional deer dance. We want to make sure our youngsters don't lose touch with our traditions."

In the smaller classroom next door, we found Pablo Fernández trying to accomplish that very task while teaching a botany class to a small group of fourth to sixth graders, aged 10 to 16. Using a textbook illustrating the differences between flowering and nonflowering plants, he was

weaving in stories of how the older generation of Todos Santos healers and shamans still use herbs for medicines and divinations. Promptly at one, he dismissed the class, and all the boys scampered to play soccer. In another hour, they would all be home for the midday meal.

In my brief discussion with Fernández in Antigua, he had emphasized the "idea" behind La Rochela over his own role in bringing it about. He refused to be cast as a latter-day prophet leading his people to the promised land. Now, as we sat in the classroom in La Rochela, he re-emphasized that ordinary people were under great urgency to find solutions for themselves and their families because the fabric of highland life that had sustained his people for generations was being unraveled by population pressures, the ongoing war of counterinsurgency, the overuse of agrochemicals, uncontrolled deforestation—all the evils at work in much of the Third World.

In fact, he pointed out, it was his nephew Prudencio Martín who had found out, through a contact in INTA, about the possibility of land being available. Martín had applied for a parcel in 1982, and then visited the site with Pablo. The *parcelamiento* was overgrown with brush, in a state of utter abandon, but for the first time in many years, Pablo felt something like peace at the prospect of turning this wild desolation into a viable agricultural settlement. He told himself that when he returned to his duties as a delegate to the Council of State he would find a lawyer to help him work out the details of applying for land and to figure out how many other plots might be available. The man he found, who had formerly worked for INTA, helped steer Pablo's application for 15 manzanas, or 23 hectares, through the agency. He also told Fernández that other parcels were available, although several had already been leased, illegally, to INTA employees and to military officers who used them as weekend hunting retreats.

On returning to Todos Santos, Fernández met with three other families eager to apply for their own parcels. And that is when the idea seized him of helping to found a settlement that would be an extended sister village of Todos Santos. "I imagined it as a

mixed association that would combine the individual enterprise of my hometown with the virtues of communal organization. Each of us would farm our own fields of cash crops and food crops—but we would also contribute to the common good by sharing skills, marketing produce together, and building a school, a health post, and so on."

As it happened, the place where we were sitting and talking was the cornerstone of Pablo Fernández's dream. Parcel number 49 had been set aside for a multipurpose civic center. When and if INTA granted them provisional title to the lot, the villagers envisioned building a "real" schoolhouse

ligations in full or in part. Another 10 families had applications pending for parcels that ranged between 16 and 31 hectares in size. That left very little margin for future growth, as the villagers were adamant about capping the settlement's size. La Rochela could not handle many more families without beginning to exhaust the soil. Fifty families was also an optimum size for an aldea or satellite village if it was to avoid the problems of "urbanization," the breakdown of cultural and consensual cohesion, that plagued so many highland communities.

Curious, I asked Pablo if La Rochela had any of the problems I

## Preserving a Linguistic Heritage to Promote Development

For many years a serious obstacle to development and internal cooperation among Guatemala's indigenous peoples had been the lack of written languages for the 23 Mayan dialects spoken by more than 50 percent of the population. With no formal basis for teaching the grammatical structures of the dialects, most indigenous groups remained illiterate, unable to preserve their stories and experiences, and hindered in their ability to communicate with each other. The work of the Academy of Mayan Languages, mentioned in the accompanying article, with the support of the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (PLFM), an IAF grantee, has

made substantial progress in overcoming this obstacle.

The founders of the PLFM, recognizing that illiteracy was preventing community organization as well as participation in modern society, set out to dismantle the linguistic barriers. Since 1970 the Proyecto has been researching dialects, training linguists, compiling dictionaries and educational primers, and recording narratives and folktales. Their work has successfully awakened Indians to their shared linguistic and cultural heritage, helping them find their written voice and mobilize popular support for community self-help efforts.

—M.H.

of cement blocks and corrugated roofing to replace the one of wood and straw.

"How many parcels are there in La Rochela?" I asked. "And do you all have titles?"

Pablo explained that the community itself had decided in 1986 to limit the settlement to 50 families, or about 240 people. INTA regulations stipulated that able-bodied homesteaders competent to work the land productively could lay claim to a parcel by making a down payment of 10 percent of its assessed value, and paying the balance over a 20-year period at an interest rate of 3 percent. Thirty-five heads of family had obtained provisional titles by paying their ob-

had seen in the aldeas directly adjacent to Todos Santos—for example, *envidia*, or malicious envy; or perhaps the religious contentiousness brought on when residents convert to one evangelical sect or another.

He nodded unhesitatingly. "Oh, yes. There are a handful of evangelical families here, who attend services in the ladino temples of Ceilán or San Andrés Osuna, and this is a possible source of friction. But we have accepted their participation because otherwise we would compromise our claim to be a representative aldea of Todos Santos. And we've already had disputes over the unequal size of the parcels. Some neighbors even threatened to lodge complaints with the

municipality in Escuintla, which has legal jurisdiction over this area. But we've been able to work things out among ourselves. We have named an *alcalde auxiliar* to represent us in Escuintla when the municipal elections are to be held, or if we have difficulties with our neighbors."

"What kinds of difficulties?" I asked. "I thought you had worked things out among yourselves."

Pablo waited a moment, then explained that several families from Ceilán had applied for some of the parcels, feeling that as local residents of longer standing, they had prior rights. Two or three parcels had been granted to these ladinoized Kekchí Indians, whose ancestors came from Cobán, but no more applications were expected.

"What about the military?" I asked. "Has the local army commander come around to inquire about subversives or organize the men into a civil defense patrol?"

Emphatically shaking his head, Pablo let out a sigh of relief. "By the grace of God that has not been a problem. We are far from the scene of conflict in the highlands or the agitation on the coastal plantations. And under the current civilian presidency of Vinicio Cerezo we can exert certain pressures to secure our land. If he is overthrown, of course, our standing could disappear overnight."

How, I wondered silently, was it possible to live in the midst of so much uncertainty?

During the awkward silence that followed, I looked around and noticed that several boys had filtered back into the room and were crocheting the small Todos Santos purses and shoulder bags, or *morrales*, whose bright geometric patterns are especially favored by foreign tourists. One of the smaller boys who had been standing near us patiently waiting, approached Pablo and whispered in his ear. Picking up a book, which I recognized as a rare copy of *The Two Crosses of Todos Santos*, Pablo leafed through the pages until he came to the photograph of Tata Julián, one of the respected shamans of the community whom Maud Oakes had befriended. The boy nodded his head, grinned broadly, and scurried off to join his companions.

"Tata Julián was his great grandfather," Pablo explained. "I wanted the

boy to know that his ancestor had been an important man in Todos Santos, someone who remembered the old ways and kept them alive."

Before I left, I asked Pablo how we could best aid his community, and he asked if I could obtain two copies of Oakes's book since their only copy had been borrowed from a university library. For all of his experience outside of his birthplace, which had tempered him into a tough and resilient survivor, Pablo looked thunderstruck when I told him I had met Maud Oakes, not once but several times, and as recently as the year before. In Pablo's mind, she evidently had long since passed into the realm of spirits to assume her rightful place as *dueña* of one of the four sacred mountain peaks guarding Todos Santos.

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A few weeks later, I met Pablo again during his next consultation with the Academy of Mayan Languages in Antigua. That evening he attended the graduation ceremonies of young indigenous linguists from the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (see box on page 22), where the marimba band he formed in La Rochela played music.

After the festivities were concluded, we renewed our conversation. As in our previous encounters, discussion about the practical problems facing La Rochela veered eventually onto philosophical ground, where Pablo seemed to feel most at home. In many ways, his direction was the opposite of that taken by Benito Mendoza, who as school supervisor for Todos Santos Municipality had achieved notable success in the ladino world. But Benito constantly complained of his treatment by superiors and colleagues, of their pressure to make him behave like the proper ladino his station in life entitled him to be. As a result, he was increasingly living a double life. On his visits home to Todos Santos he wore his native *traje* and spoke in *lengua*; on the road or at official functions, he often dressed in a suit and spoke in the stilted rhetoric expected of government bureaucrats.

"I've known Benito since we were children," Pablo said. "He is a good man, but his ambitiousness makes him vulnerable to outside pressures. He and I have different concepts of

the responsibilities of a community teacher."

During our previous visit in La Rochela, Pablo had talked about his year of service with the Council of State. "Everyone was out for himself," he had said. "The Council was just a showcase for people to demonstrate their political and demagogic skills, and to enrich themselves. I saw the pressures that turned other Indian delegates from the altiplano into greedy shadows of their former selves, fitted out in western clothes. Eventually they would deny their own fathers and mothers to win the approval of powerful ladinos. I knew the moment I stopped wearing my *traje*, and talked like they did, I would be lost."

Remembering that conversation, I now asked him about his own role in dealing with the army, with INTA, with the municipal authorities in Escuintla. Smiling ruefully, he acknowledged it was unlikely that title to any of the plots in La Rochela would have been awarded or the community's interests defended if he and his nephew Prudencio had not had prior *cuello*, or contacts, in INTA, and if they had not found and hired the right lawyer to represent them. For another La Rochela to happen, he reluctantly agreed, there would have to be another Pablo Fernández who had learned to navigate in the treacherous ladino world without losing his way. What Pablo would not admit outright, but allowed to be inferred, was the freedom and strength one gains in exchanging the role of a chameleon who looks only after himself, for that of a cultural amphibian who places the fruits of his experience at the service of his community.

He had repeatedly put off my questions about seeking international aid to fund the community's more ambitious schemes, and I finally understood why. The only aid that La Rochela had accepted thus far was limited to visits by the team of European doctors, some sheet-metal roofing to upgrade the school, and colored yarn for weaving huipiles. Pablo had ample acquaintance with communities that had become dependent on international aid or the government dole. He had seen the competition for favors that had sprung up, the proliferation of envidia in its numerous and ugly forms. "Depending

on outside aid is like eating a rich meal," he explained. "You enjoy it while you're eating, but afterward you get indigestion and regret ever having touched it. Living off charity corrodes your sense of pride as a community."

La Rochela was still finding itself as a community and accepted assistance only on terms that would not threaten to dissolve its emerging consensus, which was still fragile. Although the initial rivalry for the largest and best plots had been easily scotched, Pablo could well imagine how a sudden infusion of outside money might renew those disputes or attract further attention from people in nearby towns who might try to exploit divisions within the community to their own advantage.

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By April 1989, Pablo's leadership had intensified feelings of envidia among a small group of settlers, and he and his fellow community officers volunteered to step down. A new slate of officials was elected, including one of Pablo's adversaries as the new vice president. But everyone still came to Pablo for advice, and he continued to use his contacts and experience on behalf of the community.

Then in May, an anonymous denunciation was delivered to the army barracks in Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, claiming that Pablo Fernández of La Rochela was a guerrilla receiving visits by Cuban spies. The "Cubans" turned out to be six Swedish schoolgirls and their schoolmistress, a friend of Pablo's, who camped overnight in La Rochela. Fernández was called to the army base, but after explaining the situation, he was cleared of all suspicion.

When I visited with him in June, Pablo was still uncertain if his anonymous accuser had been someone in La Rochela or one of the ladinoized Kekchís from Ceilán who had applied for a parcel of land and been turned down. Some of the Kekchí, who carry hunting rifles and practice *brujería*, have displayed their envidia of the more fortunate Todosanteros by shooting the latter's pigs, chickens, sheep, and even dogs. The Todosanteros of La Rochela have gotten together to file a formal denunciation of these killings with the municipal officials in Escuintla.

It was one more reminder of how La Rochela was caught between its aspirations to be an extended aldea of Todos Santos and the political and economic realities binding it to the municipality of Escuintla. How, I wondered, could an amphibian survive when the sea was so far away?

Pablo explained that it was not such a simple matter. It was not a question of trying to restore the past, but of remembering one's origins and keeping alive and nurturing what was living and growing. In La Rochela, only four families, including Pablo's, still practice *costumbre*. What binds the community to its ancestral past in Huehuetenango is its language, its weaving, and its dress. "Our homes, our wooden cots are the same," he said, "but we don't have the Todos Santos adobe or the spruce to construct a proper *shuj* (sweat bath), so we must build them of cement blocks instead. Our women still weave huipiles to wear, and this is an important link to our mother culture, but we will have no *cofradía* here because the young people are simply not interested." Pablo paused to reflect that it was perhaps their failure to observe *costumbre* and pay their respects to the dueños of the mountaintops that had made them vulnerable to their enemies.

But then, he decided, it was not altogether bad that some things are lost or changed. Corrosive and divisive as the envidia arising from within the community can be, the envidia of outsiders had the opposite effect of consolidating La Rochela against a common enemy. Then a deep sadness came over his face as he spoke about the persistence of alcoholism in Todos Santos that had claimed several of his relatives. The sale of *aguardiente* had been banned in La Rochela, although there was nothing to prevent the settlers from drinking when they returned to Todos Santos for the *fiesta patronal*. Each year at that time two or three Todosanteros die or suffer injuries from falls during the traditional horse race or in *machete* fights after heavy drinking.

While the settlers in La Rochela searched for those essentials in their past that would keep their identity intact, Pablo believed that necessity was teaching them valuable lessons about economic survival that would eventually be of use to the people of

Todos Santos. Six families who had survived the earlier migration to the Ixcán had helped the newer homesteaders to set up coffee plant nurseries, determine the proper distances for digging postholes, and plant shade trees to protect the seedlings. Others, who had worked on the plantations along the coast, had brought knowledge with them about cultivating cardamom. While acknowledging that Todosanteros were more individualistic than other highland Mayas, Pablo pointed out how La Rochela's smaller size encouraged a more cooperative form of marketing. There was already some discussion about eventually acquiring a pickup truck to arrange for common transport. Knowledge of this experimentation with new crops and methods of marketing would inevitably spread by word-of-mouth back to Todos Santos, where it could vitalize what was still largely a potatoes and corn culture. From being a transplanted offshoot of Todos Santos, La Rochela had the potential to become a hybrid for renewing its parent stock, and enabling it to compete in an increasingly diversified agricultural marketplace.

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Pablo Fernández is not given to describing the future of La Rochela in such grandiose terms. Aware of the delicate line he and his community walk, he would prefer to speak about "learning the virtues of necessity." On my last visit to La Rochela, Pablo invited us to share a snack of tortillas and salt at his home, where we met his common-law wife, María, and his five children. As we ate, I noticed a print of the March Hare from *Alice in Wonderland*, and several wooden masks hanging on the wall. Afterward, Pablo displayed his *marimbas*, invited us to see his horse, and proudly pointed out his herd of two zebu cows and two bulls. "When I was a child," he said, "none of us had cow's milk to drink. My children do."

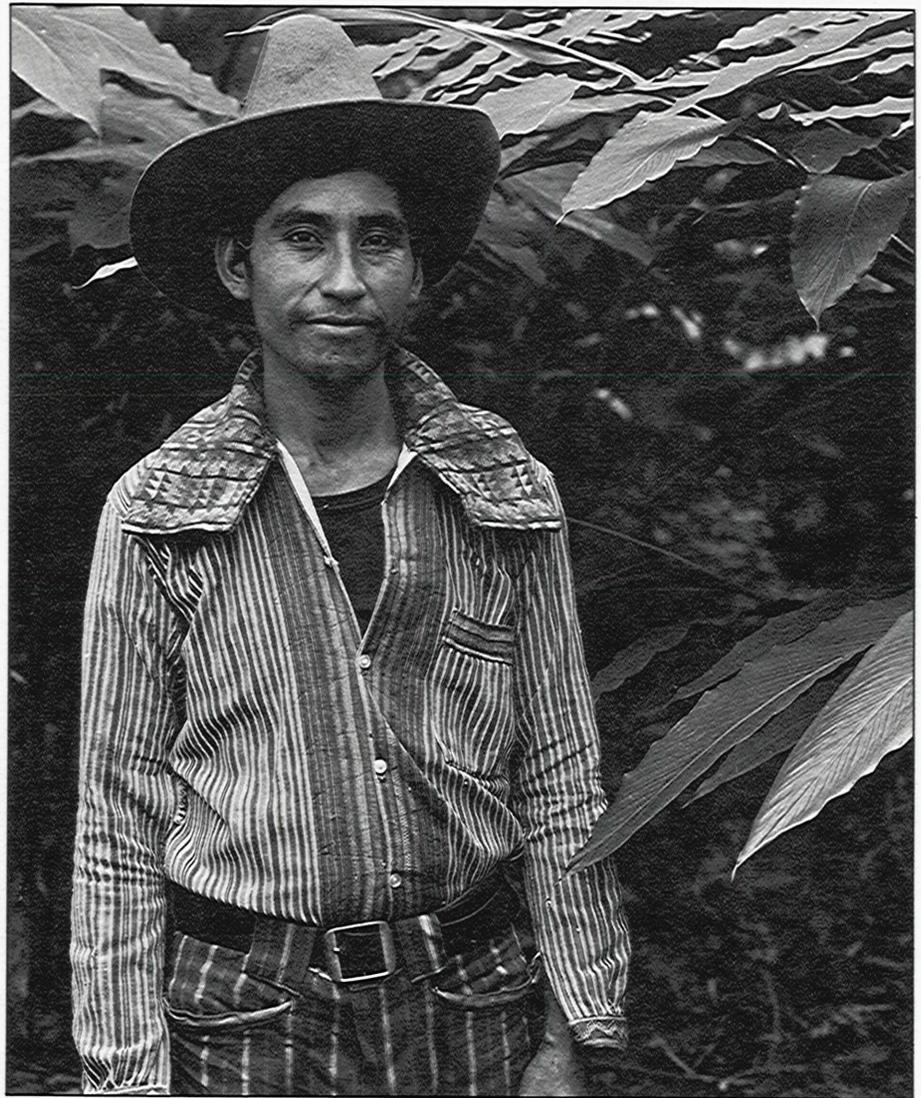
Before we left, I asked him if he planned to erect two crosses in front of the Catholic church once the planned civic center is constructed.

Smiling, he shook his head no. "Those crosses represent the conflicts in Todos Santos between our ancient traditions and ladino culture, and that is a problem we hope to avoid here. But we will have replicas of the Ma-

Right: Teodoro, one of the first to move to La Rochela in search of a better life, stands among cardamom plants, an uncommon crop in his native Todos Santos. Below: Teodoro's parents on a visit to La Rochela. They will return home with stories of its lush landscape and rich soils that, unlike their own plot in Todos Santos, require no chemical fertilizers.



Photos by Daniel Chauche



yan crosses or Eyes of God that stand atop the four sacred peaks."

"And what about the third cross?" I persisted. "The cross of violence that was erected above the prehistoric ruins of Cumanchúm—will you have a representation of that?"

He reflected for a while before finally replying. "In Todos Santos, and in the Ixcán, our neighbors shook in their beds every night from fear of the army, or of a guerrilla patrol searching out informers. Here we live with the certainty of the volcano erupting at any time, wiping out everything. Our risks are great, but all in all, I prefer them to the first alternatives. So perhaps, one day soon, we will put up a fourth cross to the keeper of this place, the *dueño del cerro* of Fuego Volcano."

On the long drive back to Antigua, I wondered how I could explain to the aged Don Pascual on my next visit to

Todos Santos that Pablo Fernández was trying to be better than his word. I kept returning to the images of the print from *Alice in Wonderland* and the ceremonial masks on Pablo's wall, twin shadows of a paradoxical figure, a down-to-earth schoolteacher and restless philosopher-reformer who persisted in dreaming of better possibilities for himself and his people.

Today, I ask myself what will become of this man and his vision. He is no longer president of his community, although he remains its unofficial *cacique*. He has recently helped four youths attend secondary schools in nearby communities, and is looking for scholarships to fund their future studies, hoping perhaps that among them there are other amphibians. He is also looking for money to buy a *nixtamal*, or corn grinder, so that residents won't have to travel to

Ceilán to grind their corn. He has, it seems, put his roots down firmly in La Rochela. By taking on its daunting challenges as well as its implicit contradictions, he is inventing a way to survive while keeping alive the spiritual legacy of his ancestors. Quite simply, Pablo Fernández has come home. ♦

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# A House of Hope

## *The Vision of Alicia Rossi*

Text and photos by Allison Lange

While inspiring others, an Argentine leader discovers a new vision of herself.

“**T**he housing situation here is terrible. To survive we *have* to take over abandoned buildings. This place, for instance, had no value for its owner, so we moved in, fixed it up, and made a home. And now,” Alicia Rossi concludes, with great intensity, “we want to live here forever.”

In Buenos Aires, Argentina, where an estimated 450,000 people live in substandard dwellings, buildings such as El Ex Patronato de la Infancia do not remain empty for very long. Less than a year after its doors officially closed in 1983, squatters began

to take refuge in this former orphanage and school located in the historic San Telmo district. They gradually subdivided it into a honeycomb of units by erecting walls of wood, cardboard, and corrugated tin. Today the apartments still seem makeshift to an outsider, but they are firmly fixed in

Right: *The Ex Patronato de la Infancia, formerly an orphanage in Buenos Aires, is occupied by 120 families who settled there illegally.* Left: *Alicia Rossi, organizer of the building's first tenants' group, and daughter Cyntia, outside the Patronato's gate.*





the minds of the 120 poor families who live there as proof of a hard-won victory that makes it possible for the people of the Patronato to dream once again of a more hopeful future.

That vision was much dimmer three years ago. The Patronato was crumbling into disrepair, and its residents faced the constant threat of eviction by municipal authorities. Moreover, families were being extorted by a man named Carmona who ran a *patota*, or gang, out of the building and who collected "rents," although he was not the legal owner. Then Alicia Rossi and her family, also at the end of their rope, moved in. Although Rossi and her husband, Osvaldo, both worked—as a maid and a seaman respectively—their combined monthly income of US\$100 had stretched to the breaking point. They could no longer afford to live in the cramped hotel room they shared with their three daughters, and they lacked the three months' deposit fee and the cosignature of a property owner needed to legally rent an apartment.

Like an increasing number of the working poor in Buenos Aires, Rossi and her family faced the dismal prospect of surviving on the streets or moving to the shantytowns ringing the outskirts of the city. So when they discovered the Patronato, they embraced it with all the fervor of an unexpected reprieve. In describing how she saw the building and its people as a potential community waiting to be organized, Rossi says, "Even though we all came from someplace different—me from Entre Ríos, my husband from San Juan, others from Uruguay and even Bolivia—what we had in common was the feeling of being displaced and the burning desire to make a better future for our children."

As a first step in that direction, Rossi had the idea of forming a *comisión interna*, or tenants' group, to meet regularly and renovate the building. Looking back, she says, "As

*As the first president of the tenants' group, Rossi has balanced many duties and many roles. Clockwise from top: Rossi surveys work to be done in the Patronato's courtyard; Rossi meets with a doctor and technicians from Programa Habitat to plan a census of building residents; Rossi, her husband Osvaldo, and their daughter Beatriz stand in front of their tiny two-room apartment.*

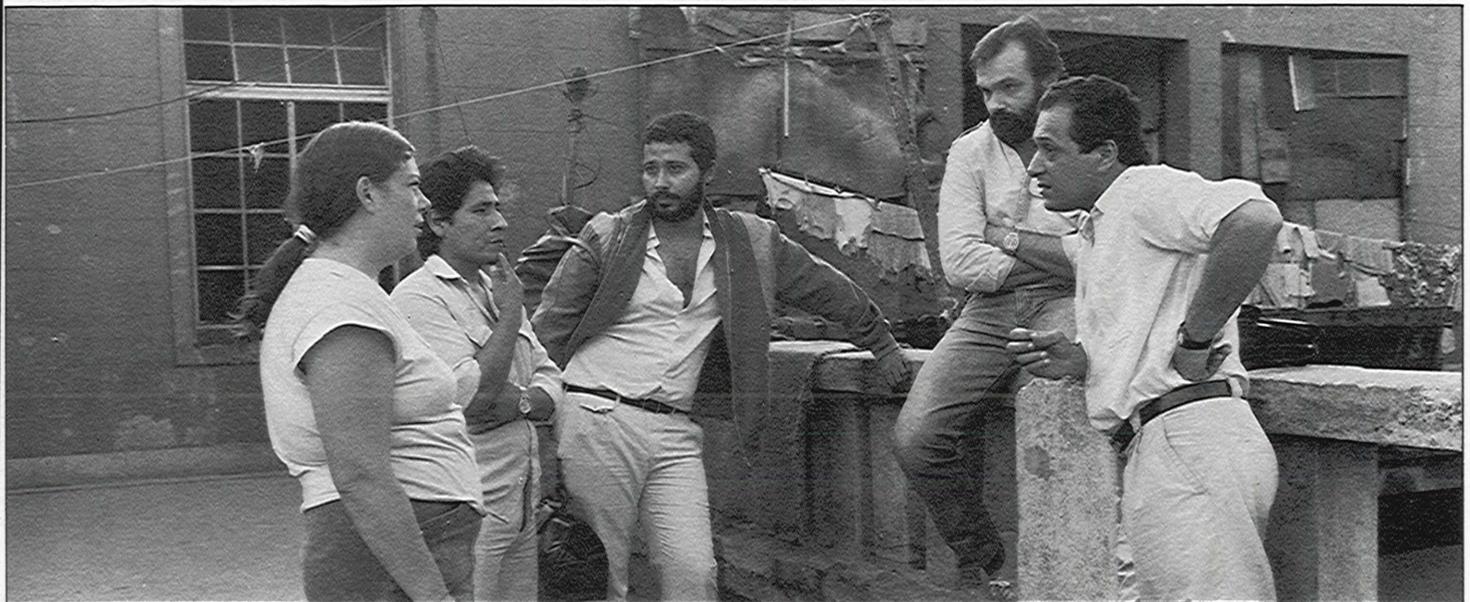
the first president of the comisión, I knew our primary order of business was making the place more livable. We built toilets, showers, and set up a cleaning schedule. I also thought it was important to legalize our status with the municipal electric company by paying for the electricity we used, rather than just tapping the lines. It was not only a question of avoiding trouble, but of establishing our claim to live here responsibly."

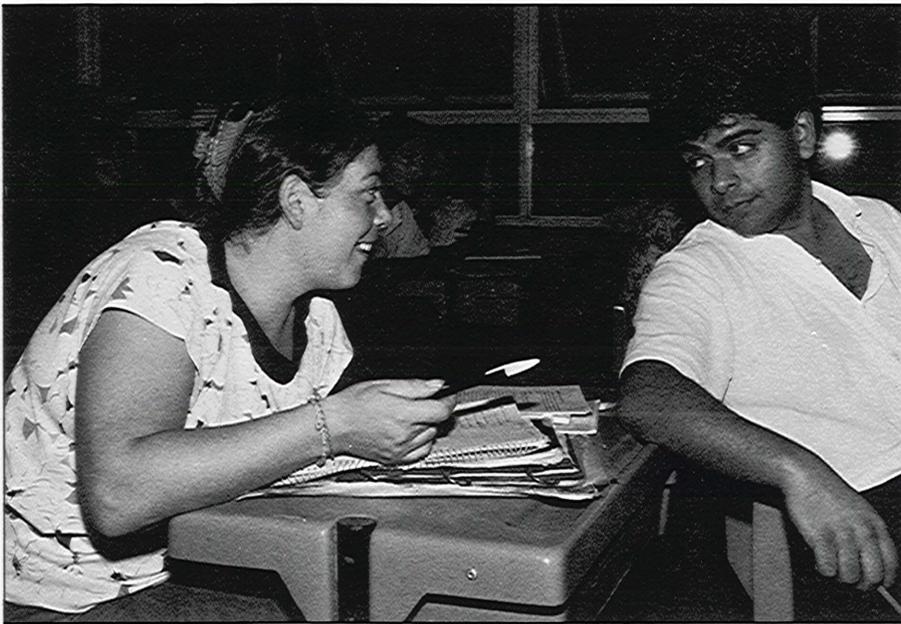
Inevitably, this drive to organize brought the tenants into conflict with Carmona, the building's self-proclaimed leader. Rossi initiated contacts with various human rights groups, representatives of political parties, and finally a woman lawyer, who in turn pressured the police to act. Carmona was eventually arrested when a cache of firearms was discovered in his apartment. As Rossi says, "Getting rid of this man was our turning point. We found a way to unite and take control of our building."

A far cry from the days of Carmona, today the Patronato is well integrated into the San Telmo neighborhood. A provisional agreement has been worked out with the municipality to forestall eviction, and Rossi and the comisión have worked with Programa Habitat, a nonprofit housing group funded by the IAF, to sponsor legislation (now in its final stages) that promises to legalize the status of the building's residents and others like them throughout the city.

Meanwhile, the Patronato's chil-









*The strengthening and stabilization of the tenants' group has allowed Rossi to begin pursuing personal goals.*

*Clockwise from top: Rossi talks with volunteers who tutor children living in the Patronato; a university student consults with Rossi about an upcoming political rally; Rossi discusses an assignment with a classmate. Upon completion of the high school equivalency program, she plans to study law.*



children are reaping the rewards. They attend nearby neighborhood schools that offer *doble escolaridad*—a kind of extended-hours tutorial program, running from morning to early evening, which allows mothers, as well as fathers, to earn income. In addition, groups of better-off students from the area have begun to volunteer their time to activities such as literacy classes, early childhood development programs, and cleaning brigades for both the children and the parents of the Patronato. Rossi's role in nurturing these relationships is evidenced by the daily stream of visits she receives from students at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and the Colegio de Buenos Aires.

Describing herself as a "born fighter," Rossi credits much of her drive to her strict upbringing and the responsibility she was forced to assume after leaving school early to help support her family. What is more impressive is the way she has impressed that self-discipline to achieve seemingly unreachable goals. Five days a week, she not only balances her full-time job as a maid with her family responsibilities and her duties on the comisión, but she also finds time to study for the three-and-a-half-hour class she attends nightly to complete the last year of a high school equivalency program.

When asked about her intentions once she receives a diploma, Rossi does not skip a beat. Perhaps thinking

about the attorney who helped in the struggle to oust Carmona, Rossi explains that she intends to study law. "There is much to be done," she says. "The fight for social justice does not end at the Patronato."

Given that larger vision and a driving desire for self-improvement, it is not surprising that she is becoming more distanced from the day-to-day activities of the comisión. During a recent vote, she was not reelected president, although she still serves as an informal advisor to the group. Nestor Jeifetz, an architect from Programa Habitat who provides technical assistance to the residents of the Patronato, views this evolution as natural and healthy: "Alicia was essential in getting the group organized. She is a very strong leader and was able to capture their interest. The comisión is now at a second stage where services are being broadened, and it is important to have less centralized leadership."

As for Rossi, her struggle for social change has already begun to take her beyond the horizons of her neighborhood to the community beyond. She has developed a special interest in women's issues, particularly as they relate to the urban poor, and is frequently asked to speak at women's conferences. "We have a kind of false machismo here. Women work just as hard as men, if not harder, yet we are not treated as equals. I have three daughters—Elizabet, who is 16, Soledad, 10, and Cyntia, 8. I believe in fighting this falseness, so that when my girls grow up, their battle will be easier." ♦

*ALLISON LANGE, a graduate of Denison University, was formerly on the staff of Grassroots Development. She completed this photo-essay shortly before resigning to join the Peace Corps. She is now working on a beekeeping project with small farmer organizations in the department of Caaguazú, Paraguay.*

# Reviving the Small Farmer Sector in Uruguay



Mitchell Denburg

*A farmer in Canelones, Uruguay, plows a field of alfalfa.*

A perennial problem for development assistance organizations is how to harvest the fruits of their experience. Generally speaking, once a grant has been awarded, the project monitored, and the paperwork completed, project and grantee officials are already preoccupied with other grants to process or with the day-to-day minutiae of running an organization. Plans to write project histories or evaluations or to reflect on what has been achieved are pushed aside in favor of more urgent work and finally forgotten. As a result, development organizations lose the opportunity to learn

from each other and from their own experiences.

Determined not to let this normal sequence of events take over, the Inter-American Foundation has organized an active program of research and dissemination, with a strong emphasis on staff involvement. One product is the recently inaugurated series of "country focus" studies in which an IAF project officer or an in-country collaborator with extensive experience in a given country reviews all IAF grant activity in that country and identifies a common theme that characterizes the portfolio. The first of these studies, published in

July 1989, was written by Cynthia L. Ferrin, a Foundation representative for Uruguay for six years. It carefully examines the small farmer sector in that Southern Cone country.

What distinguished the Foundation's role in Uruguay was its focus on one sector. While some IAF grants have been awarded to urban projects, most of the more than 90 grants given since the IAF began work in Uruguay in 1974 have been in support of a network of rural cooperatives serving small-scale farmers. This network has been successful, and, Ferrin argues, has strengthened the small-scale farmer sector nationally. In an era

when small farms are being swallowed up by large agribusinesses in many countries in Latin America, the Uruguayan small farmer sector is holding its own and even flourishing in some subsectors.

Ferrin's study begins by identifying many rural organizations now in place that have benefited from IAF grant support. There are 80 agricultural co-ops and an equal number of *sociedades de fomento*, or small farmer development societies (35,000 small-scale farmers belong to these co-ops and societies); five cooperative marketing federations; two national associations representing farmer interests; and several membership organizations specializing in meeting minority group needs. Also part of the network are several research centers and two key intermediary organizations that provide services, not solely to the grassroots, but to cooperatives and federations as well.

One of these key intermediary organizations is the Instituto de Promoción Económico-Social del Uruguay (IPRU). At the time the IAF gave its first grant to IPRU, the organization had just decided how it would operate within the constraints posed by a repressive political situation. Originally IPRU had concentrated on community development in urban areas, but such activities were considered suspect by the military regime then in power. IPRU's leaders decided that it would be best to limit the organization's activities to rural areas where government surveillance was not so active. They adopted a program of integrated rural development, hoping that such a program would lay the groundwork for more lasting social change.

By the 1970s, prosperous Uruguay, once called the Switzerland of Latin America, was in dire straits economically, and many government social services were greatly curtailed or discontinued. In reaction to this crisis, a

number of private sector development organizations emerged to fill the gap. IPRU's plan was to elicit the cooperation and involvement of these organizations in a common strategy to extricate small-scale farmers from their condition of marginality and dependency.

The IPRU plan was first to provide support to productive, income-generating projects carried out by cooperatives and cooperative federations throughout the country and then to find ways to link these projects and their implementing institutions. Goals were to improve the incomes of small-scale farmers, reduce the pressure that the government's macroeconomic policies placed on them, and extend the influence of the small farmer sector in the nation. These goals all have been achieved to some degree.

IPRU started by lending support and technical assistance to the Comisión Nacional de Fomento Rural (CNFR), the national representative organization of small farmer societies. IPRU, acting as a broker, identified the IAF as a source of funding for CNFR's contracted crops program, which provided production credit, extension services, seeds, and marketing support. This program was not an unqualified success, but it did revitalize many dormant farmer groups and redirect them toward more complex production and service programs.

IPRU learned from its experience with CNFR that isolated successes with individual cooperatives, however satisfying, were not getting to the root of the problem. To become more efficient and influential and to extend their benefits, cooperatives would have to band together. The economics of comparative advantage dictated concentrating assistance on organizations that operated in a complementary fashion to meet the needs of small farmers.

One example of how IPRU's strat-

egy worked in practice is its support to the Federación de Sociedades de Fomento del Noreste de Canelones, a federation of six cooperatives in the department of Canelones, founded in 1980. Assistance initially was in the form of a region-wide survey of conditions and opportunities in the department of Canelones, an area where small farm plots had been subdivided so many times that farmers found it almost impossible to make a living. The survey suggested that the production and marketing of alfalfa could be beneficial and lucrative. It would help restore depleted soils (more than 35 percent of the arable land was unproductive) and give farmers a crop that could be harvested at a time when other farm work was at a low ebb. Also, the federation hoped to provide a guaranteed market for the new crop.

What finally convinced the federation to launch the alfalfa program was an IAF-funded study carried out by the Centro de Información y Estudios del Uruguay (CIESU). The study found that it would be feasible to use solar dryers for the alfalfa. IPRU, again acting as broker, helped the federation obtain a grant from the IAF. The alfalfa program turned out to be a complete success. The commodity has become a cash crop, and approximately 200 hectares of land have been improved because of the regenerative properties of alfalfa production. The existence of this improved land, however, posed a challenge for the federation: What crops should be planted on the "new" land to give the best return to farmers? Meeting that challenge spurred further extension of the network.

Just as Ferrin completed her research, the federation decided to enter into an agreement with five other cooperative organizations to grow fruits and vegetables and process them by freezing. This, the federation leaders felt, would be the most pro-

ductive use of the new land. A subsequent grant from the IAF in 1987 supported the federation's plan to set up a commercial farm as a source of income for its operating expenses, and, the federation hoped, a place to provide technical assistance in growing the fruits and vegetables.

All parties have received IAF grants that have helped them achieve the maturity necessary to enter into such an agreement. According to this agreement, tasks would be divided among the participants. The Cooperativa Agropecuaria Limitada de Agua para Riego (CALAGUA), a producer-managed cooperative that had already launched a frozen fruit and vegetable operation of its own, was to train federation producers in fruit and vegetable cultivation. The Cooperativa Agropecuaria Limitada de Fomento Rural (CALFORU), a specialized service cooperative, was to be in charge of agricultural extension for the program. The Cooperativa Agropecuaria Limitada del Norte Uruguayo (CALNU) would contribute funds for training. And the Cooperativas Agrarias Federadas (CAF), a national organization that represents the majority of rural cooperatives to Uruguay's democratic government, would exercise overall management.

The Fundación Uruguaya de Cooperación y Desarrollo Solidarios, known as FUNDASOL, was to function as the program's banker. A word on how FUNDASOL was organized, and now operates, further illustrates just how complex the network is. In 1979, IPRU and representatives of two cooperative organizations convinced the IAF to finance a feasibility study to investigate the possibility of creating a new financial institution to channel credit to cooperatives—still a great need. The outcome of the study was FUNDASOL, which is made up of seven cooperative federations. (Again, all the member cooperatives



Mitchell Denburg

*The wool from this sheep on a farm near Durazno will be marketed through the Central Lanera Uruguaya.*

were IAF grantees.) Together they represent more than 50 percent of rural farm establishments in Uruguay, while the one urban federation among the seven represents thirty worker-managed enterprises in the urban sector of the economy.

*The Small Farmer Sector in Uruguay* describes how the IAF helped FUNDASOL get started and establish its loan funds. Because the organization has mounted an effective program, it has been able to match IAF grants with funds from other sources, and, in 1987, the Uruguayan Government began using FUNDASOL to channel credit to small-scale urban and rural enterprises.

Ferrin's study details the intricacies of how other organizations in the network relate to one another and collaborate in innovative ways to extend their influence horizontally. There is also a full description of how

the network assists cooperatives in marketing, an aspect of the network that is not stressed in this summary.

Today Uruguay's cooperatives play a leading role in producing important crops for export and for home consumption. For example, Central Lanera Uruguaya, a cooperative federation that built its processing center with a grant from the IAF, now markets 10 percent of the country's wool harvest and 10 percent of animal hides. Manos del Uruguay, supported over the years by three grants from the IAF, provides jobs for 1,200 rural women and is the country's leading textile exporter. Over 80 percent of dairy production and 90 percent of total dairy exports are in cooperative hands; 60 percent of Uruguay's sugar harvest is produced and refined by one cooperative.

The small farmer sector is now represented by a number of organizations, such as CAF, that are attempting to influence government farm and trade policies. These organizations are speaking out for farmers on electoral platform committees, informal government policymaking bodies, and meetings of the Bank of the Republic and the Uruguayan Chamber of Commerce. As Ferrin concludes, "Today, it is possible to speak of a small farmer sector that shares a common vision and approach to resolving problems faced by rural producers."

Ferrin does not limit herself to discussing the IAF's *modelo de desarrollo* (the development strategy), but also analyzes the Foundation's *modelo de cooperación* in Uruguay (the style of cooperation—or the way the development strategy was implemented). The latter is given high marks by a group of representatives from IAF grantees in Uruguay who contributed an afterword to the study. They write:

*At the outset, the Foundation accepted the fundamental premise that true*

development cooperation had to be a partnership. One partner provides funding and the other uses these resources to achieve an impact. The partners determine their contribution to the process of development cooperation not by putting conditions on each other, but by deciding how best to achieve their common objectives. In building this partnership, the Foundation also understood that development is a long and complex process, in which individual projects constitute only one step toward a final goal. Accordingly, it was willing to support medium- and longer-range development efforts, and to provide sequential support to one organization over a period of years.

Several hallmarks of the *modelo de cooperación* stand out: the partnership relationship; "strategic" funding that gives preferential treatment to organizations involved in the small-scale farmer sector; creative funding mechanisms; long-term commitments—often with multiple grants; and flexibility.

On the whole, Ferrin paints a flattering portrait of the *modelo de desarrollo* used by IPRU and others to address the plight of small-scale farmers in Uruguay. But this does not mean she believes the model is perfect. The network described is still not consolidated, and a number of organizations in it still must solve daunting problems before they can stand on their own. The small farmer sector, while gaining in influence and strength, is still overshadowed by large landowners and a national government more concerned with events in Montevideo.

With regard to the *modelo de cooperación*, it is now unclear what the Foundation's future role should be in Uruguay. Ferrin raises two key policy questions. The first concerns the level of success the Uruguayan grantees have attained. Many of the development organizations sup-



Kathryn Shaw

*A worker in the co-op dairy plant in Durazno transfers milk into containers for processing.*

ported by the IAF are nearing the point of financial independence. Does this mean that the Foundation's work in the rural sector is complete, or is there a role for the IAF that is not centered on awarding grants? The second question concerns the rural focus of the IAF's work. At present, 87 percent of the population in Uruguay lives in urban areas. Does it still make sense for the IAF to channel most of its grant money to rural projects?

For Ferrin personally, the most intriguing question concerns replicability: Can this *modelo de desarrollo y de cooperación* be applied elsewhere, or is Uruguay somehow unique? Ferrin argues that the model is applicable elsewhere. In fact, what has been learned in Uruguay is now being used to develop an IAF country strategy for Panama that will focus directly on small farmers. "In another country," Ferrin writes, "the process

will be of longer or shorter duration, depending on country context, the degree of interaction among nongovernmental organizations, cultural levels, and the like. But the Uruguay experience demonstrates that it is possible to overcome a hostile and even repressive environment, empowering low-income sectors of the population to take a more active role in the economic, social, and political processes that directly affect them and their organizations."

*The Small Farmer Sector in Uruguay* provides a coherent record of 14 years of IAF experience in Uruguay (1974-1987). It is hoped that other development practitioners will learn from this study or at least that it will encourage discussion of some issues at the heart of grassroots development. Other country focus studies are still in the writing stage. The next to appear will examine the role of nongovernmental organizations in Colombia's grassroots development efforts.

To obtain copies of the Uruguayan country focus study free of charge, write to the Inter-American Foundation, Publications Office, 1515 Wilson Boulevard, Rosslyn, Virginia 22209. The Spanish version will be available early in 1990. ♦

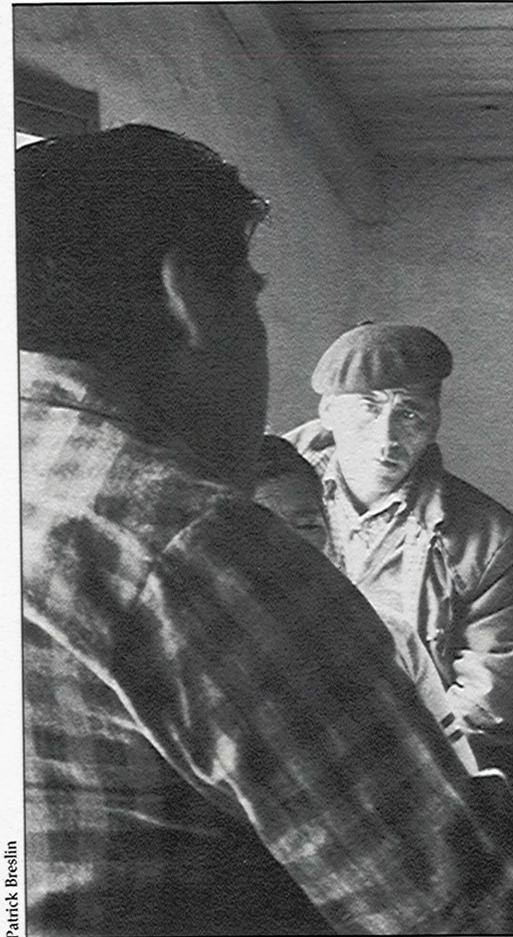
—Diane B. Bendahmane

*(Bendahmane, a Washington, D.C.-based editor and writer specializing in international relations and development assistance, edits the IAF monograph and working paper series. She has worked on publications for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs of the Foreign Service Institute, and the International Programs of the American Public Health Association; from 1977 to 1980 she was on the staff of Foreign Policy. Currently, she divides her time between the Water and Sanitation for Health (WASH) Project and the Inter-American Foundation.)*

# The Mapuche Find Their Voice

Patrick Breslin

If it is not your language, how do you spell "success"?



Patrick Breslin

Since 1982, the Inter-American Foundation has funded three projects for 10,000 Mapuche Indians in the Argentine province of Neuquén. With the money, the Mapuche have set up a network of small stores to sell basic necessities in their isolated communities, and a warehouse and communications system to enable them to market their goods—principally goat skins and wool.

Early in 1988, the IAF sent sociologist Domingo Ricardo Chirico to evaluate the project. He found slow-going in training in basic bookkeeping and management skills. But aside from that, he concluded that the Mapuche were progressing quite well toward the project's modest goals. Stepping back

for a moment from the detailed list of questions he was assigned to answer, Chirico offered the opinion that the project's results, "without being spectacular . . . will provide some economic relief even when that contribution would be insignificant, in economic terms, to those of us who do not share the conditions under which the Mapuche live."

A few months later, assigned to follow up that evaluation with an article, I visited several of the far-flung Mapuche communities, talking with the Indians and the organizers and technical people who work with the project, learning about Mapuche history, and sharing, to the limited extent a visiting foreign *huinca*, or white person, can, the conditions under

which the Mapuche live. All the while, I wondered about Chirico's observation and whether assistance to such an isolated group of people, at a level that could only promise "insignificant" economic improvements in their lives, was a valid approach to development.

And at the back of my mind I was haunted by the image I had seen on Buenos Aires television of a handsome man dressed rather incongruously in tie, white shirt, dark suit, and a feathered war bonnet like those once worn by the Indians of the North American plains. He was selling Grundig stereos and televisions, explaining an installment savings plan that would get the viewer some Grundig gear, and he was speaking in



pidgin Spanish. “*Usted cumplir, usted ganar,*” he said several times, driving home the commercial message. It means that if you comply, if you carry through, you’ll come out ahead. But it is ungrammatical and awkward, and grates on the ear. In English, it would sound something like: You pay-um up, you win-um big.

The conviction among the merchant class that such images somehow attract customers goes back at least to the days of the cigar store Indian. Equally rooted is the belief, conveyed by countless Hollywood westerns and probably learned many years ago by a child who would grow up to write advertising scripts for Grundig, that Indians sound stupid when they speak.

The Mapuche were an agricultural people in Chile, and the fiercest warriors that the Inca empire, and then the Spanish *conquistadores*, encountered. The Incas’ southern expansion stopped where it met the Mapuche. So did the Spanish conquest. But the invading Spanish had brought the horse, and that changed Mapuche history. Like many of the Indian tribes in North America, the Mapuche took to the horse immediately. As horses and cattle spread across the flat pampas south and west of the Río de la Plata, the Mapuche began filtering through the Andes mountains from Chile. Most of the lower passes through the mountains between Chile and Argentina are found in Neuquén Province, and that is where the Mapuche took root. They soon dominated the nomadic Indians of the pampas, who adopted the Mapuche language.

The place names of Neuquén testify to the Mapuche dominance and their way of life. Chos Malal, for example, a town in northern Neuquén Province, means “yellow cor-

ral,” and Malal is a common place name in the area. In the nineteenth century, the Mapuche raided deep into Buenos Aires Province to rustle cattle and horses. Driving livestock across the pampas along secret routes punctuated by water holes or large dams they built, they would corral the herds in canyons in the Andean foothills before moving them over mountain passes to ranchers in Chile, who often commissioned the raids.

Throughout the Spanish colonial period, and for the first half century of the Argentine republic, the Mapuche moved as freely over the pampas as the wind. That ended, finally, in a southern town called Junín de los Andes on New Year’s Day 1885, when Sayhueque—the last *cacique*, or chief, of free Mapuches—surrendered to the Argentine army. The surrender brought to a close the Campaign of the Desert, which broke the resistance of a tribe that had fought the white man for over 300 years. It has been called the longest war in human history. But the Mapuches’ misfortunes did not end with their surrender.

They continued to be hounded, persecuted, and burned out. Most of them fled through the mountains into Chile. Not until the turn of the century did they begin to filter back into Argentina. At first, they hid in the desert. Gradually, they gained enough confidence to petition for reservations. Their caciques went to Neuquén and to Buenos Aires, found their way through the labyrinth of government offices, and finally emerged with rights to live on tracts of provincial land, but without title.

Their reservations are scattered across hundreds of miles of desert and among the folds of Neuquén's Andean foothills, from the arid north of the province down to the forests and lakes of the south. Highway 40 is the spinal cord of Mapuche country. Much of it is paved; stretches are gravel that can (and did) shred a radial tire. Dry brush dots the landscape, giving way to grazing land near infrequent water courses. Ostriches lean forward like high-strung sprinters at the approach of speeding cars. Dust devils dance across the road. Off in the distance, the abandoned adobe buildings of played-out mining camps sift silently back into the desert. In the south, the symmetrical slopes of snow-topped volcanoes mark the western horizon. Farther north, Highway 40 weaves among buttes and mesas. Above the mesas, elongated cotton puff clouds cruise in the robin's egg sky, their flattened undersides brushed gold by the setting sun.

Most of the Mapuche communities, called *agrupaciones*, are tucked down at the end of secondary roads off Highway 40. Colipilli is typical. It covers 15,900 hectares, most of them parched and unsuited for crops or grazing. Melting snow is the uncertain source of water. The dirt road to Colipilli meanders over dry, dusty hills for 20 miles before it reaches a small valley of yellowing grass dotted with old adobe and new cement houses and corrals of twisted branches. Until recently, the 500 Mapuche families living there had to go all the way to the highway to shop at a little *boliche*, or general store, and to sell their products—raw wool and mohair, and heavy, somber-shaded weavings. The *bolichero*, or store owner, determined prices. The round trip took a full day; two



Patrick Breslin

days in winter. Most of the men of the *agrupación* migrated to work in the apple orchards and farms of adjoining Río Negro Province, to the southeast. Their families would buy on credit during their absence, and most of the pay the men brought home would go to cancel the debt.

Because of sparse grazing land on the reservations, many of the Mapuche communities sought summer grazing rights at higher elevations. Not until the 1930s were they successful. Since then, they have practiced transhumance, which they call *la verenada*, moving their livestock away from the searing summers

and up into greener mountain valleys. Until just a few years ago, they would spend up to 10 days driving their herds and flocks 90 to 120 miles overland to the mountains, camping out on the open range. Most of that area is fenced now, and the caciques must negotiate passage for their community's animals with landowners, or truck the animals in.

People from Colipilli spend the *verenada* near the town of Caviahue in a lush valley called the Cajón de los Barros, under the high mountains that mark the Chilean border. They live in *reales*, simple huts of split pine logs laid over a beam and resting on



low rock walls. Pine boughs set in the walls help to block the wind. There is a kitchen space and a snug sleeping area with a tight roof. The kitchen roof has gaps that let smoke drift out and some rain drip in. The fire is laid in a circle of stones, and there is often a slab of lamb roasting on a sword-like spit stabbed into the ground and tilted towards the flames. Necklaces of big pine nuts gathered from the *pewen* trees in March are hung to dry before being ground into flour, a staple of the Mapuche diet. Little children play with a kitten or hang on a tolerant, story-telling adult. Young boys learn to take care of the animals

grazing in wet, knee-deep grass near the winding river.

On the road with their animals, or lounging on folded ponchos in their reales in the splendid isolation of their verenadas, the Mapuche seem to recapture that freedom they enjoyed until just over a century ago. Around them are the sounds of silence—the stream splashing in its course, the wind sighing in the high branches of the *pewen* trees. But the sense of absolute peace is deceptive. The verenada, central as it is to the Mapuche economy and balm as it may be to the Mapuche soul, is only a summer respite. Before the first snow-

Preceding page: Juan Huayquillán, who helped set up the first small consumer stores in isolated Mapuche communities, urges members to market their goods more efficiently. Left: The Mapuche return every summer to set up reales, or makeshift huts, in the foothills of the Andes, where better grazing land is available for their livestock.

fall, they return to the harsher isolation of the reservations.

**A**n Argentine folk song laments the passing of the mythical figures of the country's frontier history, the gaucho and the Indian. "Filled with silences," it calls the Indian.

*Me galopan en la sangre  
dos abuelos, sí señor;  
uno, lleno de silencios  
y el otro, medio cantor.*

*Hace tiempo, mucho tiempo  
que el indio ya se alejó  
con su lanza y su alarido  
su tobiano y su tambor.*

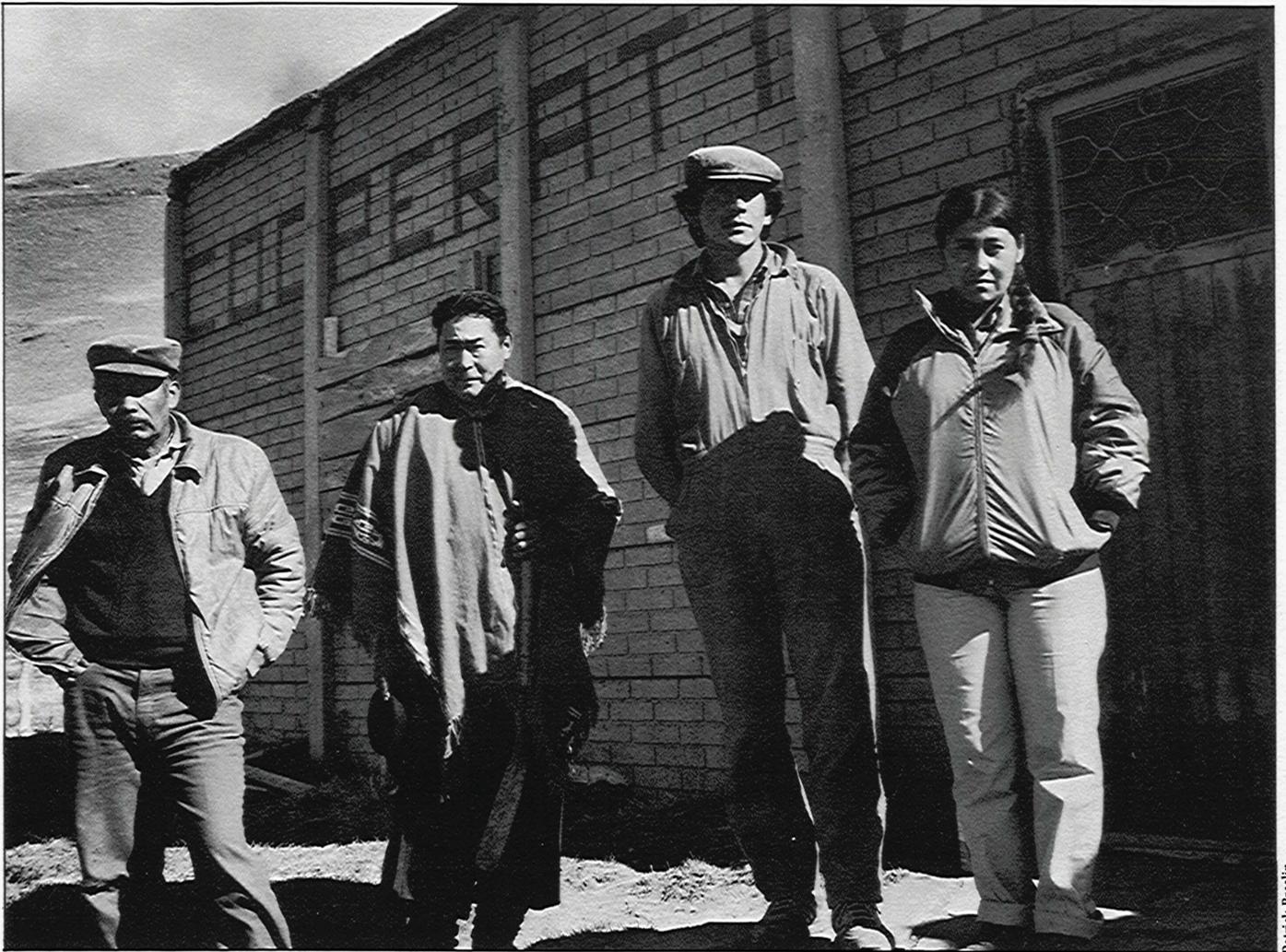
Two grandfathers  
Gallop within my blood;  
One, filled with silences  
The other, sometimes singing.

Long ago, so long ago  
The Indian vanished  
With his lance and war cry,  
His pinto and his drum.

—P. del Cerro and A. Yupanqui

**T**he first voice raised in defense of the Mapuche after Sayhueque's surrender was that of a Salesian priest, one of two who had traveled with General Julio Roca's conquering army as chaplains, objecting to the treatment of Sayhueque's followers. Ever since, Salesian missionaries, many of them natives of northern Italy, have worked among the Mapuche, and the files of the Neuquén diocese are full of chronicles detailing abuses and copies of letters to Buenos Aires protesting them. The most common abuse was huinca encroachment on reservation land, evicting the Indians, torching their homes. Few of the letters were ever answered.

Monseñor Jaime Francisco de



Patrick Breslin

Nevares, the bishop of Neuquén, carries on the Salesian tradition of speaking out for the Mapuche. "For decades, it was impossible to do much here," Bishop de Nevares said during an interview in his book-packed office next to the cathedral in Neuquén. "There was one priest on horseback for the whole region. The distances are so vast that he could only visit an agrupación every few years. Later, with more priests, it became possible to think of organizing."

In 1969, one of the priests, Padre Berreto, invited all the caciques to a five-day meeting. "They didn't know one another," the bishop said. "But they all had the same problems: the boliches cheating their people, selling them liquor; the poor land; lack of work; the ranchers taking their land."

Two years after that meeting, with church encouragement, the Confederaciones Indígenas Neuquinas was established to represent Indian interests. Then attention turned to the

need for some form of economic organization.

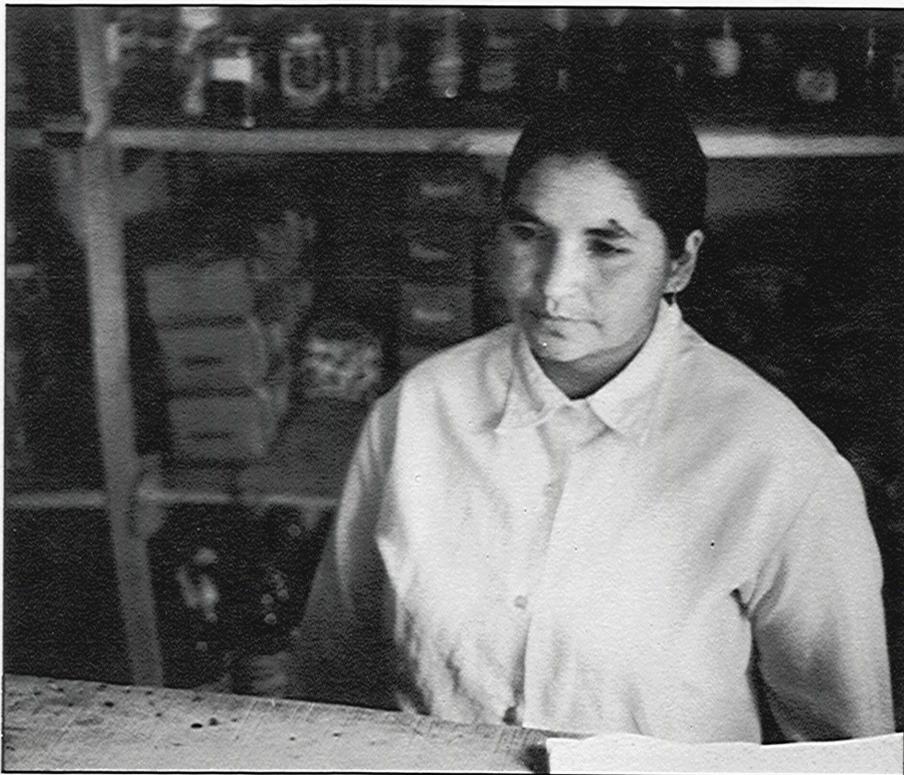
In 1975, a Mapuche named Juan Huayquillán of the Colipilli agrupación heard that a priest named Padre Francisco was going around full of plans to do something. "Yet another one," Huayquillán remembered thinking. "So many promises, and nothing behind them."

A few days later, Huayquillán met Padre Francisco on the road. "I remember he had this big wolf dog with him. Jupito. The padre and I talked of the problems, the injustices. Some time later, I found the padre with Jupito in front of my house. He wanted to know what was the most important need. 'A place to meet,' I told him. 'And we need to start a cooperative business.'"

Huayquillán had dreamed of starting a cooperative store ever since he was a young migrant worker in the Río Negro valley. Needing help, his

parents had taken him out of school after the third grade. From age 12 on, he sheared sheep, picked apples, worked in lead mines. After his army service, he worked for an apple grower. One day, the grower called him over. "'You're crazy to buy at the store where you do,' he said. 'Why don't you buy at our cooperative store?' He let me use his card and I began to shop there. I asked questions about how it worked, and I learned. I'd always been talking about starting some kind of a business, and that's when my idea of starting a cooperative store was born."

So when, years later, Padre Francisco asked him what was needed in Colipilli, Huayquillán had an answer. Padre Francisco had no start-up capital for a consumer store, but he did have access to used clothing donated to the Salesians. Two weeks later, he was back with a load of clothes. Juan and a couple of friends sold the clothes and raised the equivalent of



Patrick Breslin



Alicia D'Amico

Opposite: Members stand outside their store in Cajón Chico. Above: Inside the *Media Luna* store, Mabel Pino waits on customers; in most communities, members take turns tending the stores. Left: A young woman works on a traditional weaving, one of the products marketed by the Mapuche.

\$300. "That's what we used for the first purchase. We bought sugar, staples. We stocked it in the chapel. I remember the mine owners had big trucks, but they wouldn't help us truck it in. So the priest got a vehicle to transport it. That's how we started. Twenty people signed up as dues-paying members. And we got stores going in two other agrupaciones around that same time."

Soon there were five stores. Now there are 17. Four years ago, the members of the Huincal consumer

store opened a branch in Cajón Chico, a windy funnel of a canyon south of Caviahue where they take their animals for the verenada. The store is open to all the Mapuche in the area for the verenada. Huincal was the second agrupación to open a consumer store, and the first whose members decided to take it with them on the verenada.

The stores are one- or two-room buildings with rough, wooden shelves holding a limited variety of goods: sugar, oatmeal, crackers, razor blades, soap, matches, tomato sauce, canned fish and juices, and yerba maté, the green tea common throughout southern South America. The scales gleam as if someone polishes them each day. A bulletin board has community news and notices. When a doctor visits, examinations are often done in one of the storerooms.

Everyone in the agrupaciones—

member or not—can shop in the stores. Members get discounts on merchandise and preference for rides in the organization's truck. Men and women 18 years old and over can be members so long as they are from the agrupación, and pay dues of roughly two dollars each six months. A committee headed by a president oversees operations and the store's personnel—a cashier, dispatcher, and an assistant—who are elected each year.

Once the stores started spreading, the Mapuche and the bishop's office created a regional association to link them together. Juan Huayquillán is the current president of that organization, the Asociación de Comunidades Mapuches Neuquinas. He works with a commission made up of one delegate from each agrupación that has a store. In addition to coordinating the supply of staples to the stores, the Asociación seeks wider markets for Mapuche goods. They currently sell hides to a tanner in Zapala and are exploring possibilities in Buenos Aires. Eventually the consumer stores will become cooperatives, and then the Asociación will become a regional federation, they hope, with member cooperatives on each of the 33 agrupaciones.

The stores are also the channels through which the Mapuche sell products such as homemade cheese or honey to one another, and wool, mohair, and hides from their goats and sheep to the outside world. (A typical family would have between 150 and 400 animals.) They are paid for their goods upon delivery to the store. Every two weeks or so, a truck takes the wool and hides to Zapala, in central Neuquén, where the Mapuche, with the help of the first IAF grant, built a warehouse, office, and bunkhouse. The truck was also included in that grant, as was money for a small revolving credit fund that soon decapitalized, a victim of Argentina's virulent inflation and the fledgling organizational and management skills of the communities. Meanwhile, more communities were starting consumer stores.

An evaluation by Miguel Brunswig, an Argentine rural development expert, helped to correct the project's course at that point, and to shape a second IAF grant in 1985. With part of that grant, the Mapuche bought two pickup trucks and nine two-way

radios to provide up-to-date marketing information, especially prices, to the isolated communities. Inflation was changing prices almost daily, playing particular havoc with small producers, and Brunswig had emphasized that timely information was essential for keeping pace.

The Mapuche are currently receiving funds under a third IAF grant—this one aimed principally at strengthening activities in southern Neuquén, setting up a better-financed revolving loan fund to spur local production, and supporting an agricultural extension office.

In three grants since 1982, the IAF has provided \$602,000 to the Mapuches in Neuquén. Evaluators calculate the project benefits roughly 3,000 of the 10,000 Mapuche in the agrupaciones. That works out to \$200 to each person over eight years, or merely \$25 a year. Another way to look at it is that for what one family might pay for a three-bedroom house in San Francisco (according to the September 1989 issue of *Money* magazine), 18 Mapuche communities have been able to escape the exploitative grip of the boliches, lower their costs for staples and agricultural supplies by almost 30 percent, and begin to exercise some control over the sale of their products.

These are the gains Chirico discussed—significant to the Mapuche even though they might appear marginal to an outsider. One learns about these improvements from the Mapuche themselves, by visiting their consumer stores and asking questions. In Colipilli, the cacique, Domingo Huayquillán, picked up a pointer to explain a chart on the wall showing how the store keeps track of members' accounts. In Media Luna, south of Zapala, Rudolfo Rams, the cacique, mentioned the savings in cargo costs for his neighbors now that the Mapuches have their own trucks. Berta Currihuinca, sitting on a bench cut from a tree trunk in front of her house in the forest above Lake Lacar, talked of teaching younger Mapuche girls to weave, and of emphasizing the cultural value of the weavings over their sale as curios in the tourist shops of San Martín.

In the scattered agrupaciones of Neuquén, the Mapuche quickly tick off their gains for an inquiring visitor, who can then make rough calcula-



Patrick Breslin

*Berta Currihuinca models a Mapuche poncho. For her, such weavings have cultural—as well as commercial—value.*

tions in dollars and *australes*, of the costs and benefits, the standard basis, with greater or lesser degrees of sophistication, for judging development projects. But sometimes the really significant facts appear not on the bottom line, but are right there in front of you. The people who have witnessed this project since the beginning say its true significance lies in the fact that the Mapuche are *talking*. What this project has really touched is the power of speech.

"The first memory I have of the Mapuche," Bishop de Nevaes said, "was that they didn't talk." Rudolfo Descalzo, a technical adviser working with the project, recalls a similar impression. "Six years ago," he said, "it would have been impossible to have these conversations in the agrupaciones. They were not confident enough to talk to a stranger." Baigorria González of Huincal agreed. "Now we are used to meeting people from the outside, to talk with them," he said. "Before, we only knew how to take off our caps to salute visitors, but we didn't even know if they deserved it. Now we tip our hats when there's a reason—and if

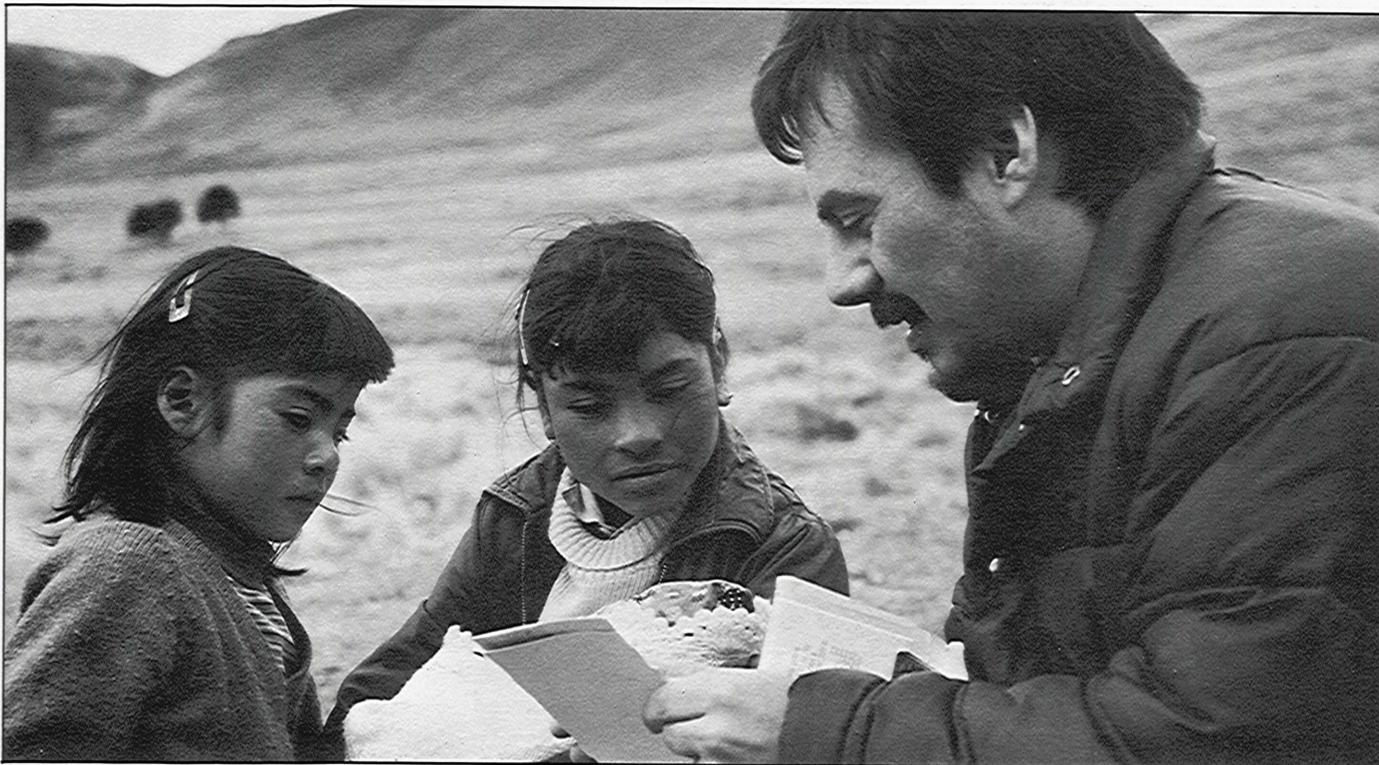
we've got the time. If we're not too busy."

This is a recurrent theme in grassroots development projects, particularly those that involve the very poorest and most isolated people. One hears similar observations on the northern coast of Haiti, in the Colombian Chocó, and the highlands of Ecuador and Bolivia. Again and again, when people in such areas talk of how a project in which they participated has changed their lives, they will omit increased income, better food, more material goods. They will say first that they feel more confident, that they can speak out where before they would have been too timid.

When the Mapuche do speak out, they speak about land. "Without the land, we are nothing," they say. The very name Mapuche testifies to the centrality of land to their culture: "Mapu" means land; "che" means man. Man of the land is what a Mapuche is. Most of what the Mapuche say about the land has to do with continuing encroachment on their reserves. The first time he went to the vereneda after a dirt road had been bulldozed into the Cajón de los Barros, Juan Huayquillán hiked up a trail to Domingo Huayquillán's *real*. "You need to put in a gate now," he greeted the cacique. "With the new road, anyone can come in and take firewood."

This has been the Mapuches' life since the 1500s: trying to think what outsiders will come to take away next. In every agrupación, the conversation sooner or later turned to neighboring ranchers stringing wire that closed in some of the Mapuche rangeland, to caciques who did not know enough law to defend their rights in the past, to the national parks hemming them in. "We can't even gather pine nuts freely," Berta Currihuinca complained on the slopes above Lake Lacar.

Land remains the abiding problem for the Mapuche. The members of the Asociación are full of plans for improving their communities. Some speak of digging wells, of installing irrigation to grow alfalfa for winter forage, of planting willows and cottonwoods to halt erosion and provide firewood, of selling construction-size blocks of the white rock called *toba* from quarries on some of the reserves. They lack the funds for almost all



Patrick Breslin

Young Mapuche girls talk with project advisor Rodolfo Descalzo about the community's sheep and goats.

these projects. But even were they able to undertake them, improvement would still be marginal. Significant economic change for the Mapuche will only come if they can regain some of the land they once roamed, land more productive than the desert in which they live.

The obstacles are great. The agrupaciones, for the most part, are surrounded by private or national park lands. Even were the government forthcoming, and there have been some positive signs in recent years, powerful interest groups would oppose Mapuche claims. Their leaders hope to strengthen Mapuche organizations so that they too will become a powerful interest group. As the Mapuche begin to speak out, as they organize, they change the situation. Possibilities emerge.

One small victory came a few years ago in Colipilli. As the idea of organizing consumer stores gained ground, Bishop de Nevares hired a young lawyer named Jorge Duarte to oversee the work. When the Mapuche in Colipilli learned Duarte's profession, they raised an issue that had rankled for decades. In 1939, the local *juez de paz*, or justice of the peace, took possession of some level

Mapuche land in the center of the valley. He had a spacious adobe house built, using the Indians as laborers. The unorganized Mapuche were helpless.

"Those justices had life and death power," Bishop de Nevares explained later. "Often they were both judge and police commissioner—*hombres de horca y cuchillo*. They did what they pleased. If you went through the Church archives, you would find a history of such injustices."

The judge's family kept the land at Colipilli for over four decades. But with Duarte's arrival, the Mapuche began the legal process to reclaim the land. Duarte took the case to a local court, which ruled that since the land ultimately belonged to the province, the provincial government had the power to dislodge the trespassing family.

But Neuquén's governor at first refused to move. "Those Indians will just squabble over it," Duarte remembers the governor saying, "and in the end nothing will be any better."

"It was the Asociación that finally won the argument for us," Duarte said. "It proved the Mapuche could cooperate for the benefit of all. After Domingo Huayquillán and I met with

the provincial government in 1982, the officials agreed to take over the land, pay the judge's family a sum for improvements, and then turn it over to the agrupación with the understanding that it would be used for the whole community."

"Before the Asociación, we had no justice," Juan Huayquillán said when asked about this case. "Outsiders could come and do whatever they wanted, like the miners, like the ranchers. Now, people in the government listen more to the Indian. These new houses we're building with government assistance, the agricultural extension services—we never got them before. It all comes because we organized ourselves."

Or, as a tongue-in-cheek cigar store Indian might say: *Usted cumplir, usted ganar.* ♦

*PATRICK BRESLIN, who holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles, is the IAF research and evaluations officer. He is the author of Interventions, a novel about Chile, and, most recently, Development and Dignity, a history of the Inter-American Foundation's first 15 years.*

## Solidarity: The Best Medicine

Herbert Daniel and Sílvia Ramos

The threat of AIDS is unprecedented in the history of communicable diseases. Taking no account of race, age, sex, social class, or geographic boundaries, the epidemic has spread rapidly in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, in highly industrialized societies and in the poorest countries of the Third World. For the first time, we face a worldwide pandemic.

As we near the end of the century, AIDS has become our greatest public health problem. Programs to fight the disease have been launched by governments and private groups alike, and the results of these early efforts make it plain that victory cannot be achieved without solidarity among all sectors of society.

One participant in this worldwide effort is the Associação Brasileira Interdisciplinar de AIDS (ABIA), a Brazilian NGO created to accurately inform the public about AIDS. It is our conviction that the first thing people need to learn is that although no one is immune, the disease *can* be avoided.

Getting that message across is especially crucial for the Third World, where other epidemics are already raging. AIDS threatens to make a bad situation catastrophic, and if disaster is to be avoided, we must tap resources latent in the community, finding new ways to reinforce and expand communal solidarity as we develop a campaign of prevention. Such a campaign must be built on the understanding of where the collective right to health is anchored. Advancing that understanding is the duty of those who, like ourselves at ABIA, seek solutions through mutual commitment.

The challenge is a global one, forcing people in both the First and Third Worlds to urgently rethink tra-

ditional approaches to public health. As a new and highly lethal disease that renders the resources of modern medicine ineffectual, the problem of mobilizing human resources against AIDS has caught off guard Western countries that have successfully relied on technological solutions to eradicate or contain the major infectious and parasitic diseases. In societies with less developed economies and generally lower living standards, epidemics are recurrent calamities that accentuate the presence of—and call public attention to—dramatic structural distortions. Paradoxically, while such countries may be more vulnerable to the effects of the AIDS pandemic, they may also

African blood to Europe.

As a result, the AIDS virus has been transmitted to thousands of people all over the planet through infected blood. This has made many nations aware of the need to end such trade immediately. The terrible consequences of the trade are clearly seen in the figures for AIDS in Brazil, where about 10 percent of reported cases result from transfusions of infected blood and blood products. In Rio de Janeiro, where the blood trade has always been very powerful, powerful enough to block implementation of quality-control measures, the proportion of cases is as high as 20 percent. In that city, more than 80 percent of hemophiliacs are HIV-positive. Scandals of this kind show how a purely commercial outlook has taken what is an essential human birthright and

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The challenge of AIDS is a global one, forcing people in both the First and Third Worlds to urgently rethink traditional approaches to public health.

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reap larger rewards in the long run since the mobilization of resources for such a struggle can also lead to dramatic advances in civic responsibility and lay the foundations for future improvements in public health.

An unparalleled example is offered by the trade in blood and blood products. In most Third World countries, blood has always been treated as a commodity that passes from the poorer segments of society to the richer. The richer nations also share in that complicity since the Third World poor supply some of the needs of blood banks and processors in the industrialized countries. For example, Latin American and Caribbean blood has often been exported to the United States, and

transformed it into a product to be sold cheaply by some and bought dearly by others.

One of the unexpected outcomes of the AIDS pandemic has been to expose a social wound that has been festering silently for years, and to point out failures in health systems worldwide. The result, in Brazil, has been the mobilization of public opinion on a scale never before witnessed in response to any health problem. This outcry led to the enactment in 1988 of a provision in the new Brazilian Constitution prohibiting the sale of blood through private blood banks. This was a first step, but there is still an enormously long road to travel before legislation is passed—and enforced—regulating the distribution

# Development Notes

of blood through state-supported outlets. There is, however, widespread recognition of the urgent need for further action.

Behind the rising statistical figures of AIDS cases worldwide are the victims themselves, real people who are suffering and require care. The individual dramas produced by the epidemic are awakening the general public in many countries to the need for better, more humane treatment and living conditions for those who have the illness. AIDS is not, after all, a problem that can be solved by ostracizing specific groups of people. Since the best weapon against the disease is a large-scale prevention effort, continued prejudice and discrimination disarm us and allow the disease to grow more virulent. The protection of civil rights and a campaign to inform the public about AIDS and to dispel prejudicial distortions must work hand in hand if we are to succeed.

In this effort we must be especially aware of the plight of the poor. As the disease spreads in the Third World, it will ravage already deprived populations. The lesson of the blood trade tells us that the affluent can no longer afford to ignore the needs of those for whom both health services and citizenship have traditionally been unaffordable luxuries. If we fail to respond now, we will create the conditions for a disaster of genocidal proportions.

The bonds of solidarity that unite international donors and PVOs to NGOs doing AIDS prevention work suggest what may yet be accomplished if we have the will to act promptly. The challenge that awaits us is an invitation to life, for life can only be lived fully as a day-to-day exercise in solidarity with our fellow human beings. ♦

*HERBERT DANIEL, a writer, and SILVIA RAMOS, a psychologist, are the coordinators of ABIA.*

## BITTERSWEET COFFEE

On July 3, 1989, the International Coffee Organization, which controls the world coffee market, deregulated prices. Overnight, thousands of small producers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America suffered drastic slashes in already threadbare incomes. The price slide accelerated daily, soon reaching the lowest level in 13 years, threatening not only individual producers but the already fragile economies of many Central



Mitchell Denburg

*Workers unload coffee at the main processing plant of FEDECOCAGUA, a co-op federation in Guatemala.*

and South American countries. Debt-strapped Central America was especially hard hit since coffee, unlike bananas, has largely been produced by domestic companies, generating the lion's share of national export earnings. Colombia, the world's second largest coffee grower, found itself in a double bind, caught in a life-and-death struggle with the drug cartel but unable to persuade campesinos to stop growing coca when the prices for coffee barely covered its production

costs. In countries such as Mexico and Guatemala, where many small producers grow coffee as their primary cash crop, the loss of income for rural families is calamitous and threatens social unrest.

For the past 10 years, small coffee growers in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean have spearheaded vigorous campaigns to organize themselves nationally and improve their terms of trade. During the second week of September, over 40 representatives from coffee cooperatives and federations in Guatemala, Panama, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Honduras gathered in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, to assess a decade of progress and the recent damage from the collapsed floor for coffee prices.

The "Conference on Improved Production and Marketing Alternatives for Coffee," which was convened by the Asociación Hondureña de Productores de Café with support from the IAF, quickly moved from discussion of the lessons to be learned from separate national experiences, to the setting of an agenda for the whole region. Realizing that they shared common problems, particularly the lack of credit and infrastructure to add value to their crop and market it, participants decided to form a Latin American network of small coffee producers that would represent their interests internationally and work to strengthen national organizations from the local level up. A series of visits and regional exchanges was adopted to share information about marketing strategies, and to evaluate varying techniques (such as those that have enabled the Costa Ricans to achieve the second highest yields in the world—175 kilograms per hectare) for boosting output and cutting production costs. Several groups agreed to explore organic methods that would not only cut agrochemi-

cal costs but take advantage of changing consumer tastes in the industrialized countries. Tapping the experience of some federations in penetrating the European market directly, the group agreed to search for footholds in North America, primarily through contacts with nongovernmental organizations and consumer groups.

Before they adjourned, the conference drafted an appeal for distribution to development agencies and organized consumer groups in the United States and Europe. Following a brief description of the urgent need facing small producers and a call for restored international agreements to control market swings, the statement urges three courses of action: Efforts should be made to open new marketing channels for small growers; direct contacts should be made with organized consumer groups; and development agencies should move expeditiously to finance infrastructure for processing crops and improving quality control so small farm families can not only survive the present crisis but thrive in the future.

—Luis Hernández

## JAPAN GAINS LEAD IN DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Less than 45 years ago, Japan was faced with the herculean task of rebuilding its nation and economy after World War II. Today, this same nation finds itself the world's banker: It is the second leading economic power in the free world, the largest creditor nation, and this year will emerge as the world's biggest donor of foreign assistance, surpassing the United States in the total amount given. (Japan's per capita assistance has outpaced the United States' for some time: In 1987 Japan contributed \$61 per person, com-



Courtesy: IDB

*Japanese and local agronomists discuss the progress of an experimental rice plot near Santa Cruz, Bolivia.*

pared with \$37 for the United States.) Over the next five years, Japan will contribute more than \$50 billion in loans, grants, and technical assistance to developing nations—nearly double the amount spent in the previous five years.

According to Teizo Igarashi, spokesperson for the Washington, D.C., office of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), "Although the amount of money is large, sometimes the results of our efforts aren't quite as impressive." The increase in Japanese aid has rapidly outpaced its delivery system: Last year, Japan's foreign program staff numbered 1,500, compared with 5,000 employees worldwide at the U.S. Agency for International Development. Because large infrastructure projects and privately administered loans require less staff to oversee, these types of projects have dominated Japanese aid. But as the quantity of aid increases, so do efforts to improve its quality and geo-

graphic distribution. These efforts augur well for Latin America, which received a 13-percent increase in aid last year and will receive another increase this year.

Although low-interest loans will still make up a large part of its foreign aid, Japan will also increase other types of activities, including an aggressive technical assistance program and a well-established overseas volunteer program, similar to the U.S. Peace Corps. In Argentina, for example, Japan is collaborating with the National Institute of Technology (NIT) in Buenos Aires to improve the country's packaging technology—a field in which Japan ranks among the world's best. In Panama City, a joint program at the Instituto Nacional para la Formación Profesional provides technical skills training in automobile maintenance, electronics, and refrigeration, among other fields. In addition, representatives from developing countries come to Japan to receive technical

training as part of the Japanese Technical Cooperation Program. In 1987, over 1,200 trainees from Latin America received instruction. The goal is to multiply the learning effect by teaching these new trainers to train others in their home countries.

Japan focuses on the grassroots in developing countries through its Japan Overseas Cooperation of Volunteers (JOCV) program, which is increasing its presence in Latin America. This organization, too, emphasizes technical expertise: "It's a good program in that it reaches local people," says Igarashi, "but volunteers must have technical skills to contribute to local societies." While some projects include the general areas of sports instruction and community development, many more are undertaken in technical fields such as plant machinery, agricultural engineering, and communications.

While Japan's assistance flows primarily through government channels, a study conducted this year examined the potential role that Japanese and local NGOs might play in Japan's foreign aid program. Officials now acknowledge the importance of NGOs and are exploring ways to achieve a more direct relationship with them.

Perhaps Japan's most significant contribution to Latin American development today is in debt restructuring. The Japanese recently collaborated with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in restructuring a \$2 billion debt for Mexico, and are closely following IMF negotiations in Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela. With a 30-percent share in Latin America's total debt, Japan's interest is manifest, and consequently it is seeking larger representation in negotiations at both the IMF and the World Bank.

The Japanese view their foreign assistance program as the country's most important contribution to international peacekeeping efforts. Critics

argue, however, that Japan's aid is too tied by economic constraints, is directed at economically strategic countries—primarily in Asia—and is too often given in the form of loans, which are difficult to repay because of the strength of the yen. In response, the Japanese Foreign Ministry stated recently in its Official Development Assistance (ODA) report that it will improve the quality of its aid by increasing the percentage of grant aid given, expanding its presence to other countries, and reducing economic restrictions on grants and loans.

Japan's new role as a leader in international development bears watching—and waiting—as the Japanese take their first steps to implement new policies.

—Michelle Huber

## GRASSROOTS SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION

Nearly 200 representatives of grassroots organizations, municipal governments, research institutions, and universities gathered in Santiago, Chile, in October to attend a landmark conference on how grassroots support organizations (GSOs) and local governments can more effectively provide services to the poor through joint ventures. The seminar was co-sponsored by the IAF and the School of Social Work of the Catholic University in Santiago. It was the second in a series of conferences sponsored by the Foundation on this topic (the first was held last April in Mexico). The recent meetings focused on several successful collaborative community development efforts, exploring how these pilot projects might contribute to broader social policy and government decentralization.

Many IAF grantee organizations

participated in the event, as did a host of local government officials interested in new opportunities for collaboration in local development as Chile prepared for elections in December 1989. Reflecting on the experience of their own countries, members of the IAF's In-Country-Support (ICS) systems and grantees from Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Paraguay tempered Chilean enthusiasm for their electoral moment by reminding them that free elections alone will not ensure democracy and development.

The School of Social Work will publish a book based on the conference, and regional meetings between nongovernmental development organizations and municipal officials will be held to implement ideas discussed during these meetings.

—Charles Reilly

## THE DEAF WAY

"The world of deaf education will never be the same after this event," said Ethel Pacheco, external relations coordinator for the Deaf Way Conference, which brought together more than 5,000 deaf persons from 81 countries around the world. They met last July in Washington, D.C., to attend the first International Festival and Conference on the Language, History, and Culture of Deaf People. The conference was sponsored by Gallaudet University, the only university in the world fully dedicated to the education of the deaf.

The six-day conference was more than a year in the planning, and prompted a turnout nearly double that anticipated by its organizers. Latin America was well represented, with 294 participants from 24 countries.

The largest Latin American delegation included 20 Ecuadorians from the Sociedad de Sordos Adultos de Quito "Fray Ponce de León," an IAF

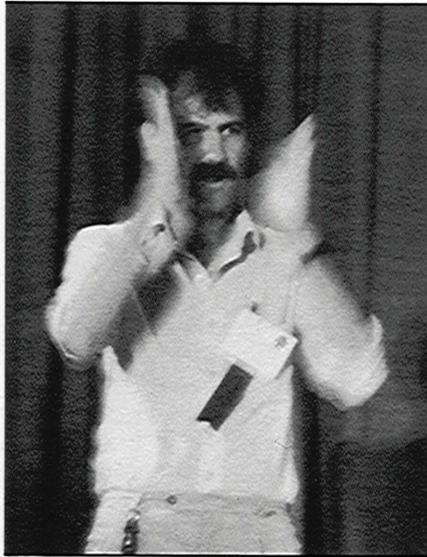
grantee since 1984. Through their project "Mano a Mano" (Hand to Hand), members produced the first sign language dictionary in Ecuador and one of the first in Latin America. The project also provided training in practical skills to deaf members and their families, and established a deaf theater and dance troupe.

During the conference, the Sociedad made two presentations: one in which Miguel Santillán, Nelson García, Carmen Velázquez, and Orlando Benalcazar traced the general evolution of deaf awareness and organization building in Ecuador, and another in which Santillán and Alfredo Toro, the project coordinators, gave an overview of Mano a Mano.

Communications logistics at the conference and festival were extraordinary. The Sociedad's presentations were translated from Ecuadorian to American Sign Language, then to International Sign Language and spoken English, Spanish, and French. At the same time, participants and translators were visible to the audience on larger-than-life-sized video screens, making for a true multimedia event.

Members of the Sociedad's delegation danced and gave mime presentations during Deaf Way social gatherings. The dance group, which performs Ecuadorian folk dances in native costume, was hosted by the employees' association of the Organization of American States. As the members of the audience watched, they learned how to applaud in "the deaf way" by waving their hands in the air rather than clapping.

While in Washington, the delegation met with officials of the Ecuadorian embassy, who arranged a press conference to be broadcast on radio and TV in Ecuador, drawing attention to the group's Washington experience and the need for greater



Michelle Huber

*Miguel Santillán, member of the Sociedad de Sordos Adultos "Fray Ponce de León," signs a description of the Mano a Mano project at the Deaf Way Conference.*

efforts in deaf education and other rights for the deaf.

Sociedad president Nelson García observed that participation in the conference and festival gave members an opportunity to learn about the situation of deaf people in other countries. Given the similarities among sign languages, deaf delegation members communicated more readily with each other using European, Asian, and English languages, than could hearing persons. The result, said García, was that the Sociedad and its work in Ecuador will never be the same.

—Chris Krueger

## COMPUTERS LINK NGOS WORLDWIDE

Brazil's NGOs have decidedly joined the computer age. In June, representatives from the country's major NGOs met in Brasília for the first "National Meeting of NGOs on Co-

operation and Networks" to launch a national alternative computer network called ALTERNEX. This non-commercial electronic system will not only connect groups instantly and inexpensively throughout Brazil's vast territory, it will also link them with existing networks in North and Central America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.

This effort to expand communications and information-sharing among NGOs in Brazil actually began in the early 1980s when several of the larger groups opted to computerize their operations. The Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas (IBASE) in Rio de Janeiro led the way by establishing joint data banks and providing technical assistance to other groups. Several years later, IBASE joined the Brazil office of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in a program to encourage the establishment of regional computer networks among leading NGOs. Funding through this program allowed IBASE to rent a communications line from EMBRATEL, Brazil's state-owned telecommunications agency; contract the technical services of the Institute for Global Communications (IGS) in San Francisco; and test its experimental ALTERNEX program. A council of eight key NGOs was formed to oversee the effort.

The council presented its plan for the network at the June meeting, which it sponsored jointly with the UNDP. The event brought together some 50 NGOs nationwide, ranging from community development groups to research centers. Also attending were representatives from the Foreign Ministry's recently created development agency, Agência Brasileira de Cooperação (ABC), as well as governmental development agencies from Italy, France, Canada, and Germany, among others. The historic meeting formally brought together representatives from the

# Project Update

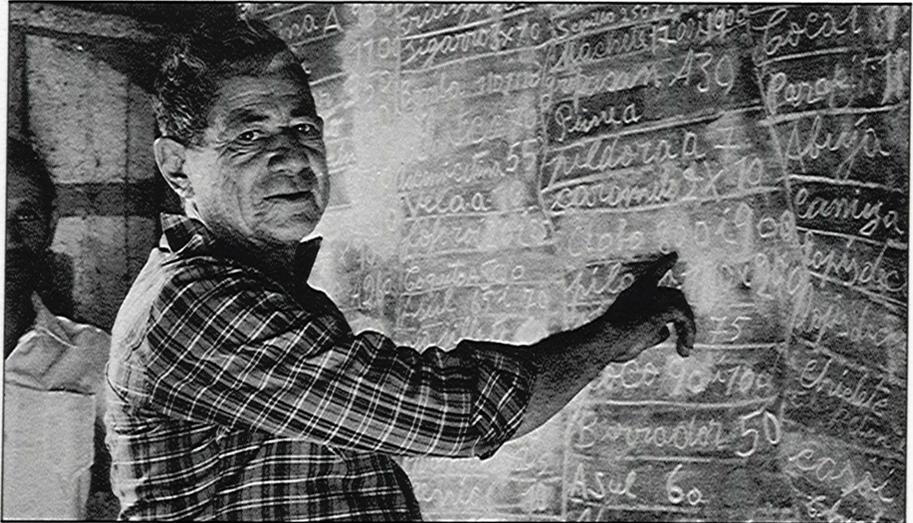
Foreign Ministry and major NGOs for the first time.

The ALTERNEX system will give its subscribers access to electronic mail, national data banks (including those from governmental and academic research centers), and simultaneous electronic conferences, all at low cost: Transmitting information via ALTERNEX will be approximately 40 times less expensive than using telex and 25 times cheaper than FAX machines. Subscribers will need only a personal computer and telephone modem; hookups via satellite are being explored for groups in isolated areas with unreliable telephone service.

ALTERNEX will connect Brazilian groups with NGOs throughout the world. The system is already linked to networks in the United States (PeaceNet and EcoNet), Europe (GreenNet), and Nicaragua (Nicarao). NGOs in other Latin American countries have also expressed an interest in participating in the network. The potential for greater and more effective communication among Brazilian NGOs and their international partners was demonstrated last year when rubber tapper and community leader Chico Mendes was assassinated. Word of his death in the far reaches of the Amazon was received by thousands of groups around the globe in a matter of minutes.

IBASE's motto—democratize information to democratize society—underscores the potential that state-of-the-art computer technology gives NGOs to improve their efforts toward integrated and sustainable social and economic development. International donors will also benefit from ALTERNEX, as greater access to information and enhanced communication allow for a more transparent and horizontal funding relationship with grantees.

—John Garrison ◇



Kathryn Shaw

Narciso Silvero points out current prices at the consumer store operated by the comité in Ciervo Cuá Arribada.

## Comités Continue to Credit Campesinos

*We are pleased to introduce a new column examining projects previously covered in Grassroots Development. Rather than providing in-depth evaluations of success or failure, these articles will explore some of the ups and downs in the lives of people and organizations supported by the IAF as they continue their development efforts.*

What are the odds, after eight years, of tracking down a Paraguayan campesino named Silvero Narciso, once quoted in *Grassroots Development*? That he had not migrated to Argentina or moved to a newly colonized area and could be located to chat with a visitor says a lot about the system of agricultural committees, or *comités*, discussed in the 1981 article *By-Passing the Patrón* (see Breslin, *Grassroots Development*, Vol. 5, No. 1).

At that time, Silvero and his neighbors in the rural community of

Ciervo Cuá Arribada were enthused at how membership in a comité had changed their lives. Theirs was one of some 50 small farmers' groups near Villarrica that had been organized by the Centro Paraguayo de Cooperativistas (CPC), a small non-profit organization working with the region's campesinos. Among CPC's many activities was a credit program for the comités funded by an IAF grant in 1976. The program was designed to free farmers from their longstanding indebtedness to the *patrones*, or local store owners, who had traditionally made loans to them for agricultural inputs and food. At harvest, farmers were obliged to sell their crops to the *patrones* at prices that barely allowed farmers to break even. With CPC's help, comités throughout the area established their own consumer stores to offer credit and goods to members on more favorable terms. To improve logistics, the comités had been grouped into seven zones and a regional coordinating committee was set up with representatives from each of the zones. The next logical step was to convert the com-

mittees into legally recognized co-operatives.

As it turns out, the intervening eight years have been good ones for Silvero, who recently obtained title to his land. The nine-member Ciervo Cuá Arribada committee continues to operate a consumer store, with price differentials for members versus nonmembers clearly displayed on a blackboard.

The big news is that a loan from CPC in 1985 enabled six members to purchase 10 hectares they now farm communally. "We have already paid off the whole loan," Silvero proudly stated as he tended customers in the consumer store.

"Now we're not as dependent on outsiders," added Ramón Caballero, who, like Silvero, was taking his turn at tending shop that day.

This sense of self-reliance was confirmed by Ina Troche de Cáceres, principal of the high school in Eugenio Garay attended by students from several of the area's settlements. She explained: "You can really see the effects of cooperation in the communities that have comités. The children and their families live together much more peacefully, and they are better off both socially and economically."

If things have gone well for Narciso Silvero and his community, they have not always proceeded as smoothly for CPC. Restless with CPC's methodical approach, described as one of "enormous patience and attention to detail," the regional coordinating committee broke with its parent organization in 1984. The new group, called the Asociación Regional de Agricultores (ARA), still follows the CPC model. However, the number of comités in its seven zones has dropped significantly.

"We're stalled for now," admitted Javier Romero, manager of ARA, "but that's natural after a period of such great change. We're not letting



Kathryn Shaw

*Comité member Julian Vera (left) and his wife, Bernarda, discuss changes in their community with Apolinario Ybarra, a member of the staff of ARA.*

ourselves get carried away anymore by unreal expectations."

As much to spark new interest in the organization as to help members diversify crops, ARA received a grant from the IAF in 1988 to establish mills for processing yerba maté tea. The project is not yet fully under way, however, and questions have arisen about the centralization of leadership.

Meanwhile, CPC has organized an additional 55 comités in other areas around Villarrica. But given its experience with the regional committee, it is now concentrating efforts on strengthening the comité system at the zonal level. It is also focusing on a different beneficiary: the poorest campesinos living closer to Villarrica who have less than three hectares of farmland apiece. The new program, funded by the IAF in 1988, targets the whole family, rather than just male heads-of-household, and includes an experimental farm as well as a communications project to produce publications and videos.

And whatever happened to the next logical step—that all of these comités would someday become co-operatives? "It was impossible with all the bureaucratic red tape at the time," said Carlos Luna, current director of CPC. "We just didn't get the cooperation we needed from government agencies." He has accepted the disappointment stoically, however, remarking that, "Even if they're not called co-ops, the comités truly are the cooperatives of the campesino."

It would appear, then, that if events of the past eight years have led the two support organizations to temper their optimism and set more realistic goals, beneficiaries themselves seem satisfied with consolidating the relatively modest personal gains they have so painstakingly earned. Fewer campesinos are forced to migrate in search of cash income, and the comités continue to provide credit and consumer staples at affordable prices. ♦

—Kathryn Shaw

# Reviews

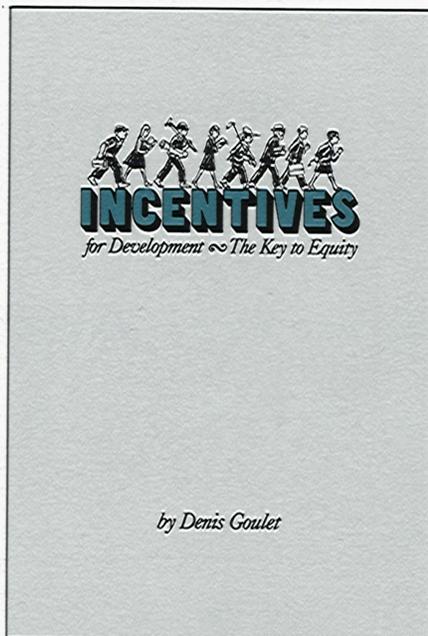
**INCENTIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT: THE KEY TO EQUITY,** by Denis Goulet. New York: New Horizons Press, 1989.

Susan Pezzullo

Author of several books on development theory and ethics, Denis Goulet looks at how socially sanctioned incentives shape development priorities and strategies. For Goulet, incentives can be either rewards encouraging positive behavior or penalties discouraging negative behavior by institutions and citizens. The package of incentives operating in a given society mirrors its underlying values, power relations, and social goals, and tends to perpetuate prevailing patterns of wealth, power, and legitimacy. Yet because they are malleable, incentives can also become instruments for changing the political status quo, redistributing wealth, or redirecting investment.

This book limits itself to an examination of the economic incentives developed and managed by government. Goulet divides these incentives into two categories: moral or nonmaterial ones like justice, equity, or patriotism; and material ones such as tax credits, income, or other physical benefits. A good portion of the text examines how these two types of incentives are balanced in socialist and capitalist economies.

Students of grassroots development will find the last section of the book, "Incentives: A New Theory," of much interest. Earlier sections lead us over familiar territory. Using Brazil as a case study, Goulet examines how three different types of rationalities, or ways of thinking—political, technological, and ethical—interact in the planning of large-scale development projects. For Goulet, ethical rationality is usually advocated by those who are "left out of the power and wealth," and it



is a mode of thinking that "takes as its goal the creation, nurture, or defense of certain values worthy for their own sake—freedom, justice, the right of each person to a livelihood, dignity . . ."

Few would argue with Goulet's contention that "participation is best understood as a moral incentive that empowers hitherto excluded non-elites to negotiate new material incentives for themselves." Rather than debating the obvious merits of why non-elites should participate in macrolevel planning or policy formulation, however, Goulet might have spent more time showing *how* non-elites can develop the capacity to participate effectively in policymaking. One also wishes Goulet had explored the forces compelling governments and/or technocrats to tolerate or enlist participation by non-elites. In the case of Brazil, for instance, allowing participation by non-elites in planning large-scale projects may have resulted as much from the economic recession and the military's desire to get out of government as from the inherent capac-

ity of organized citizens to pressure planners and policymakers.

Goulet closes by raising several basic questions germane to the debate about the restructuring of foreign assistance, the role of nongovernmental organizations, and efforts to "scale up" grassroots programs into macrodevelopment strategies. He concludes that "wealth cannot be harnessed as a resource in the cause of development unless the poor themselves shape the incentive systems—that optimal mix of moral and material stimuli and deterrents to desired behavior—which will serve as the main policy instrument of their national societies' quest for development."

Understanding, supporting, and sustaining the process by which the poor develop the capacity "to shape" is left to other authors to explore in detail. Moreover, it would seem from development programs in Brazil, such as Projeto Nordeste mentioned in the book, and similar programs in other developing countries, that "shaping" will not be enough. Acquiring the clout and skill to keep agencies accountable during the implementation process is equally important for equitable development.

*SUSAN PEZZULLO has recently been named Foundation representative for Paraguay. Prior to that she served as a representative for Mexico from 1983-1989.*

**BLAZE A FIRE**, by Nesha Z. Haniff. Toronto: Sister Vision, Black Women and Women of Color Press, 1988.

Julie Sutphen Wechsler

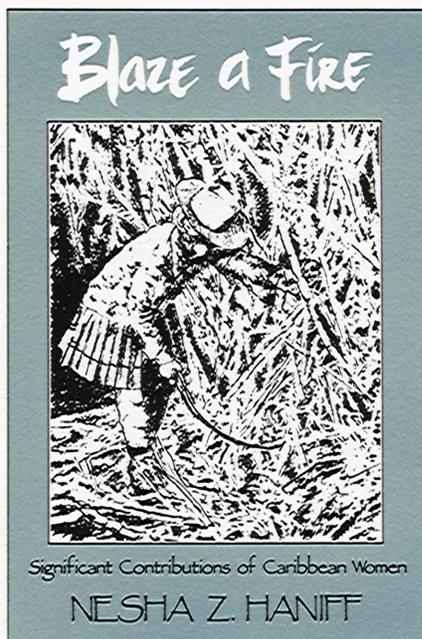
**B**laze a Fire, which gives voice to 28 distinctive women, is both a welcome contribution to the limited literature on women's roles in Caribbean society and a de-

lightful addition to the oral history of the region. Distilled from lengthy interviews, each chapter weaves together personal memories and insights about daily life, using the women's resonant Caribbean voices to expose the reader to new vistas of a familiar landscape.

Social scientists have paid considerable attention to the role women have played as breadwinners in single-parent families. However, the vital contributions that women have made to the evolution of Caribbean societies have been overlooked in formal histories of the region. This collection of profiles was intended to fill that gap. It was meant to raise the level of awareness among Caribbean secondary school students about the range of past accomplishments and about the potential for future leadership and action.

Although well suited to that purpose, *Blaze a Fire* will also appeal to a wider audience. Nesha Haniff's accessible prose and her insightful commentary make it invaluable for those interested in Caribbean history, women's studies, and development issues. Her description of traditional credit systems—called "susu" in Trinidad, "throwing box" in Guyana, and "throwing partners" in Jamaica—are informative, as is the short glossary of West Indian Creole terms and place names. At the heart of each woman's story can be found a common theme of strong moral conviction, independence, and natural leadership ability that cuts across divisions of class, color, and ideology. Whether planter or cane cutter, conservative politician or labor union leader, each speaker shares attributes that the reader soon realizes are essential building blocks for the wider society of which they are a part.

The self-confidence these women display is justified by the conduct of their lives. Good mothers, strong political leaders, impressive judges,



leaders of grassroots organizations, and proud street vendors, they provide excellent role models for young people, and remind the rest of us how much more could be accomplished than we may have dared to imagine.

Listen, for instance, to the words of "Miss Tiny" Antoine, a Jamaican higgler, as she tells us:

*Every Heroes' Day, I should get a medal to go through all these troubles and nobody don't give me a ting. Is me an me alone. Every Heroes' Day I should get a medal, for I struggle hard with my life, and for my children I is a hero.*

And hear how the self-respect engendered by such everyday heroism can find its voice being raised to confront social evils. Prime Minister Mary Eugenia Charles, of Dominica, for instance, describes her reaction on encountering racial discrimination in the United States over 40 years ago, when she was refused entrance to a restaurant and took the offending maître d' to court. She ex-

plained to the judge in the preliminary hearing:

*This man must be punished. Make him understand that he can't do this. He must lose his job. I want this man to be punished. He has broken your law, you say your country believes in law and order. He is a criminal. He must be punished. I am not going to have it. I come from a country where people are black and people are respected for being black and I am not going to come to this two-by-four country and have anyone treat me this way.*

Finally, listen to Didi Ramroop, an illiterate Trinidadian, who provides the title for the book. During stalled labor negotiations, Ramroop feared that her fellow cane cutters were going to give up. Determined to speak out, she seized the stage at a meeting and delivered a fiery speech:

*Like you put a blaze of fire in me and it blaze, it burnin me to know that we trying to get betterment and these man breaking and they rebelling. . . . We suffer so long here, and we must sacrifice, and if we have to eat dirt we must eat it . . . and if we have to eat grass, we eat it.*

With this, she reached down, pulled up a clump of grass, and ate it. Her dramatic action stiffened the cane cutters' resolve to stick together, and they eventually succeeded in winning higher pay and better working conditions.

While these stories demonstrate the much-celebrated strength and courage of West Indian women, they also underline the tremendous odds that must be overcome in raising children and putting food on the family table. In describing that struggle, the book also describes some of the practical difficulties women have encountered in breaking into professional fields outside of traditionally defined roles. The

reader learns firsthand of the social dilemmas facing a woman who wants to be a doctor, a judge, or a laborer without sacrificing her womanhood in the eyes of her father, brothers, and prospective mates.

Rarely is anything written about the Caribbean that does not mention, at some point, the small size of the region and how that affects whatever other subject is under discussion, be it development, politics, or a newly published book. Anthropologists often call these small social entities "face-to-face" communities, for in them, nearly everyone knows everyone else. This book reminds us of the face-to-face familiarity of the Caribbean. It was a pleasure, but not really a surprise, to find that many of the people profiled in its pages are also people with whom the IAF has worked over the years. We recommend Nesha Haniff's book as an album of friends.

*JULIE SUTPHEN WECHSLER is the senior Foundation representative for the Caribbean region.*

**DOS MAZORCAS DE MAÍZ: UNA GUÍA PARA EL MEJORAMIENTO AGRÍCOLA ORIENTADO HACIA LA GENTE**, by Rolando Bunch. Oklahoma City: World Neighbors, Inc., 1988.

### Wilbur Wright

I first encountered this book in 1982 when it was published in English as *Two Ears of Corn*. At that time I was preparing to teach a course at Essex College in Baltimore, Maryland, on managing local development projects. The students were part of the Central American Peace Scholarship (CAPS) Program, and I was looking for training material that presented an easily understood methodology for the development



and management of local projects, and that focused on the role of local beneficiaries.

I was becoming rather frustrated in my search when the director of the program suggested a paperback she had just received from World Neighbors in Oklahoma City. Knowing little about World Neighbors and being rather skeptical of the kind of books on development that might be published by a small, religiously motivated organization in Oklahoma, I was not optimistic that it would meet my needs. My opinion began to change as I looked at the back cover and read the endorsements by individuals and groups whose work I know and respect. David Werner, author of the highly praised book *Where There Is No Doctor*, declared *Two Ears of Corn* a "must" for those involved in grassroots development.

Any remaining skepticism was transformed to surprise and then excitement as I began to leaf through the book. Organized in primer-like style, it takes readers step-by-step through the planning and imple-

mentation phases of a local development project. Although most of the experiences cited are based on rural agriculture projects, the process being described can just as easily be transferred to an urban setting.

The guidance and suggestions Roland Bunch offers are basic and practical. Each chapter provides useful guideposts such as: Don't do development for them, teach them the process instead; keep beneficiary participation and enthusiasm high; be flexible; plan programs soundly; start small, slowly, and simply; maintain a good monitoring system; choose an appropriate technology to assure accessibility and success; develop local leadership; and, multiply your efforts.

The final two chapters concentrate on the structures created and maintained to carry out the projects. Although Bunch reveals his bias toward cooperatives, he acknowledges that they must facilitate the entire development process. Once initial success is achieved, co-ops can become springboards to more integrated programs covering a greater variety of needs confronting the community.

As more and more development agencies and foreign assistance donors struggle to understand and support systems that can be sustained at the local level, *Dos Mazorcas de Maíz* becomes ever more relevant as a beacon pointing out the path to follow. Soon to be published in French, this book is a requisite for anyone studying or working in local development. It is quickly becoming a traveling companion to be read, re-read, and continually consulted.

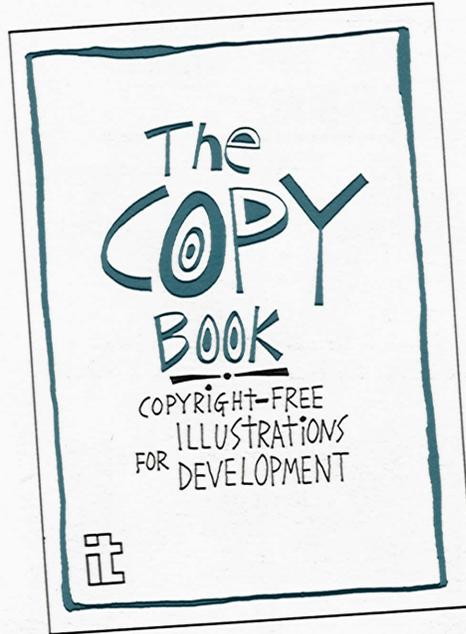
*WILBUR WRIGHT is the Foundation representative for the Dominican Republic. Both the Spanish and English editions of Dos Mazorcas de Maíz can be ordered directly from World Neighbors, Inc., 5116 N. Portland, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73112. ♦*

# Resources

Grassroots Development frequently presents collections of thematically linked publications or specialized materials of interest to a particular group in order to inform readers of newly available development resources. This issue, however, contains a virtual *piñata* of resource material—a wealth of publications that has rained down upon the editors in recent months, each deserving attention for individual merit rather than for an overarching relationship to the others.

*The Copy Book* is such a good idea it is hard to imagine we have not seen another like it. This large-format publication is a compendium of black-and-white line drawings that feature Third World models performing a variety of common development-related tasks. Easily reproducible by tracing or photocopying, *The Copy Book* encourages local development workers to use these illustrations as an educational tool, or to create their own.

This new resource is the outgrowth of response to an article published in *Illustrators*, the magazine published by the British Association of Illustrators. All of the artwork was donated by association members, free of any copyright charge, to address a pressing need. The book's editors have tapped the marketing skills of illustrators in the developed world to help make educational campaigns in the Third World more effective. In the poorest rural and urban areas of many developing countries there are few posters or other visual aids to promote health and other development-related projects, and those materials that are available are often ineffective because they speak at, rather than to, the poor. With this book in hand, local project managers have a range of culturally sensitive, clearly presented materials to improve their outreach efforts.



*The Copy Book* is distributed by the Intermediate Technology Development Group, which also publishes a newsletter providing information about appropriate small-scale technology projects.

Contact: Intermediate Technologies Publications, 103-105 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4HH, England.

*Women, Poverty and Progress in the Third World*, by Mayra Buvinić and Sally Yudelman, is the latest presentation in the Headline Series produced by the Foreign Policy Association. Specifically designed for teachers and students, the series also provides general readers with up-to-date, in-depth looks at foreign policy topics in the news.

This particular publication serves as a basic, but comprehensive, text for surveying the issues confronting Third World women. It examines the root causes of women's prevailing poverty, and reviews the progress made during the United Nations Decade on Women. These and other topics are brought to life by the au-

thors, who draw heavily from their experiences around the world as development professionals to illustrate the lives of, and unique problems facing, Third World women.

Headline Series publications aim for brevity and readability but also include illustrations, discussion questions, and a reading list along with detailed background. They are available by subscription, or can be purchased singly. Other recent topics in the series include the historical relationship of the United States to the Philippines, global television's impact on foreign policy, and the link between international sports and politics.

Write to: Foreign Policy Association, 729 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York 10019, or call (212) 764-4050.

*Environment and Urbanization: Environmental Problems in Third World Cities* is the first issue of a journal with the stated goal of providing a forum for Third World researchers, teachers, and other professionals to reach their counterparts in government and donor agencies. The editors, affiliated with the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), say they intend to allow their readers to shape future issues of the journal to meet evolving interest in topics affecting urban environments in developing countries.

This first issue is a general introduction to Third World urban environmental concerns. Researchers draw on experience in areas as diverse as Bogota, Colombia, and Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Subsequent issues also will be thematically related. The second issue, scheduled to appear in October 1989, addresses how the urban poor obtain housing.

The publication is being subsidized by IIED to encourage broad distribution. Free subscriptions will

be made available to Third World nongovernmental organizations and teaching/training institutions; other subscribers in developing countries will be charged \$11 annually, compared with the regular subscription rate of \$20.

Contact: IIED, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H ODD, England.

The flip side of urban environmental degradation is the rural depletion of resources. *Environmentally Sound Small Scale Agricultural Projects* tackles the problem by presenting ideas for minimizing environmental abuses in agricultural practices.

This volume is a revised edition of an earlier publication that had eight printings. A section on agroforestry has been added, and information on pest management and several other topics has been updated.

The manual was jointly produced by Coordination in Development (CODEL) and Volunteers in Technical Assistance (VITA), two non-profit organizations dedicated to the dissemination of development information. It is one of several publications for assisting development workers to protect the physical environment in designing and implementing projects.

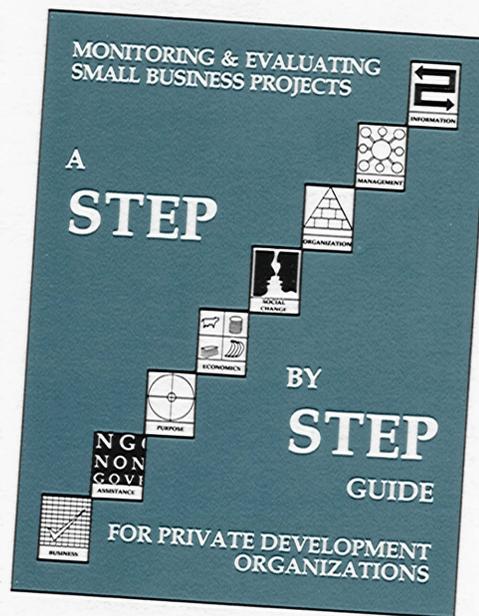
Editor Miguel Altieri, from the University of California, Berkeley, biological division, and CODEL editor Helen Vukasin say the manual has two goals: to promote well-planned and environmentally sound small-scale agricultural projects, and to introduce environmental concepts into technology development and alternative management techniques and encourage their transfer into training programs.

Contact VITA at 1815 N. Lynn Street, Suite 200, Arlington, Virginia 22209.

The promotion of small business

projects has increasingly become a basic element in Third World development schemes. Yet like many fast-moving innovations, implementation of business-directed projects may have outstripped understanding. Even seasoned development professionals frequently have few business skills themselves and even less ability to evaluate business-related projects.

*Control y Evaluación de Proyectos de Pequeños Negocios: Una Guía Paso*



*a Paso*, which was first published in 1987 as *Monitoring and Evaluating Small Business Projects: A Step by Step Guide for Private Development Organizations*, does precisely what the title suggests. It coaches development organizations in how to effectively respond to the demands of small-scale entrepreneurs, offering step-by-step guidance on implementing the program and then on transferring that expertise to the community. A recent facilitator's manual introducing trainers to the new approach is also very helpful.

Although the technique is a bit like staying one page ahead of your

students in a reading assignment, it appears a whole lot better than re-inventing the wheel or learning the hard way through mistakes. This how-to manual was produced by members of the Small Enterprise Education Project (SEEP) Network and published by Private Agencies Acting Together (PACT). It is also available in French.

Contact: SEEP Network/PACT, Inc., 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017.

Similar to *Control y Evaluación de Proyectos de Pequeños Negocios* is *Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP) for Nutrition and Primary Health Care: Anthropological Approaches to Improving Programme Effectiveness*, by former IAF Fellow Susan Scrimshaw and Elena Hurtado.

Again, as with the authors of *Women, Poverty and Progress in the Third World*, the writers of this volume are development professionals with years of experience. However, in this case the range of the intended audience is narrower.

RAP is the outgrowth of a collaborative effort that began in 1981, and the techniques that have evolved have been thoroughly field-tested. The authors write that their intended readers are people already trained in anthropological or related social science methods. While the book may be too specialized for the average development worker to use as a field guide, it could be adapted for use as a university text.

RAP is a product of the United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan, the UNICEF/United Nations Children's Fund, and the University of California, Los Angeles's Latin American Center.

Contact: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, University of California, Los Angeles, California 90024. ♦

—Barbara Annis

# Postscript

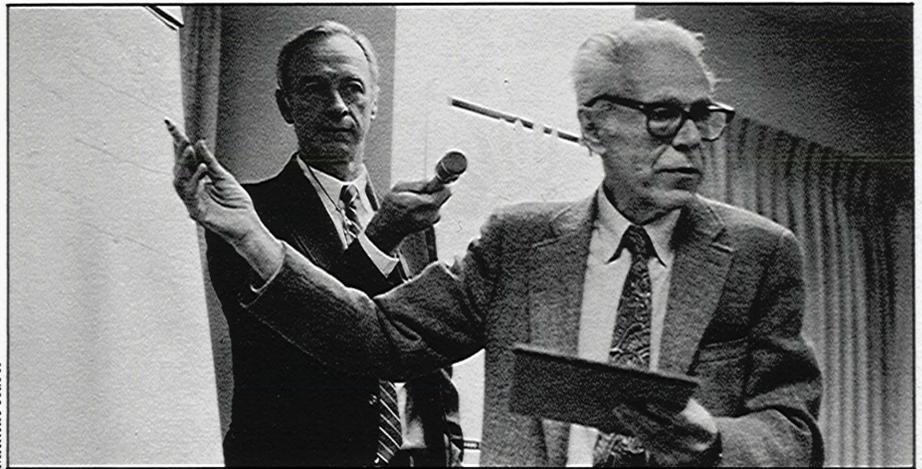
Unlike publications produced by many other donor agencies, *Grassroots Development* is not used as a promotional or fundraising tool. Its purpose is to inform readers about the results of projects, examining what works and doesn't work—and why.

Each issue is based on the considerable field experience of Foundation staff, local project managers, and commissioned researchers. Their in-depth articles chronicle the ups and downs of indigenous development organizations, analyzing key turning points to glean lessons that can be applied elsewhere.

Since the life of these organizations is so dynamic, it is often difficult to tell the whole story in an eight- to ten-page article. Consequently, authors and editors are forever revising and rewriting—often having to cut valuable information in the process of making the material fit the space allotted.

Over time, we became convinced that the "untold stories" deserved an audience as well—and the idea for a grassroots development speakers series was born. Such a forum would bring readers and writers together to discuss underlying issues in greater detail, and would allow the public to probe—perhaps even to challenge—opinions stated in the articles.

Judging from the enthusiastic response to the first seminar, held October 5 at the Peace Corps' new headquarters in Washington, D.C., the idea is a good one. A standing-room-only crowd gathered to participate in a discussion of success and failure in grassroots development, the topic of a special section in a recent issue of the journal. Distinguished economist Albert O. Hirschman, professor emeritus at Princeton's Institute of Advanced Study, led a panel of authors who had contributed to that issue, including IAF staff members Susan



Michelle Huber

*Distinguished economist Albert Hirschman (right) discusses success and failure at the launching of the Grassroots Development Speakers Series.*

Pezzullo and Robert Maguire. A recurrent theme during the question-and-answer session was the need for better indicators to determine success and failure. Unfortunately, conventional ones don't apply, says Hirschman, who has written extensively on the subject. Grassroots development is hardly an exact science, and he encouraged those present to think in terms of social gains that can be quantified—but only over time.

The next event in the series, to be held in January or February, will feature a panel of authors who analyzed the informal sector in the last issue of *Grassroots Development*. If

you live in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and would like to receive invitations to future lectures, return the coupon on this page.

In addition to inaugurating the speakers program, the IAF recently launched a Country Focus Series. A summary of the first study, which examines the small farmer sector in Uruguay, begins on page 32. As usual, we welcome your comments on this report, as well as on the other articles in this issue.

*Kathryn Shaw*

## Grassroots Development Speakers Series

If you live in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and would like to receive regular invitations to the Grassroots Development Speakers Series, please fill out this form and send it to: Inter-American Foundation, Publications Office, 1515 Wilson Blvd., Rosslyn, Virginia 22209.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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**IAF Fellowships** The Foundation has created three fellowship programs to support Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. scholars researching development activities among the poor. Two of these programs support field research in Latin America and the Caribbean at the master's and doctoral levels; the third brings Latin American and Caribbean scholars and practitioners to the United States for advanced training.

Fellowship topics of primary interest are: 1) the nature of effective grassroots organizations among the poor; 2) the nature of effective intermediary or service organizations; and 3) systematic appraisals of local development activities such as studies of development programs and projects designed to reach the poorest populations, including small businesses in the informal sector, female-headed households, isolated indigenous populations, and artisanal fishermen.

Applications and inquiries should be directed to:

Fellowship Office  
Inter-American Foundation  
1515 Wilson Boulevard  
Rosslyn, Virginia 22209  
(703) 841-3864

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