

# Grassroots Development

Journal of the Inter-American Foundation

Focus: Women Grassroots Leaders



VOLUME 32

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**Double Feature:**  
IAF Fellows'  
Forum

The Inter-American Foundation (IAF), an independent foreign assistance agency of the United States government, was created in 1969 to promote self-help development by awarding grants directly to organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its operating budget consists of congressional appropriations and funds derived through the Social Progress Trust Fund.

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The purpose of this journal is to share grassroots development experiences with a variety of readers. The editor encourages submissions on relevant topics including, but not limited to, the following:

- how the poor in Latin America and the Caribbean organize and work to improve their lives;
- issues and trends in the development community;
- how institutions cooperate to further the development of the region.

Please direct query letters to Paula Durbin at the above address or e-mail [pdurbin@iaf.gov](mailto:pdurbin@iaf.gov).

Cover: Elsa Zaldívar, director of IAF grantee Base Educación, Comunicación y Tecnología Alternativa (Base Ecta), has won international acclaim for probing the possibilities of loofah as a development resource, including for the construction panels that frame her. Photo, courtesy Base Ecta. Opposite page: Zaldívar with sponges and her experimental material for housing.

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Courtesy Base Ecta



## Contents

### Focus: Women's Leadership at the Grassroots

|  |    |
|--|----|
| The Most Tenacious Woman in the World<br><i>Patrick Breslin</i> .....                                  | 2  |
| Rolex Laureate Improves Lives with Loofah<br><i>Jeremy Coon</i> .....                                  | 10 |
| Education in the Andes: The Fourth "R" is Art<br><i>Wilbur Wright</i> .....                            | 14 |
| Helping <i>Cariocas</i> Crack the Concrete Ceiling<br><i>Amy Kirschenbaum</i> .....                    | 20 |
| These Boots Are Made for Managing<br><i>Mark Caicedo</i> .....   | 24 |
| Madame Louise and the Long Trek from Isolation<br><i>Jenny Petrow and Deusibon Pierre-Mérité</i> ..... | 28 |
| Health Care in the Shadow of the Volcanoes<br><i>José Toasa and Paula Durbin</i> .....                 | 32 |
| Resources for Women's Microenterprises<br><i>Miriam E. Brandão</i> .....                               | 40 |
| A New Frontline for Former <i>Guerrilleras</i><br><i>Seth Micah Jesse and Rolando Gutiérrez</i> .....  | 44 |



Jeremy Coon

### At the IAF

#### First Juried Competition: A Forum for IAF Fellows' Findings

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Mining and Democracy: International Law goes Local<br><i>Amanda M. Fulmer</i> .....    | 51 |
| Agriculture and Conservation in the Galápagos Islands<br><i>Laura Brewington</i> ..... | 54 |
| <b>Development Note:</b> Tinkuy de Tejedores.....                                      | 60 |
| <b>Grantees in the News</b> .....  | 66 |
| <b>Resources</b> .....   | 68 |



*Deise Gravina, a civil engineer, prepares Brazilian women for construction jobs.*

# Focus: Women Grassroots Leaders

This issue is dedicated to the women who are spearheading grassroots development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Their leadership is hardly a new phenomenon. Far from sidelined, women have always had a strong presence in the Inter-American Foundation's portfolio, as past issues of this journal indicate. If we had a list of all of those who have guided the IAF's grantees over four decades, it would be a long one.

It would also be diverse, and this is one reason for the theme of this issue. Too often women are lumped together, which obscures the fundamental fact of how very different they are from one another. The 10 leaders profiled here bear this out. They include an artist, an inventor, a recycler. They have nurtured microbusinesses and reduced mortality rates. They work in the most remote reaches of Haiti and in Rio's *favelas*. They lead sophisticated, well-networked nongovernmental organizations and the most incipient and isolated of base groups. A few seem to have taken the helm as a step in a natural progression; one describes her rise to leadership as accidental. Some were up against incredible odds and yet stepped forward, spoke out and mobilized others. Some are dedicated to creating opportunities for women; some head efforts in which men predominate. While most of the profiles in this issue include references to discrimination as a hurdle that women still face, a few are not about gender at all.

What these dynamic women have in common is that they are all succeeding remarkably, especially considering the circumstances, in helping some of the hemisphere's most vulnerable citizens toward financial self-sufficiency and personal well-being. Their stories are all compelling and make worthy case studies for anyone interested in what drives grassroots development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If any generalization can be drawn from them, it might be this: Ultimately the emergence of an individual as a grassroots leader seems determined by her personal awareness of her power to make conditions better.

Today, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, women are less limited than ever by expectations. For the generation that is coming of age in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama, the election of a woman as president is no longer news. Everywhere the future holds a vast range of possibilities that simply didn't exist for women a few decades ago. The articles here speak to the need for their talents, skills and commitment at the grassroots and to the challenges and rewards of service. For those women—and men—drawn to this calling, the demands and opportunities are many, as are the creative ways to work together to address them.



Robert N. Kaplan

# The Most Tenacious Woman in the World

By Patrick Breslin

All photos by Patrick Breslin



*Nohra Padilla, recycler.*

Many years later, as she faced the threats from Colombia's violent shadows, Nohra Padilla was to remember that distant day when her mother took her through a city dump to discover the small treasures discarded there—bottles, cans, paper and cardboard that could be sorted, cleaned and sold to put food on the table, to clothe her and 11 brothers and sisters, to pay for their education.

It was not quite the magical scene of danger and discovery that opens Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, but it was where Padilla's story started. Over time, she would find in those hills of trash and in the people who mined them, her life's work, and in herself, the leadership that would change the politics, economics and culture of recycling, often over the opposition of entrenched groups who benefited from the way things were. A daughter and granddaughter of recyclers, Padilla now heads Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá, 20,000



members strong, as well as Colombia's National Association of Recyclers. She meets regularly with mayors, ministers, donors and journalists and is invited abroad to share her experiences. At 41, she is on her way to a university degree in public administration, taking courses as her duties permit. Around the conference table, when the lawyers and economists and civil engineers introduce themselves by profession, Padilla simply says, "Recycler."

The story of Nohra Padilla is part of a series for *Grassroots Development* profiling individuals throughout Latin America who are changing their societies from the bottom up. It is worth noting in this special issue on women leaders that Padilla rose through the ranks of an organization in which most workers are male and that among recyclers, gender is not commonly an obstacle to advancement.

## The history of trash

In that tiny percentage of hereditary matter that separates humans from animals, there must be a gene for generating trash. As long as humans have been on earth, we have left trash behind. Most of what we know of ancient ancestors comes through their detritus—fossilized bones and teeth of the game they ate, the rough weapons and tools they fashioned, shards of pottery that once stored their grain and water, unstrung beads and shining bits of metal with which they adorned themselves and, in their burial pits, the evidence of their age, sex, height, weight, status and of the wounds or disease that killed them.

Modern trash is quantitatively and qualitatively different. The middens we leave for future research are vast mountains and bogs that threaten to overwhelm the cities of consumers that produce them. In Latin America, urban growth has exploded since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and the volume of trash in municipal dumps has outpaced it. Again and again, reform-minded mayors take office with ambitious plans, only to realize that their first priority must be finding new dumpsites as old ones overflow. Dumps, or "landfills," threaten health, safety and the environment as

they pump greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, accelerating climate change. In 2000, an avalanche of trash buried hundreds of Filipinos living in a dump. But as long as there have been dumps, people have gleaned them. One person's trash is another's lucky find. In Latin America, the number of recyclers has swelled with the waves of migrants to the cities. A recent census counted 150,000 recyclers in Colombia. Like hundreds of thousands of rural Colombians, Nohra Padilla's parents and grandparents fled farms in Boyacá and Cundinamarca because of the horrific violence that swept through the countryside in the 1940s. So massive was this flight that Colombia became a majority urban country by the early 1960s. Padilla's family settled in Las Cruces, a barrio near the center of Bogotá that had still open land.

If the migrants found safety in their new surroundings, work and shelter were harder to come by. Housing built on vacant land from odd bits of lumber, flattened cans and sheets of cardboard gave rise to the sprawling shantytowns that mushroomed overnight and became the face of urban poverty in the region. In the absence of jobs, some migrants scratched out a living searching through trash for anything they could sell. Padilla was born to recycling and was experienced at it before she was 10. But even though they needed her in the dump, her parents put education first. With only one year of schooling, Padilla's mother had taught herself to read and write, then taught her husband. Their children combined work with their studies, through high school in Nohra's case. But Nohra's father became permanently disabled in an industrial accident and died when she was 13. Recycling kept the family afloat, but trapped in one of poverty's whirlpools: *Reciclo porque soy pobre y no salgo de pobre porque solo sé reciclar.* ["I recycle because I'm poor and I stay poor because all I know is recycling."] For recyclers to escape from that whirlpool, someone had to provide the centrifugal force.

### **The politics of trash**

In 1999, Marcela Chaves, a field worker with Colombia's Fundación Corona, took me to see a nascent organization of recyclers that she was advising via a program called FOCUS, which was receiving assistance from the Inter-American Foundation. We drove to one of the poorest areas in the southern rim of Bogotá to meet the residents of Las Marías, a community literally built on trash. The area had once been a shallow lagoon that migrants had filled with dirt and garbage, tamping it all down, then building their ramshackle houses on the new land. A score of those who made their living from recycling had decided to organize as a cooperative within the Association of Recyclers of Bogotá. Their working conditions were as precarious as their houses. Their rickety carts pulled by spavined horses could be seen on the side of highways and major streets, shrinking from speeding cars as they hauled bundled cardboard and piles of newspapers. They stacked their material beside their houses, then sold it for a pittance to middlemen. Recyclers were lucky to earn \$4 a day,

but none of those I spoke to seemed bitter. Several, in fact, said they liked the freedom to be their own boss and work the days and hours they wished. By opting for membership in the Association, they came in contact with Nohra Padilla, who was about to change their lives.

Padilla was 29 then, a stocky woman in a heavy sweater and jeans with turned-up hems, her thick brown hair drawn into a long braid or a knot. She coordinated organizing for the Association and she was helping the Las Marías group position itself to sell its gleanings directly to industry for better prices than the middlemen were paying. Padilla had an air of having just rushed in from a previous meeting, and when she left, she was rushing to the next. But in between, she was focused, listening intently and responding quickly, decisively, emphasizing her words with gestures. Marcela Chaves saw her as an up-and-coming leader.

Actually, Padilla had been a leader since her teenage years. At 14, she began attending school at night to leave days free to help support her family. She and a few neighbors and school friends formed a group that collected material together. Soon, they were busy improving their Tisquesusa neighborhood of Las Cruces, where trash dumped illegally on a daily basis had attracted plagues of rodents and flies, causing skin and respiratory diseases. Padilla's group pressured the authorities and worked to remove the garbage, dig drains to prevent flooding, channel water to public sinks and lay out a park with a sports field.

When Bogotá's municipal government decided in the late 1980s to close the major dump that supported 200 recyclers, Padilla and her friends formed cooperatives to defend their interests. Initially ignored by the city, they successfully pressured for negotiations by blocking roads and setting fires in the dump. City officials persisted in closing the dump, but they recognized the cooperatives, aided their efforts to organize trash collecting and outfitted the members with identity cards and uniforms that gave them a semi-official status. The four cooperatives created at that time became the core of Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá, founded in 1990.

Support for recyclers across Colombia already had been coming from a prominent former IAF grantee, Fundación Social (FS), which funneled profits from

***"I go long periods without drawing a salary. And I'm not the only one. Many of us have donated our time and effort to the Asociación."***

several businesses it controlled, mainly in the financial sector, into the struggle against poverty. An FS program helped recycling groups find storage, upgrade transport and access social security, education, health services and childcare. In 1991, FS began to inform Colombians of the benefits of recycling. With assistance from FS, la Asociación bought a deteriorating structure and recycled it into the organization's airy, expansive headquarters that includes an office, meeting space, a kitchen, dining areas in an enclosed patio and a childcare center. When a

subsequent banking crisis temporarily curtailed FS's support, Padilla became director of the recyclers' association.

"Ever since," Padilla said, "we've been trying to reach self-sufficiency. But that's very difficult for an organization whose members are among society's poorest people. I go long periods without drawing a salary, just bus fare or money for an emergency. When do I receive a salary? When I'm successful in getting one of our projects financed and can charge for administrative costs. And I'm not the only one.



*In a meeting at ARB's headquarters, Padilla is the center of attention.*

Many of us have donated our time and effort to the Asociación.” With some IAF support, Fundación Corona, a corporate foundation, stepped in to back the recyclers’ attempts to organize and to professionalize their work. But bigger obstacles lay ahead. In 1999, Bogotá’s government began working on a master plan for the city, with trash collection and removal the key concerns. In 2003, bids were restricted to registered corporations that provided sanitation services. The recyclers were not only left out but were banned from their usual routes. Help came from an unusual source.

Alfonso Fidalgo was a successful and politically-connected consultant living in a spacious apartment near Bogotá’s trendy Zona Rosa. A handsome man with expressive eyebrows, strong features, and thick, wavy black hair, Fidalgo is one of those high-energy people able to hold a meeting and simultaneously manage three cell phones. A few years before, he’d attended a by-invitation-only meeting in the resort city of Melgar that brought together business leaders with representatives of the *guerrilleros* waging war against the state—part of an ultimately unsuccessful peace process launched by the Colombian government. At the meeting, Fidalgo sat in on a presentation by Nohra Padilla and a colleague on the problems of trash pickers.

“It was love at first sight,” Fidalgo told me. “I thought they made the biggest impact of any of the speakers.” Impressed by the implications of what they said, both for combating poverty and for improving the environment, he volunteered to help them obtain funding from a Spanish foundation. When that didn’t work, he drew a few friends and colleagues, including attorney Luis Jaime Salgar, into an informal support group for the recyclers. Salgar helped the Asociación contest the government decree that had sidelined the recyclers. The appeal was based on the fundamental right of people to work, as guaranteed under the Colombian Constitution of 1991, and it was successful. It not only overturned the decree but gained the recyclers a foothold in the city’s trash management system. “This has been one of the best remunerated jobs in my life,” Fidalgo told me. “Not in money, but in satisfaction. I’ve learned a ridiculous amount. Helping the recyclers has no downside. It’s good for them, and for everyone else. It’s a virtuous circle.”

## The economics of trash

The second time I visited Las Marías, the group, thanks to Fundación Corona and the Asociación, had started to pull away from the drag of the poverty circle by acquiring a partly-roofed yard, where it could weigh each recycler’s contribution and store material until it had truckloads to sell directly to industries. Working conditions were still brutal. I saw a loaded cart, with a sturdy woman in the place of a horse between its shafts, straining to pull it up a ramp into the storage yard. In a corner of the ground floor of a building in an industrial area, like a baseball pitcher warming up, a young man rhythmically hurled bottles against a cement wall and they exploded like grenades. The resulting mound of splintered glass was a danger to anyone who had to handle it, but it could be cleaned more efficiently than intact bottles—an initial step up the rungs of the reprocessing ladder.

Padilla has long had two guiding ideas about how recyclers could break free from the poverty trap: gradually take over the reprocessing and move into steady jobs cleaning buildings and tending public parks. When she talks trash, you forget the squelching, reeking dumps and imagine a corporate boardroom where the CEO lays out the business plan. “We want to control the entire process of recycling plastic, from collecting, sorting, sterilizing, all the way to reprocessed raw material for industry,” she said. “Why plastic? Because paper is controlled by a few industrialized multinationals. With metals and glass, the same thing, but not plastic. And you can completely process plastic with relatively simple machinery. Our other focus is non-ferrous metals, aluminum and copper, which are not that commonly found but whose value increases very quickly with whatever you do to it. In plastic and non-ferrous metals, we can compete.”

The Asociación put that strategy to work at the Alquería Parque de Reciclaje, a well-organized center occupying most of a city block, which it took over under a contract with Bogotá’s municipal government. The ferocious-looking Rottweiler-type dogs patrolling the gate are a reminder that junkyard dog is a metaphor for meanness and that trash has value and must be protected. Past the dogs, trucks drop off tons of unsorted recyclables at one of seven bays.



*Shredding a magazine at ARB's expansive processing center in Alquería Park.*

Under a high roof, uniformed, gloved recyclers from 21 cooperatives, some wearing surgical facemasks, rotate to separate the materials. The day I visited, a proper-looking middle-aged lady was methodically dismembering a glossy magazine full of photos of lingerie models, the pages falling like leaves into the big blue drum. Across the yard were smaller buildings housing offices and classrooms where the recyclers take courses offered by Colombia's Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA), a vocational-training agency that has been in operation for a half-century. Processing equipment included a long yellow machine roughly the shape and size of the hand-baggage scanners at airports.

The change in working conditions that machine represented became clear in a neighborhood in southern Bogotá, which Padilla said was one of the city's most toxic areas. Men shambled along muddy streets with thick sheaves of tanned skins riding on their bent necks and shoulders. We stepped through a green metal door, crossed a dingy yard and entered a rickety two-story structure where plastic bags were prepared for recycling. Dozens of huge canvas sacks full of plastic bags were strewn everywhere. Up a shaky flight of stairs lined with more such bundles, a pair of youths stood in front of wicked-looking blades fixed to a stand, sharp edges facing up. They took the bags one at a time and sliced them apart. Downstairs,

other workers used paddles to stuff them into a solution bubbling and boiling in large open tanks. An OSHA [workplace safety] examiner would have run screaming back into the street.



*Jairo Alape prepares plastic bags for recycling by slicing each one on an upturned blade fastened to a workbench in ARB's warehouse on the city's south side. The sliced plastic is then submerged into a solution bubbling and boiling in large open tanks.*



*A safer approach went into operation at the Association's Alquería Park facility. The whole process is contained inside a metal machine that heats plastic to melting, cools it and then extrudes purified pellets that are bagged and sold.*

At the Alquería Park, all that dangerous work is safely contained within the long yellow box. It takes plastic in at one end, heats it to melting, water-cools it and then extrudes it in dark gray spaghetti-like strings at the other end.

A little guillotine slices the strings into purified pellets that are bagged and sold to factories that turn them into chairs, garden hoses, more plastic bags—an almost infinite number of products. With the Alquería facility, the Asociación recyclers became an integral part of Bogotá's trash management system, a big step up from the dusty yard where the Las Marías recyclers brought their material more than a decade ago. In addition to this vertical integration, Padilla has also been working to expand horizontally, into the cleaning and landscaping industries mentioned earlier. "There's not the profit that's possible with recycling but there are a lot of jobs that take a recycler who's not earning much on the street and put him in different but related work," she explained.

### **The culture of trash**

If uniforms and identification cards gave recyclers an identity, the arrangement of regular routes and schedules has represented another breakthrough, eliminating competition for the same trash piles and facilitating connection with the people putting out the trash. The realization that they could count on the same individuals showing up helped make Bogota residents receptive to suggestions that they separate recyclable materials from organic garbage. This made the work easier and cleaner, with less sifting through bags and cans of trash. Better communication reinforced the idea that the recyclers were not derelicts but workers providing an important service. "Gradually, there came the recognition that, for example,

we help preserve trees,” a recycler said.” If this pile of shredded paper were not recycled, think of all the trees that would be cut down.” As their efforts became more organized, the recyclers’ contributions became more apparent. Padilla estimates that groups in the Asociación remove for recycling at least 15 percent of the trash generated each day in Bogotá, about 100 tons of material. That means their work alone extends the life of the city’s landfills by the same percentage.

With set routes and schedules, the freedom that went with scavenging disappeared. Some recyclers dropped out of the Asociación but others appreciated the benefits it provides. These include the center

***Padilla always underlines how each victory increased public respect for the recyclers and their own respect for themselves.***

in the headquarters where members can leave their children from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and receive medical and dental services. Since 2006, the center has participated in the government-funded lunch program Bogotá Sin Hambre [Bogotá without Hunger], serving 300 hot meals a day, mainly to poor people from the neighborhood, as well as to recyclers and their children. Shortly after the program started, Padilla invited me to lunch to show me how smoothly the center was handling the increased responsibility. Behind us, a long line of people with trays waited patiently, quietly chatting, leaving room for busy staff to go back and forth. “People say we’re disorganized,” Padilla said, “but look at how proper everyone is. There’s respect. There’s attention to the presentation of the food. That’s important.”

Her comment about the food reminded me of other grassroots leaders who also notice all the details, especially those that encourage pride. Poverty is in the concrete realities of life, but it also worms its way into the mind, and overcoming it is partly a question of attitude. When Padilla talks about what the Asociación has accomplished, she always underlines how each victory increased public respect for the recyclers and their own respect for themselves.

## **Fending off the Sopranos**

Trash management is a tough business, no place for the meek. The foundation of Tony Soprano’s HBO crime principality, let’s remember, rested on trash routes and the municipal contracts that awarded them. In the 1990s, as Padilla began her push to enter the bidding process, she and her colleagues received threats from shadowy groups who regarded organizing the poor as subversive. Behind them, Padilla perceived business owners who were profiting from their control of trash collecting and wanted no competition. Attempts at intimidation escalated whenever contracts came up for review, as did offers of bribes. There have been violent episodes; recyclers have lost their lives in clashes over access to dumps. In the face of this danger Padilla says that her organization sought help from the authorities to no avail. In fact, she says, members are sometimes harassed by the authorities and constantly on guard against proposals to strip them of their rights.

Undeterred, Padilla has continued to push, but is also working to improve communication and internal security within her organization. She has taken complaints about threats to the press. And she has relied on her allies, including prominent Colombians like Fidalgo and Salgar. She has not wavered in her demand that recyclers have a seat at the table when contracts are negotiated and decisions are reached on sanitation and recycling services in Bogotá.

In pursuit of that goal, she has won the grudging admiration of municipal bureaucrats. I sat in on one difficult meeting at a government office on dangerous residue in trash and the laws that supposedly regulate it. The conversation veered off on tangents, but Padilla kept pulling it back. She complained that her organization had not received promised information on proposed legislation. “I’m not asking whether,” she said firmly at one point, “I’m affirming that there is no control by the authorities.”

A few minutes later, on the sidewalk outside, a woman who had been in the meeting watched as Padilla continued to press her points. “Nohra Padilla,” she said quietly, is “the most tenacious woman in the world.”

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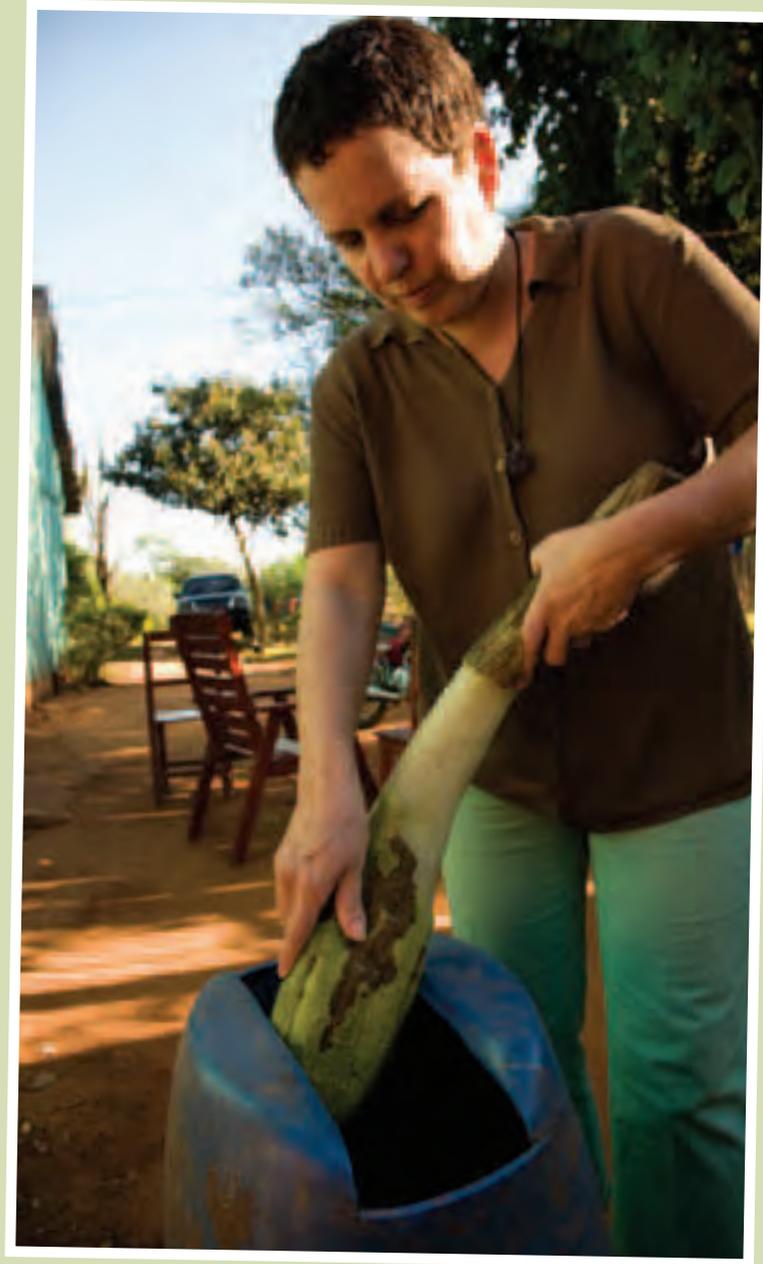
*Patrick Breslin, formerly IAF vice president for external affairs, retired after 22 years of service. He may be reached at patbreslin@yahoo.com.*

# Rolex Laureate Improves Lives with Loofah

By Jeremy Coon

*“In the poverty-stricken countryside of Paraguay, an innovative social activist has found a new use for an old vegetable. Elsa Zaldívar, whose longstanding commitment to helping the poor while protecting the environment has won her deep respect in her native land, has found a way to mix loofah—a cucumber-like vegetable that is dried to yield a scratchy sponge for use as abrasive skin scrubber—with other vegetable matter like husks from corn and caranday palm trees, along with recycled plastic, to form strong, lightweight panels. These can be used to create furniture and construct houses, insulating them from temperature and noise. About 300,000 Paraguayan families do not have adequate housing.”*

—[www.rolexawards.com](http://www.rolexawards.com)



Elsa Zaldívar working with freshly harvested loofah.

Jess Hoffman-Rolex Awards

For 20 years, Elsa Zaldívar, director of Base Educación, Comunicación y Tecnología Alternativa (Base Ecta), has focused on practical ways to improve conditions in rural Paraguayan communities, particularly for women, and her accomplishments have been noticed. In 2008, almost simultaneously with the award of an IAF grant to Base Ecta, Zaldívar became one of five laureates, selected from a field of 1,500 proponents, honored with the Rolex Award for Enterprise. And that came just a few years after Zaldívar's earlier distinction as an Ashoka Fellow. Google Zaldívar and pages of references come up, as might be expected, given the esteem such recognition commands. Log onto Wikipedia's site on loofah and you'll find Zaldívar mentioned in connection with the new use she discovered for the waste from this tropical vegetable whose possibilities she is still probing.

Zaldívar was born in Asunción in 1960, during the rule of General Alfredo Stroessner, South America's most durable dictator. Her mother, an artist, and her father, a lawyer who could not practice because of his opposition to the regime, supported their family from odd jobs. Zaldívar, in fact, grew up surrounded by people willing to pay the price for their ideals. Although her parents opted to forego electricity and raise their seven children on 10 hectares in San Lorenzo, just outside the capital, they didn't stint on education. "I was taught to believe that I could do and be whatever I wanted," Zaldívar said of her progressive schooling. Participation in programs of the local Young Men's Christian Association, took her, as a teenager, to conferences in Latin America and the United States, where she discovered her vocation for development and field work.

By the late 1970s, when Zaldívar was ready to pursue university studies and opportunities for women were opening up around the world, Paraguayan women were still limited to the secretarial pool, the library and the classroom. They were also expected to live at home until they married and Zaldívar's choice to share a house with four other young women while they attended the university was so unconventional that the arrangement was covered in the local press. Zaldívar studied journalism, but, she says, she soon realized that her family's

political activism, and her own reputation for flouting norms, made entry into the profession impossible as long as Stroessner was in office. So, after finishing her coursework, she turned to Paraguayan civil society to earn her living, first as a librarian for a nonprofit. In 1992, after a brief hiatus to care for her small children, Zaldívar joined Base Ecta, a nongovernmental organization that develops community leaders and grassroots groups, and rotated through a series of positions focused on women. She considered the work important and was impressed that the board of directors included women as well as men. "Very few organizations have mixed membership

and even the majority of the progressive NGOs in Paraguay are still dominated by men," she explained recently.

Zaldívar attributes to her paternal grandparents her love of rural life and her first acquaintance with loofah, which grew on their farm. It was during the mid-1990s in Caaguazú, a department in eastern Paraguay once known for its lush forests and fine woodworking, that the idea of loofah as a development resource occurred to her. At the time she was



*Loofah on the vine.*



*Sun-dried loofah fiber for exporting as is or for fashioning sponges, slippers and mats.*



*Waste left after processing.*

focused on working with women to improve their conditions by building stoves and latrines, but she knew that they would eventually have to earn an income. As she tells it, during a trip to Repatriación, a small town that used to be surrounded by forest and is now surrounded by soybean fields, she looked up and spotted, hanging from a tree, the zucchini-shaped gourd she remembered from childhood. As a material for sponges, it had long since been displaced by synthetics. But, recalled Zaldívar, “I knew that this was the product that could generate income for the women.” She took her idea to Teodora Arguello of Organización Campesina de Repatriación (OCAR), who said women in OCAR would be interested in experimenting with loofah.

With women from Organización Campesina de San Joaquín (OCSJ) and Coordinadora de Agricultores Asociados (CODAA), they started cultivating the plant, learning by trial and error, and their experiment with its different uses continues to this day. Initially their husbands and other men in the three organizations were skeptical and scoffed at the venture as going nowhere. But the women persisted and began to produce sponges, slippers, insoles and mats for the domestic market. The three organizations furthered the enterprise by creating the Asociación de Productores Agropecuarios del Caaguazú (APACC), which, until 2009, marketed much of the inventory to retailers catering to a discerning clientele

in Europe, Canada and Taiwan. But when APACC became controlled by the very men who had ridiculed the enterprise as “going nowhere,” the women turned to OCAR for marketing. Some launched family-run businesses. To keep up with the demand, OCAR and some of the families that were associated with CODAA are working to persuade others to grow and process loofah.

Zaldívar modestly credits Paraguay’s financial crisis of 2000 with creating a leadership vacuum in Base Ecta that no one else wanted to fill in those tough times. Rather than see Base Ecta disband, Zaldívar not only agreed to take the helm but permanently relocated the headquarters from Asuncion to her home in San Lorenzo. Just one year later, her pioneering work with loofah was recognized with an Ashoka Fellowship that allowed her to further explore the plant’s potential in the marketplace and, at the same time, resolve something that was bothering her. Zaldívar was intent on finding a use for the two-thirds of raw loofah that is either of poor quality for sponges or is wasted in the manufacturing process. Rampant deforestation, Base Ecta’s work on alternative technology for housing, and the properties that made loofah a natural insulator against heat, cold and sound motivated her to consult manufacturers of construction components. Eventually, Pedro Porajas Padros, a Spanish engineer living in Paraguay, became a collaborator. The breakthrough came when



*Construction panels incorporating the waste.*



*A model home under construction using the panels.*

he combined loofah with discarded plastic and produced panels suitable for use in construction.

But, just as Rolex announced its selection of Zaldívar as a laureate, Porajas Padros discovered that jute worked better than loofah in the panels. Zaldívar was, understandably, disappointed. Her focus had been loofah waste and Paraguay does not even produce jute. She wanted to continue to experiment with loofah, but Porajas Padros was satisfied with his invention and patented it. Rolex let the award stand. Whether technology used loofah or jute, the resulting panels were inexpensive and easy to manufacture, reduced the need for wood in construction, recycled plastic and could generate income for rural families.

The prize resulted in an international media buzz that drew attention to Base Ecta. Zaldívar invested the \$100,000 that accompanies the award in equipment to produce the panels and in further testing and market research. However, notwithstanding the local housing shortage and drastic deforestation, Paraguayan manufacturers have been slow to produce the panels. Zaldívar attributes the indifference to a bias in favor of imported innovation and technology. That she is woman, she said, works against acceptance of her idea. But outside Paraguay, especially in countries that produce jute, the technology is generating interest.

Zaldívar is justifiably proud of having developed an inexpensive building material that reduces solid waste and environmental degradation, and she is determined to find the ideal composite for Paraguay. She also is concerned that her work with Base Ecta continue to have an impact. "There are not enough resources and organizations that provide opportunities for women," she said. "We need to bring new people into the organization and into its leadership, to find more sources of funding that don't depend on my reputation, to become involved in more entrepreneurial initiatives using materials available locally." So Zaldívar's priority continues to be devising technology from the resources that rural Paraguayans have at hand. She is currently experimenting with a combination of loofah and *almidón*, a starch from manioc that is already used in plywood, to develop a material with a finish similar to plaster that can be used to fill holes and cracks in walls and provide insulation. Several prototypes look promising and she has begun testing them. Is another innovation in the works? Given Zaldívar's determination, I wouldn't bet against it.

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*Jeremy Coon is IAF representative for Argentina, Paraguay, Southern Brazil and Uruguay.*



Education in the Andes:

# The Fourth “R” is **Art**

*By Wilbur Wright*

*Photos by Jefry Andrés Wright*

**D**otting the Andean highlands are small schoolhouses, mostly one-room structures, where a single teacher is charged with educating indigenous Peruvian children in “the three Rs” by following an officially-mandated curriculum that has no relevance to them or their surroundings.

Although school is supposed to be in session 180 days a year, children in these remote settings can get shortchanged by up to three-quarters of that period. Teachers, usually strangers to the assigned village, often spend one or more weekdays commuting to and from their distant homes.

Personnel disputes, labor conflicts, political disagreements, bad weather and natural disasters can further deny children time in the classroom. Parents have little input into their children’s education, minimal interaction with the teacher and absolutely no presence in the classroom. Very likely, the teacher does not speak Quechua or Aymara, the most common languages indigenous to the Andes, and only a few men in the villages, and none of the women, speak Spanish. If the government delivers dietary supplements, the teacher might hire a mother to cook for the students, but she usually works in a rustic shed and never enters the school.

In 1990 Laura Russell, an artist from Los Angeles, visited Cusco. While trekking along the Inca Trail, she observed schoolchildren struggling to understand instructions in an unfamiliar language and to memorize and recite facts about a world totally foreign to them, devoid of any opportunity for self-expression. That image haunted Russell for months and in 1991 she returned to those high plateaus with art supplies and a passion to help the children learn by honoring their culture and encouraging their creativity. Community elders thought the woman was eccentric at best, if not insane, but the sheer joy in learning brought out in Russell's art workshops was not lost on them. The word spread and village after village began to invite *la loquita* to conduct workshops for their children.

Such was the demand that Russell approached retired teachers and other concerned Cusco residents about forming a nongovernmental organization that would support more workshops. In 1994 they founded the Taller Movil de Arte. It received its initial financing from the Centro de Estudios Bartolomé de las Casas, then party to a cooperative agreement with the Inter-American Foundation. This small grant and the personal sponsorship of Russell and others enabled a team of eight trained instructors to take the workshops into 30 indigenous communities throughout the Cusco highlands over the next three years. In 1998 Taller Movil reorganized as Asociación Cultural Allyu Yupaychay (YUPAY). The Quechua words, meaning "guardians of respect," reflect YUPAY's goal to develop a curriculum using art and indigenous identity as a platform for teaching the three Rs in



Larry Palmer

Laura Russell and Cusco residents.



*Classroom aides schedule their training throughout the year, usually during school breaks.*

single-room, multi-grade schools. A science lesson on the metamorphosis of the butterfly, for example, would incorporate hands-on experience applying the color spectrum and notions of symmetry and proportion and would introduce the children to the three stages of insect development and the significance of the butterfly in Quechua culture.

Vital to the approach is the corps of community residents, usually young men and women selected by their neighbors, trained to help with the art activities that convey important concepts of math, science, history and geography while developing the children's sense of personal worth and pride in their heritage. These classroom aides also serve the vital function of explaining the cultural relevance of the classwork to the children's parents. YUPAY not only values their awareness of the activities taking place in school, but also their participation in those activities. Parental involvement makes teachers feel less isolated and more committed to the children.

First-hand observation is essential to a full appreciation of YUPAY's effectiveness. Initially, the visitor feels he or she has walked in on a celebration. The children are gathered in animated groups, talking, laughing, with very few seated at a desk. The teacher wanders among them, acknowledging and reassuring. A classroom aide is fetching materials, encouraging an activity or putting a completed project on display. Every child's work is accepted as having merit; there is no criticism, no rejection. As the teacher reviews the finished products with all the children, the creativity, individuality and perspective of each are acknowledged as elements in a singular approach to the assigned task. The aide interjects a local perspective and elicits further comment. The school day over, the children collect their work to set aside to dry or to prepare for further elaboration or to take home to share with their families. They leave school happy with their accomplishments.

But at the end of the academic year, do the children demonstrate greater comprehension of the subjects deemed compulsory by the Peruvian Ministry of Education? Results of testing conducted in 2007, 2008 and 2009 at the second, fourth and sixth grade levels in 10 participating schools in the municipality of Checca and two schools not affiliated with YUPAY are both enlightening and encouraging.

Children in participating schools did significantly better than those in the unaffiliated schools in advancing toward the goals set by the Ministry of Education. For those interested in numbers, the difference was 80 percent. The disparity was even greater between the groups of second-graders; tests showed children in the unaffiliated schools actually lost ground gained during their first year of schooling. The results are all the more surprising given that the unaffiliated schools had a more experienced



*A trainee observes a multigrade class in session.*

and stable teaching corps and the children had benefited from more exposure to preschool activities. Most dramatically, the scores of the fourth-graders who had been taught with YUPAY's methodology since first grade, and had been tested each year, indicated they had progressed more rapidly than children first introduced to YUPAY's methodology in the fourth grade. The earlier the introduction of art and cultural relevance into daily lessons, the more rapid the progress toward the Ministry's goals.

## Andean Educators

Other than pasturing animals, which is often shared, what pertains to the men generally gets them out of the house, while what pertains to the women keeps them at home. However, it is the women who have economic and social control of the family unit. While there is the illusion that men are the dominant force and in community meetings they do most of the talking, the opinions expressed were agreed upon before they left the house. Over the years, I've been disappointed that more women do not participate in our activities at the schools, but they have many responsibilities that go beyond cooking and caring for children.

In our elementary-school project, the few female volunteer classroom aides were either very young, childless and moderately educated or they were in their 40s, less educated and had older children. Though usually quite shy, they were eager, creative, able and grateful for this experience. Our new project, in early childhood education, offers a technical degree after three years of training. As a unique opportunity to advance beyond high school without leaving the community, it has attracted a significant number of women. Several are very bright, even ambitious. With this more balanced group, the learning experience is more dynamic.

—Laura Russell



*Children from surrounding farms en route to school.*





Recognition of YUPAY's success is beginning to percolate up the educational system. Local officials of the Ministry of Education who oversee the participating schools in Checca are now convinced of the methodology's validity and have expressed as much in writing for the last two years. In 2009, the Ministry's regional office in Cusco formally chimed in. Once officials in Lima sign on, YUPAY's training for teachers and classroom aides will become part of the Ministry's annual budget.

Such progress can move at glacial speed, and in the meantime YUPAY must continue to reach younger children and more single-room, multi-grade schools. It helps that representatives of local government, NGOs and international donors have witnessed how children throughout the Andes release the rich cognitive energy that has been stifled or overlooked for far too long.

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*Wilbur Wright is IAF's regional director for programs in South America and the Caribbean. Jeffrey Andrés Wright is a professional photographer based in Maryland.*



*Deise Gravina and FIB trainees.*

All photos courtesy FIB

## Helping *Cariocas* Crack the Concrete Ceiling

*By Amy Kirschenbaum*

**W**hen, back in 2007, former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva announced a cornerstone initiative of his economic policy, Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento (PAC), or Program for Accelerated Growth, Deise Gravina paid attention.

The PAC called for the Brazilian government, state-owned companies and the private sector to coordinate their investment in construction, sanitation, energy, transportation and logistics. Gravina, a retired civil engineer, heads Federação de Instituições Beneficentes (FIB), an umbrella organization founded in 1957 that today manages several community development initiatives in Rio de Janeiro. Realizing that these infrastructure projects would fuel a demand for a skilled workforce—as would preparations, on an unprecedented scale, for Rio to host World Cup matches in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016—Gravina came up with the idea for FIB’s Projeto “Mão na Massa,” colloquially, “getting our hands dirty.”

Through Projeto Mão na Massa, FIB prepares *cariocas*, or women from Rio, for the lucrative, and traditionally male-dominated, construction trades. In just three years, FIB trained more than 300 women as construction workers, and its placement rate has attracted attention. More than 60 percent of the women trained found jobs immediately following graduation, nearly doubling their personal income. Others have started small businesses offering construction and renovation services. Nearly half of the participants in Projeto Mão na Massa are from the notorious Complexo de Alemão, a *favela* that had been ruled by drug traffickers and other gangs until the recent government crackdown in December 2010. The women’s motive for going into construction is understandable: the industry generates some 9 percent of Brazil’s jobs. (The upcoming renovation of Rio’s iconic Estádio do Maracanã alone is expected to employ some 3,000 workers.) “I always wanted to work the way a man does,” said graduate Andreia Sulmira Ribeiro Alves, who had spent 15 years cleaning other people’s houses. “I feel that I now have rights,” she added, referring to the benefits employees in the formal sector receive under Brazilian law.

Gravina considers herself as much a social engineer as a civil engineer. A lifelong volunteer in service to the community, she has actively contributed to forums and discussion groups on the rights of the most vulnerable Brazilians. She attributes her commitment to the influence of her mother, a retired schoolteacher who ran an agency that helped the poor find housing. In the late 1980s, when Gravina

was involved in the renovation of the Abrigo Maria Imaculada nursery, the institution’s director died suddenly. With no one willing to replace her, given the nursery’s financial straits, Gravina and her mother stepped in. Within a few years, they had returned the nursery to solvency, with more children than ever in its care. Gravina’s interest in Brazil’s youngest citizens doesn’t stop there. She currently serves on the municipal and state councils responsible for monitoring policy affecting the rights of children and adolescents and social services for them.

It was Gravina’s experience in the nursery that made her want to do something for the children’s mothers as well. “Women are the real heads of



Tatiana de Souza Xavier.

the great majority of families in Brazil today,” she explained. “To address enormous deficiencies in access to health care, education and housing, the government has launched programs, such as Bolsa Familia that values the role of these women heads-of-household and entrusts them with channeling the benefits to the family. Public housing programs give the title and the key to the property to the mother. But we cannot forget that we are a country that for centuries elevated the man in the family or in the professional world. I believe that only massive investment in education will change this reality.”

A lifetime in the business convinced Gravina that construction offered opportunities for women from



Clélia Floris.

Rio's *favelas* and a path out of poverty. She knew that they were already helping their husbands and fathers build and upgrade homes—and that they needed to overcome inhibitions and the stereotypes that she had never harbored. “Gender played no role in my decision as to which career to pursue,” she said. “My interest was construction. Obviously, I realized I had chosen a field dominated by men, but I knew that knowledge, dedication and competency opened doors.” A native *carioca* born into the middle class, Gravina joined the workforce at age 17, after a technical course and an internship. Her engineering degree qualified her to work on major public works, such as the Tucurí Hydroelectric Dam in Northern Brazil; Rio’s subway system; the tower of Shopping Rio Sul, the tallest structure in the city at the time; and Rio Centro, one of the city’s largest exhibition spaces.

Over the years, Gravina has seen technology advance and equipment replace brute force in construction, shattering the myth that this work is “too heavy” for women. FIB attracts women to its course via posters strategically placed in their neighborhoods and advertisements in popular media. Its training, Gravina said, begins by addressing any prejudices and stereotypes. “By the time the

trainees get to the practical phase of the course,” she said, “the difference is not related to gender but to the realization that they can do the work.” And if remnants of *machismo* remain on the job site, that is a challenge that Brazilian women appear willing to take on. According to government reports, their employment in construction has steadily increased over the last decade. From 2008 to 2009, it grew 3 percent, thanks not only to the PAC, which Lula’s successor, President Dilma Rousseff, intends to continue, but also to a building boom driven by the increase in personal income and in the availability of housing loans.

The presence of women in construction has taken hold in Canoas in the South and Fortaleza in the Northeast, which have programs similar to Projeto Mão na Massa. As demonstrated in other formerly male-dominated sectors where women are now ensconced, such as the armed services and civil aviation, the trend is not likely to reverse. On the job, noted the representative of a company that hires FIB graduates, women tend to be less wasteful with materials, which holds down costs, and more attentive to detail, which helps in specialized areas such as workplace safety. One supervisor reported an improvement in decorum where women are on the site. “Male workers become a lot more polite and careful,” he said. “The guys show up wearing cologne and they swear less,” another reported.

Marcia Vieira dos Santos.



The women whom FIB trains to become professional masons, carpenters, electricians and plumbers also receive instruction in Portuguese, math, reading floor plans, civic participation, cooperative organizations, nutrition, environmental responsibility, occupational health and safety, and business management. They specialize by opting to attend another 120 hours of instruction in a single trade. In addition to skills, the women graduate with a sense of confidence. Claudia Luzia Dionisio da Silva, 36 and mother of five, speaks with palpable pride of becoming the first female stonemason in her community. Rosangela Rocha came to the course from her father's electrical business, where she used to help out. "I'm going to steal clients from my dad!" said the trainee electrician, adding that technology has changed since her father originally learned his trade and, as a result, she finds herself teaching him.

The last phase of FIB's course is a hands-on practicum that provides invaluable experience and lets the trainees give back to the community by renovating or adding to a structure belonging to one of the institutions in the FIB network, such as the Santa Cruz de Copacabana nursery and Projeto Brincando e Estudando and Praça do Rocha, which offer after-school programs. Projeto Mão na Massa has already forged significant partnerships outside this civil-society network: Petrobras and Eletrobras, respectively the state-owned petroleum and power companies, both provide counterpart resources to make the project possible. The National Service for Industrial Education (SENAI), the Organization of Cooperatives of the State of Rio de Janeiro (OCB-SESCOOP) and the Brazilian Ministry of Justice provide instruction related to specific elements of the curriculum. The Social Service for Construction Companies (SECONCI) advises graduates during their search for jobs and maintains a database in partnership with the project to facilitate the hiring process. Abrigo Maria Imaculada, a natural ally, offers space at reasonable rent and provides child care.



*Vanderléia Constantino Dantas, Daiana Garcia Aguiar, Maria Isabel Vieira de Silva and Ana Lucia Sampaio de Oliveira.*

*National Geographic* plans to feature FIB in an upcoming issue focused on women in development; Projeto Mão na Massa recently participated in the 2011 World Social Forum in Dakar, Senegal, where its representatives shared experiences with an international audience. Meanwhile Gravina forges ahead. "I want to expand the methodology to other regions of Brazil and share our experience with other developing countries, so that we shift the gender paradigm in civil engineering," she said. Norma Sá, project coordinator for Projeto Mão na Massa, is working for passage of a bill by the state legislature of Rio de Janeiro to guarantee that women fill a specified number of the jobs in any government-funded construction project. And both Gravina and Sá want construction companies and unions to contribute toward funding Projeto Mão na Massa training programs. The struggle for equal pay and opportunity for advancement also looms. Brazilian government statistics indicate that women construction workers in entry level positions earn 80 percent of the amount paid to men starting out. "Few companies are willing to hire women, but the ones that do demand more of us," commented Norma Sá. Nonetheless the women trained by FIB can take pride in cracking the concrete ceiling and finding a niche they could not have filled just a few years ago.

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*Amy Kirschenbaum is IAF representative for Brazil.*



*Francisca Blandón Ortiz,  
general manager, Tepeyac.*

# These Boots Are Made for Managing

By Mark Caicedo

Photos by Mark Caicedo

Following in her father's footsteps, Francisca Blandón Ortiz became a cattle rancher, and she is not afraid to get her boots muddy. A founding member of IAF grantee Cooperativa de Servicios Múltiples Tepeyac, she has worked in pastures and corrals. But, these days, as the dairy cooperative's general manager, she's as likely to be at a computer as on a horse.

A tireless mother of two, Blandón Ortiz, 45, radiates both authority and charm. She was born in San Rafael del Norte, in Jinotega, where ranching is a tradition. Except for attending high school in Managua, she has lived there all her life. In 1995, she was one of only three women among the 38 local ranchers who joined forces as Tepeyac to address cattle rustling, the lack of credit that made expansion impossible and depressed prices. The ranchers began by organizing to prevent the theft of cattle, pooling resources for a loan fund and allying with two other groups, which increased membership and furthered collaboration, marketing and opportunities to industrialize production.

Today Tepeyac counts 315 dairy farmers, 72 of them women. "I've never felt at a disadvantage working with men," Blandón Ortiz said. "On the contrary, I and the other women in Tepeyac have always felt protected in any situation that might become dangerous. Rodeos expose us to risks, for example, when we assist injured riders who've been thrown off bulls



Francisca Blandón Ortiz with, from the left, Jesús Rizo Centeno, driver; Victor Manuel Herrera Zeledón, laboratory technician; and Hernán Antonio Rodríguez Rodríguez, field technician.



Courtesy Francisca Blandón Ortiz

*Blandón Ortiz uses her vacations to manage the ranch belonging to her father, a Tepeyac member.*

and transport them for medical attention. Often we leave very early for these events and remain until late at night, and to ensure our safety, the men escort us.” Relations weren’t always so consistently cordial, however. “As the co-op grew, some men became upset with the women’s increasing clout,” she recalled. “I was selected by Tepeyac’s administrative council for the management position because of my background in accounting and my history with the organization. *Machismo* still runs deep, and some men didn’t like the idea of a woman in charge, but ultimately 98 percent of the co-op’s members supported me.” That was in 2004, and to assume the post, she left the City Council of San Rafael del Norte, to which she had been elected four years earlier, an accomplishment

bearing out her claim that Nicaraguan women have gained significant ground in the past 15 years.

As Tepeyac’s new manager, Blandón Ortiz decided to focus on infrastructure. The IAF grant awarded in 2005 financed offices, a sparkling new processing plant—complete with a laboratory that ensures compliance with the standards applicable to dairy products for export—and the indoor-fairgrounds currently under construction. Finishing this facility is high on Blandón Ortiz’s list of priorities. “The most difficult needle I’ve had to thread as general manager,” she explained, “is the fierce competition among local milk producers.” She looks forward to annual fairs that she hopes will give Tepeyac’s farmers an edge in a market crowded with producers who are not



Equipment for processing cheese.

held to the same requirements for quality and safety that members of the co-op must meet.

Tepeyac produces and pasteurizes 1 million or more liters of milk annually, mostly for sale to PARMALAT-Nicaragua, which distributes it in Nicaragua and internationally. The arrangement guarantees members a stable income throughout the year and they also receive an annual dividend from the cooperative. Always on the lookout for new opportunities, Blandón Ortiz says Tepeyac is considering the advantages of processing cheese with equipment that recently arrived from a Spanish donor.

“We’ve come a long way but we still need support to reach our ultimate goal,” Blandón Ortiz said. “My vision is for a completely self-sufficient enterprise,

respected by other businesses in the municipality, and for local milk producers to reach domestic and international markets.” She somehow finds time to serve as deputy coordinator for the municipal development committee and is involved with the departmental council and in the construction of a municipal facility that will provide essential prenatal services. “Tepeyac’s accomplishments encourage me daily to continue working for the families of San Rafael,” she explained. If Blandón Ortiz’s boots are no longer muddy, they are certainly well worn.

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*Mark Caicedo is the IAF’s photo editor and has worked with the Fellowship Program since 1994.*



Louise Lexis Relus.

## Madame Louise and the Long Trek from Isolation

By Jenny Petrow and Deusibon Pierre-Mérité

All photos by Keziah Jean

**I**n October 2007, as the IAF's brand new representative for Haiti, I met with prospective grantees in Port-au-Prince. At the end of the meeting, Louise Lexis Relus appeared, glowing with perspiration, and handed me a proposal in Creole from *Oganizasyon Kominotè Fanm Veyon* [Women's Community Organization of Veyon] (OKFV). I had no idea then of the effort required to arrive (almost) on time for a 9 a.m. meeting in the capital—an eight-hour trek on foot from Veyon, her village, to *Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite*, the closest town, and an additional five hours from there by tap tap, a shared taxi. When I traveled to Veyon myself and understood what Madame Louise had gone through to find me, I knew that the IAF had to fund OKFV.

Veyon lies deep in the *Chaine de Cahos* mountain range. It has no electricity or running water; cell phone use requires a climb to the top of a tall hill. The residents' traditions are primarily oral and they know very little French. Due to its isolation, Veyon, unlike much of Haiti, is lushly forested and its soil is fertile. Farmers grow beans, rice, sorghum and peanuts as well as fruit, herbs and coffee. But the community's rudimentary storage devices are vulnerable to pests and the elements. Lack of proper storage forces farmers to sell abundant harvests at rock-bottom prices and to purchase seeds at exorbitant cost during planting season.

OKFV had never handled external funds; members' savings had always financed its production of liqueurs



*The trek to Veyon.*

and small credit operation. The IAF works with such base groups in Haiti, but some creativity is required. To develop the storage system it was proposing that the IAF fund, OKFV would need a support network. So Dieusibon Pierre-Mérité, who provides liaison and advisory services for the IAF in Haiti, and I connected OKFV with Pascale Toyo, coordinator of IAF grantee Kombit Fanm Kaskad-Dubreuil (KOFKAD), and Plateform des Organisations de Désarmes (PIOD), a farmers' organization that had received support from IAF grantee Fonds International de Développement Économique et Social (FIDES). Madame Toyo helped OKFV draft a work plan and budget, and PIOD welcomed members to nearby Désarmes, where they learned about grain storage and refined their proposal.

In January, Pierre-Mérité visited this most isolated of IAF grantees and caught up with Madame Louise, its coordinator. His interview offers a glimpse into the singular resolve of the woman whose commitment to the families scattered among the hills and ravines of Veyon convinced the IAF to invest in OKFV. —J.P.

### ***How did OKFV come to be?***

In 2006, three women from the community received training in agroprocessing in Deschapelles. We returned to Veyon intent on transmitting what we had learned to other women. Thus the idea for OKFV was born. It had 20 founding members, 15 women and five men. When we grew to 85 members in 2010, we instituted annual dues of 50 *gourdes* (about \$1.10) to help cover our costs.

### ***If OKFV is a women's organization, why does it admit men?***

Everyone asks that! The objective of the group is not to focus on women's rights but to process fruits and herbs into jams and liqueurs and to store seeds and grain. Men can become members of OKFV, but only women can hold leadership positions according to OKFV's founding charter. In 2008 members proposed calling the group Community Organization of Perodin to reflect its mixed character and to encourage it to expand to the entire

*section communale*. But the parish priest urged us to keep OKFV because the initiative to form the group came from a woman. The community is small and OKFV is its first and only organization. Life is hard, so the relationship between men and women must be based on cooperation. We need men, too!

### ***How do the male members perceive you?***

I would say as a force within the community, because they know that I am always searching for ways to help them. Neither the local authorities nor development and humanitarian organizations even know that people *live* in Veyon. When the IAF project was just getting started, something happened that really encouraged me. I had to travel a lot—to the Ministry of Social Affairs in Port-au-Prince to file our bylaws, for example—and I didn't have the time to prepare my garden for the rainy season. While I was gone, the members of OKFV organized a *kombit* [volunteer work crew] to hoe and plant my garden.

This proved to me that they know that when I travel, it is for them.

***How do the men and women get along?***

In my four years with the organization, there haven't been any conflicts.

***Do you consider yourself a leader of the community or of the organization?***

I'm a leader of an organization but also a community leader. When I find financing, it benefits the whole community, not just OKFV. I'm in the process of fighting to change the living conditions of the inhabitants of Veyon. They respect me and I respect them.

***How would you describe your leadership style?***

I am a responsible person who is true to her word. That's why people respect me. When a person says she is a community leader, she must behave as a model for the people in that community, especially one as abandoned as Veyon. You have to say "yes" and "no" with transparency. In the case of the storage depot that we're constructing, I tell members how much the IAF has given us and exactly what we're doing with every penny.

***What motivates you?***

I was born in Veyon. People here don't have access to anything. In 1993, my husband and I saw that our children had no future, so we put them in school in Port-au-Prince. But the question of the many children who stayed in Veyon and couldn't go to school weighed heavily on me. So I told the women that we had to fight to help the community and that's why we founded OKFV.

***Does being a woman affect your role as a leader?***

No! The situation is so difficult in Veyon that anyone who has leadership ability is viewed as a leader. That means both men and women.

***What type of discrimination do you experience?***

Ah, that's a good question. Within the heart of the community one could say that there isn't any discrimination. But in Petite Rivière, people call us "mountain people" and "people who came out of a hole." Our children, who go to school in town, suffer

discrimination from their classmates and teachers who consider them *moun andeyò* and *moun sòt*, backward and stupid. Sometimes, when our *madan sara* [women vendors] go to market in town, they are charged more because people think we're not very bright.

***Which donors have worked with OKFV?***

In 2008 the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) gave us seven sacks of beans and in 2010 another 10 sacks, which we used to set up a small seed bank. We started a *mutuelle solidarité*, or mutual aid association, with our savings to help people in times of need. The IAF is our only source of external financing.

***Describe OKFV's biggest challenges and most significant rewards as an IAF grantee.***

The biggest challenges have been the expense of transporting construction materials to Veyon, the first withdrawal of money from the bank in St. Marc, and the fact that participation in the project requires members to neglect some of their personal responsibilities. The most rewarding aspects: the planning guided by Madame Pascale; the IAF's method of disbursement that puts us in charge of expenditures; the purchase of mules to facilitate transportation; and your availability, Monsieur Dieusibon, to advise us.

***What is the hardest thing about managing a project?***

First, how to show the IAF that we are able to manage the money; and second, how to show the community that organization is important to making changes, despite our lack of access and resources.

***How did you handle these challenges?***

All of the women in OKFV are *madan sara* with experience managing money, including loans. Managing the IAF funds is similar. Once the disbursement arrives in our account, we review the budget developed with Madame Pascale. The two members on the account pay for construction materials up front. That protects us from price increases and we don't have excess cash on hand. We store and use the materials according to our schedule. The purchase and management of the four mules, thanks to Madame Pascale's guidance, is working out well. The member responsible for each mule receives \$10 a month toward its



*A conch shell announces OKFV's meetings on the site of the storage facility that members are building with IAF funds.*



care. The mules have generated debate; no one is allowed to use them without authorization of the board. Personal use is limited to emergencies involving sickness or death.

***What about your family?***

I'm married, the mother of five children. One went blind, which affected our morale and economic situation. In 2008, the two youngest joined the others in Port-au-Prince. My husband has stayed there while I came and went because I am also a *madan sara*. Now that the children are older, he can come back to Veyon to work the garden. Our eldest son, Marc Eddy, 26, is working toward a degree in agricultural entrepreneurship and we are really happy.

***How did you find the IAF?***

My husband's brother, Relus Alainson, lives in Port-au-Prince. His organization had sent the IAF a proposal that didn't get funded. In 2007 he told me that the IAF had announced a meeting in Port-au-Prince. He said it was important and so I discussed it with the board and we drafted a project with the support of Julien Schwartz, a *blan* [foreigner] from

Inter-Aide, an NGO working in the Chaine de Cahos. I went to the meeting and gave our proposal to Madame Jenny [Petrow].

***What is the hardest part about trying to raise money for OKFV?***

The hardest thing is not speaking French. Last week, when I was interviewed for a film, the gentleman spoke to me in French and I told him, "I'm sorry, I don't speak French."

***What are OKFV's greatest strengths?***

First, all the women are merchants, so they know a lot about budgets and cash flow. Second, the level of transparency among the group. And finally, the solidarity in the community, including men who support women's activities and respect their decisions.

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*Jenny Petrow is IAF representative for Haiti, the Dominican Republic and the English-speaking Caribbean. Keziah Jean studies at Ciné Institute in Jacmel.*

# Health Care in the Shadow of the Volcanoes

By José Toasa and Paula Durbin

Any approach to Lake Atitlan is a scenic route but nothing along the way quite prepares a traveler for the first breathtaking glimpse of this vast expanse of water spectacularly set among mountains and volcanoes. According to the Maya, the site is *rumxux ruch'lie*, where the world began, and the volcanoes are the guardians of the lake as well as of the land and its inhabitants.

Rxiin Tnamet, a grassroots organization whose name means “of the people,” also looks out for the well-being of lakeside residents. Headquartered in Santiago Atitlán, a town of 50,000, mostly indigenous Tz’utujile Guatemalans, it provides health care that has won the praise of international donors, the local government and, most importantly, the people it serves, as our visits have confirmed. When we stepped off the boat that had brought us from Panajachel in March, for example, we didn’t know which bustling street would take us to the IAF grantee’s clinic. “Don’t worry if you get lost,” advised the woman who gave us directions. “Anyone you ask will know where Rxiin is.”

Rxiin is thriving under the leadership of Leticia Toj, the nurse practitioner who is its executive director. Beyond Santiago Atitlán, Toj’s commitment to improving health services for indigenous Guatemalans has taken her into ministries, universities, congressional offices and a regional alliance of her peers. Language, locale and a way of life define ethnicity in Guatemala, where at least 40 percent of the country’s 13.8 million citizens are considered indigenous. Dress can be an important

component of this identity. Toj is a proud Kaqchikel, a member of one of largest of Guatemala’s 22 Maya groups, and she always wears the traditional *traje* consisting of a hand-loomed skirt, lavishly embroidered sash and *huipil*, or blouse, that convey to any other Maya a wealth of information about her. Wherever indigenous Guatemalans live, the richly patterned textiles of this everyday apparel grace the landscape as moving tapestries. The *traje* and other features of their culture endure despite a tragic history of systematic exploitation and impoverishment. The book *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, by the 1992 Nobel laureate, attracted international attention to their plight and to the brutal civil war that lasted from 1960 to 1996 when the Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace ended hostilities. The atrocities targeting indigenous Guatemalans during that period and the utter disregard for their human rights have led to the characterization of the war as genocide.

Toj was born during the early years of the conflict in rural Chimaltenango, a department located in the heart of Guatemala’s *altiplano*, and she grew up as the violence escalated. Even had times been





Mark Caicedo

*Santiago Atitlán.*

better, her gender would have destined her for a life of limited options. Her own father would not look at her when she was born. “People believed that boys were more valuable than girls and that they brought more pride to their parents,” Toj explained and these biases persist. But within a few months she won him over and he became a wellspring of support and encouragement. In those days, many indigenous families considered educating girls an extravagance rather than an investment. But Toj’s father thought of his daughter differently. Overruling her mother, he allowed her to enroll in school—with the proviso that she still had the same chores expected of all girls, which included fetching water, babysitting and making tortillas.

“Learn to speak Spanish well,” Toj recalled her father saying. “I want to see you interact among different kinds of people.’ He had been profoundly

affected by the war and he did not want me to be discriminated against as an indigenous person or as a woman.” Toj finished her elementary education in a system segregated by ethnicity. Nonetheless she emerged completely bilingual and ready for high school, in Guatemala City, where at the height of the civil war, she was the only indigenous student. While some classmates disparaged her, she found staunch allies in the school authorities. Insistent on expressing her Kaqchikel identity, she negotiated their permission to wear her *traje*—except in gym class where she put on shorts like everyone else. She vividly recalls showing up for an independence day celebration and being warned by other students that she would have to wear the school uniform if she wanted to participate. But instead of requiring her to change out of her *traje*, the principal gave her the Guatemalan flag and put her at the head



*Francisca Chiquival Men, midwife, nurse and Rxiin’s coordinator of community development; Marta Floridalma Ruiz Ajtujal, nurse and medical technician; Leticia Toj, Rxiin’s executive director and director of nursing; and Lidia Ester Sojuel Rabinal, accountant-manager.*

of the formation. Toj did form friendships with other students. “But,” she said, “they all wanted to be engineers, doctors, and lawyers in the capital. My dream ever since I was a little girl was to help communities without access to services—as a nutritionist, a social worker or a nurse.”

A government scholarship made nursing school possible—in Quetzaltenango because the capital had become too dangerous for indigenous Guatemalans. Again the lone Maya in her class, Toj wore her lab coat over her *traje* as she went about her practicum in hospital wards. By the time she received her diploma in 1984—the only graduate in a *traje*—she had accepted an offer to direct nursing in the hospital in Santiago Atitlán run by Project Concern International, a California-based grassroots group that has since grown into an aid organization.

“I wanted to go where I was needed most,” Toj said, “I felt I could be of use.” The work gave her the opportunity to address two of Guatemala’s grimmest statistics: A child mortality rate among the highest in the Western Hemisphere and the shocking likelihood of indigenous women to die in childbirth.

Even before Toj arrived, local volunteers had been trying to organize around the urgent needs of pregnant women, new mothers, infants and young children. Francisca Chiviliuy, Rxiin’s coordinator of education and a licensed midwife, recalls their uphill battle. The only girl in her village to complete the sixth grade, she had been avidly recruited by PCI. She and other recruits who went door-to-door trying to organize mothers and midwives encountered overt hostility. An affront to the authority of husbands, fathers and brothers,

the activism also brought forth deeply-rooted distrust. “People met us with sticks, hot water, even dogs,” said Chiviluy. “They were convinced that inoculations would kill their children and sterilize everyone else. We fought, continued and little by little people changed.” Even so, many were reluctant to come forward during the war years, aware that any meeting of indigenous Guatemalans might provoke the authorities. The situation turned dangerous when Chiviluy and others began to receive death threats, but they refused to be deterred.

As infant and maternal death rates began plummeting in the late 1980s, thanks to proper care, their persistence became appreciated. Rxiiin has grown to include almost 100 trained volunteers. Few know Spanish so the language of instruction is Tz’utujile.

If many cannot read and write, Toj shrugs that off as inconsequential. Rxiiin teaches them to hold a pencil and make their mark and otherwise adapts its training. “They didn’t have the opportunity to learn,” Toj said, “but that doesn’t mean they don’t know anything. They know a lot and they are very intelligent. Because they can’t take notes, they pay close attention and train themselves to remember everything.”

In the early 1990s, PCI announced its intention to end operations in Santiago Atitlán due to lack of funds. Toj knew Rxiiin could never replace the hospital, but she thought it could focus on preventing some of the conditions that had required treatment. PCI agreed that the women in Rxiiin had the technical expertise and the NGO stayed long enough for Toj and others to hone their managerial and financial skills.

Rxiiin’s clinic operating out of the organization’s headquarters offers lakeside residents daily access to a full-time physician, dentist and nurse and to a professionally-staffed pharmacy. A smaller clinic in San Juan La Laguna, staffed part-time, spares residents a trip to Santiago Atitlán that can take hours over footpaths through the mountains and ravines. The backbone of Rxiiin’s community development program is still its networks of trained volunteers. They account for a drastic reduction in malnutrition wherever Rxiiin has a presence and for the eradication of measles and mumps. While 80 percent of deliveries still occur at home, almost no one dies during childbirth now. “We work with midwives, mothers, husbands,” explained Chiviluy. “We train them to detect danger signals and prepare them for emergencies.”

Toj would like to see more facilities take Rxiiin’s multiethnic approach to medical care. This includes services accessible in local languages, acceptance of traditional Mayan birthing positions and sensitivity to such concerns as modesty. “Being in a hospital

José Toasa



*When Arturo Méndez, a young office assistant and volunteer firefighter, first mentioned marriage to Leticia Toj more than 20 years ago, she insisted on her freedom to practice her profession, a condition Méndez accepted. Their two children, both medical students, want to serve rural Guatemalans like their mother. Inspired by Toj, Méndez finished high school. Now an office manager, he still volunteers as a firefighter.*



*Leticia Toj with local midwives.*

can be like being in a foreign country,” she commented. She and her team have worked hard to keep Rxiiin’s programs going with resources from international and Guatemalan donors. One negotiation resulted in significant discount on medications. But there have also been setbacks. Rxiiin lost its entire savings when its bank failed. The deposit had been intended to finance Rxiiin’s expansion, which was further delayed by the global economic slowdown that has limited the availability of resources.

Nothing, however, tested the resourcefulness and resolve of Toj and Rxiiin like the devastation wreaked when Tropical Storm Stan struck in 2005. The rain filled the crater of the Tolimán volcano and put such pressure on the peak that one side gave way, causing a catastrophic avalanche of mud, trees and rocks. Here, where the world began, one young girl described the horrific sound, it seemed to be coming

to an end. Some 120,000 Guatemalans lost their homes. Many relocated to emergency shelters without electricity, sufficient water or safe bathroom facilities. Health problems resulted immediately. Although Toj and her team had never experienced a crisis of such magnitude, they acted quickly on behalf of the homeless families. Among the donors responding, the IAF allowed the grantee to redirect funds and supplemented its original award. (See *Grassroots Development* 2006.) In addition to offering urgently needed, stepped-up medical care, this enabled Rxiiin to help orphaned and displaced students finish the school year and provide seed capital to women for the microenterprises that today support their families. “Some now earn more than their husbands,” Toj commented.

The foray into economic development and education has added these priorities to Rxiiin’s agenda.



*Rxiin's seed capital helped its volunteer María Rionda Chojpán recover from Hurricane Stan. Applying skills learned from her mother and grandmother, she began making huipiles and soon had to hire assistants to meet the demand. Her children, Rosario, Felipe and Josefa Esquina Reanda, also help out.*

“There are so many needs,” Toj explained. So that Rxiin can continue to address them, she has thought about the leadership for the future. “I would like to find someone perhaps better than me,” she said, “ideally, someone from Santiago Atitlán, so the person will stay. I’m looking for academic training, experience. That might be difficult to find but not impossible.” Only 5 percent of indigenous Guatemalans graduate from high school, resistance to educating girls lingers and just .05 percent of indigenous women have university degrees. But Toj is encouraged that more fathers have begun to feel differently about daughters and conditions are better for young Mayan women. “There is still a long way to go, but things are changing,” she added. “Meanwhile, I’m trying to transmit the vision.”

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*José Toasa is the IAF representative for Guatemala.*



*Orphaned by Hurricane Stan, Juan Antonio Damián finished high school and continued his education, thanks to Rxiiin's IAF-funded program of scholarship aid.*

# Resources for Women's Microenterprises

By Miriam E. Brandão

Photos by Rebecca Janes

I first met María Auxiliadora Vanegas Pérez in 2002 when, as the Inter-American Foundation's representative, I was in Nicaragua to assess a proposal submitted by Fondo de Desarrollo para la Mujer (FODEM). Vanegas Pérez, its executive director, so impressed me with her knowledge of the microfinance sector, her mix of professionalism and warmth, her technical skills and her experience, that I decided to take a big chance on a new organization with no track record.

Donors play a crucial role in microfinance. They can support experimentation and assist service providers toward the self-sufficiency essential to enabling significant numbers of poor people to improve their lives. Soon after opening its doors in 1969, the IAF began funding organizations offering loans or working capital to the poor, which was

considered very risky at the time. Such programs run by and for women were an anomaly in the 1970s, but the IAF counted several among its grantees well before the conventional wisdom came to accept the notion of credit as transformative in a woman's access to opportunity. Forty years later, based on exactly that premise, a microfinance industry has evolved to serve millions of clients worldwide, yet the barriers to financial services persist and very few credit institutions in Latin America operate with a gender perspective. In Nicaragua, for example, only three or four, out of the 21 that serve women, specifically focus on them as clients.

In 1993, with seed capital from the IAF, the educators, social scientists and development specialists who had founded Centro para la Participación Democrática y el Desarrollo (Cenzontle) five years earlier, launched



Conselo Martín is one of four employees in the factory owned by FODEM client Guadalupe Rivera Orupia.



María Auxiliadora Vanegas Pérez

FODEM, a separate microfinance institution (MFI) serving low-income women almost exclusively. Vanegas Pérez was hired to run it. Her background included 11 years as a microfinance professional and five years with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As a young university graduate in economics with a diploma in bank administration, she had joined the Fundación para el Apoyo a la Microempresa (FAMA), Acción International's affiliate in Peru, which grew from two offices to 21 over her eight-year tenure. During her time with UNHCR, she helped with the repatriation of 17,000 displaced Nicaraguans after hostilities ceased in their country and with income generation and credit programs in 25 municipalities in northern Nicaragua.

Microfinance can help the poor increase their income, sustain viable enterprises and reduce their vulnerability to the shocks from which a family can take years to recover—the illness or death of a primary breadwinner, weather phenomena and theft. MFIs can be a lifeline for people without the collateral to obtain a loan from a conventional bank and allow households to acquire assets and invest



Lucina Lara used her loan for her small business selling groceries and other items.

in nutrition, health and education. But providing financial services to the poor is an expensive proposition. To cover the proportionately higher costs of extending small loans, which require the same personnel and resources as larger loans, MFIs often charge higher interest. Faced with exorbitant rates levied by moneylenders in the informal sector, up to 20 percent a day, or no access to credit at all, borrowers willingly accept the MFIs' terms. Liquidity and capital boost the return on their labor to many times the interest charged or enable them to take advantage of opportunities.

According to Vanegas Pérez, IAF's award provided the infusion of cash necessary to achieve operational and financial equilibrium at a crucial stage. "FODEM's success would not have been possible without the Inter-American Foundation," she said, "which provided the support necessary to FODEM's expansion and consolidation. It also contributed toward the creation and preservation of jobs in microenterprises managed by women; the strengthening of the management as the organization sought to obtain new

resources to continue to grow. It was crucial." Anyone who wants to put a number on this declaration should consider these figures. In 2001, a staff of 18 operating in FODEM's central office in Managua and two branch offices in Estelí and Managua managed a loan portfolio of \$500,000 and provided loans to some 1,000 clients, of whom 94 percent were women. The IAF's grant more than doubled FODEM's capital to \$680,000. Within seven years, under Vanegas Pérez, FODEM had 65 employees in seven offices, a loan portfolio of \$5.5 million and a clientele of 8,500, of which 94 percent were still women. This represents an amazing growth in the value of the portfolio and the number of borrowers—while the institution continued to reach the poorest segments of the population, as evidenced by the size of its average loan which was under \$500.

FODEM had designed its IAF-funded program with a view toward self-sufficiency through growth, efficiency and productivity. Elements of its success include transparent criteria for approval and loan recovery, its requirement of sufficient guarantees,



*Yadira Gonzales, a loan recipient, and her four employees make up to 1,500 bricks a day for sale to local builders.*

and interest charged at market rates. FODEM tailors a variety of products to female borrowers running micro- and small businesses: working capital, equipment loans, home loans, commercial loans, agriculture loans, personal loans for education, health, training and household needs, and small backyard-garden loans financing infrastructure, equipment and inputs. Support does not end with loans. FODEM works with Cenzontle to offer women training in civil rights, the prevention of domestic violence, and personal and business development. It continues to be a sound organization despite the impact of worldwide financial crisis on the microfinance industry and the challenges posed to the Nicaraguan microfinance sector by the No Pay Movement launched in 2008 by a group of borrowers clamoring for a moratorium on loan repayments and a reduction of the interest rates they had agreed to pay. That is because FODEM is structured for efficiency; it interacts productively with other Nicaraguan microfinance institutions; and it remains focused on meeting the needs of poor women

and treating them as valued clients. Nine years after receiving its first disbursement from the IAF, FODEM continues to emphasize credit, organization, education and technical assistance as the foundation for women's economic security.

Vanegas Pérez considers the development of harmonious, productive and committed teams her most significant professional achievement. She has always worked on the assumption that employees who are motivated and feel valued give any enterprise an edge. At FODEM, she hired talented and capable staff and delegated to them responsibility for operations. She left FODEM in October 2010 to recharge her batteries and seek new challenges. As a wife and the mother of two sons, she still finds time to volunteer with Rotary International and other worthy causes. Whatever Vanegas Pérez decides to pursue in the future, she will give it her all and will continue to make a difference. Meanwhile FODEM remains in good hands.

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*Miriam E. Brandão is currently IAF representative for Peru.*



*FODEM extended a loan to Irma Ramos to develop her fruit stand in a clean, covered market.*

# A New Frontline for Former *Guerrilleras*

By Seth Micah Jesse and Rolando Gutiérrez



Linda Hess Miller

Courtesy ADEPROCCA

Women warriors at ease in the 1980s and on duty leading community development in El Salvador in 2011.



Jill Wheeler

ADEMUR, founded by Mabel Reyes, is an organization of rural women that markets livestock, extends in-kind loans and provides social services. Evelyn Huevo, above, is distributing school supplies from Manos de Esperanza, a Salvadoran hometown association in San Francisco that works with ADEPROCCA, the NGO she founded.

Widespread poverty, brutal repression, terror and the total loss of trust in the political system motivated many Salvadorans to join the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) that waged a guerrilla war against the country's military government from 1980 to 1992. The conflict claimed 75,000 lives, spurred a massive exodus, destroyed much of the country's infrastructure and set the economy back years. It involved thousands of troops on both sides. While no women fought for the Salvadoran government, when hostilities finally ceased some 30 percent of the combatants demobilized from the FMLN were female. According to Jocelyn Viterna's article "Pulled, Pushed and Persuaded: Explaining Women's Mobilization into the Salvadoran Guerrilla Army," published in the *American Journal of Sociology* of July 2006, although multiple paths had led these *guerrilleras* to the FMLN, biography and education would define whether their activism transferred to civilian life. Her point is illustrated by two women, Evelyn Huezo and Mabel Reyes, who joined the resistance movement under very different circumstances, but 40 years later, are both carrying their ideals forward—into grassroots development.

Neither woman could have imagined a trajectory that would take her out of a conservative, patriarchal society onto the battlefield and from there into a leadership role in successful community organizations. In the mid-1970s Huezo, one of eight children born to a leatherworker and his wife, was focused on her studies in social work at the National University in San Salvador. Reyes, who had grown up in La Unión, San Miguel and Usulután, was tending a store and harvesting coffee to pay for her school uniform and the medical treatment her father needed. Within a few short years, they and legions of other Salvadoran women would abandon their studies, careers, homes and loved ones to join the armed opposition.

"My close friends and those of my siblings were killed, but the last straw was the murder of Monseñor [Oscar] Romero in March 1980," said Huezo, who has never doubted the regime's role in the assassination. "If they were capable of that, what wouldn't they do with us? I had a house, a companion, studies; my life had direction but the country did not." That same year the Salvadoran army launched its "scorched earth" campaign—wholesale massacres, aerial bombings and the torching of everything that stood in its way. Along with 500 other families, Mabel Reyes and her parents fled to Honduras, where the teenager was denounced to the local military as a *guerrillera* and came under surveillance. Aware that she was in danger, Reyes decided that she would rather "die in El Salvador than disappear in Honduras." Once she was back in her country, her survival instincts pushed her to join a group of resistance fighters whose path she happened to cross. As she had hoped, she found safety. "I had a weapon," she explained, "I had God, and I had the support of all my fellow combatants."

### Equal opportunity

With the women ubiquitous in the *guerrilla*—in communications, logistics and as battlefield nurses—the concept of gender equality, which had not yet entered the Salvadoran lexicon, was moot. Male and female combatants were treated the same during the war, according to Huezo, with advancement based on ability. "Attitude, flexibility and energy enabled women to take on any type of work and do it well, including fighting in the cities and the countryside, organizing in prisons or abroad, infiltrating the military and recruiting army officers to join the revolutionary struggle," she said. She began serving the resistance by supporting commandos in San Salvador and then monitoring the enemy's movements. After the FMLN's initial coordinated military campaign in January 1981, she was among the urban guerrillas



NGO connections: As Santiago, left, Carlos Consalvi launched Radio Venceremos to which Huezo and Reyes were assigned during the war. Consalvi became the founder and director of IAF grantee Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (MUPI). Here he is digitizing old formats for archiving; the screen includes a reference to PADECOMSM, an organization that Huezo assisted in the mid-1980s.

transferred to the rebel stronghold in the department of Morazán in the mountains of northeast El Salvador. Her first assignment to the front lines, in 1981, with the strategic communications team of the FMLN's high command, gave her an opportunity to demonstrate her organizational and analytical skills. Responsibility developed her confidence.

Both Huezo and Reyes collaborated with the clandestine Radio Venceremos, launched in 1982 by Carlos Consalvi, then a Venezuelan journalist who used Santiago as his *nom de guerre*. (See *Grassroots Development* 2009.) Reyes, under the alias Estenia, monitored broadcasts from conventional stations and developed programming for Santiago. According to an account in *Las Mil y Una Historias de Radio Venceremos* by José Ignacio López Vigil (UCA Editores, 1991), he and Estenia were wounded in the same incident in 1985. Consalvi echoed Huezo and Reyes on the egalitarian treatment in the resistance movement. This spilled over into rural areas, he said, rebalancing traditional relationships. "My husband used to beat

me, but the war changed him," he recalled hearing. He retains a vivid impression of the guerrillas' practice of relaying instructions through women up the chain of command. Women were in leadership positions at all levels of the resistance.

#### A future foreshadowed

If combat duty on the front lines exposed Reyes and Huezo to equal treatment and gave them confidence in their abilities, their role in the social-welfare efforts of the resistance would determine their life's work. Reyes attended and later directed one of the FMLN's political-ideological "schools," and she was profoundly affected by the emphasis on the moral justification for the struggle and the notion of sacrifice. "I learned solidarity and became politically and socially aware," she recalled. "When we saw how people lived, we would say to ourselves, 'What we are doing is just.' We weren't interested in anything else, just the changes we wanted to see." In densely populated El Salvador, combatants had daily contact with



*MUPI has received multiple awards for its preservation of memory and is a popular destination for educational field trips that have been facilitated by IAF's grant. The archival photos in this article are from MUPI's collection.*

civilians, especially in areas from which the government had withdrawn. The battle for their hearts and minds was integral to the FMLN's strategy to defeat the counterinsurgency, and it included addressing urgent needs. The FMLN stepped in with protection that allowed farmers to produce the staples required to feed the guerrillas and the civilian population. It provided security for refugees as they were fleeing or returning. Organized groups of sympathizers, some of which became pillars of Salvadoran civil society, joined in the effort, distributing such essentials as batteries, clothing, medicines, books and newspapers.

Among the services that the FMLN offered its own soldiers were healthcare and primary education. Huezo considers her assignment to the guerrilla version of the Escuela Militar her most rewarding tour of duty. "I was privileged to teach reading and writing to my combat colleagues, many of them brilliant military leaders but illiterate," she explained. "Some are now lawyers and

policemen who will never forget who taught them to read and write." Reyes also taught other combatants these basic skills. When she was wounded, she was sent to recover in Colomoncagua, Honduras, where she worked with the refugee community. After distinguishing herself as a leader, she joined the team that escorted Salvadorans to safety in Colomoncagua. In 1989, she organized the repatriation of 700 individuals, accompanying them on foot from Colomoncagua to the community of Segundo Montes in Morazán.

After the Escuela Militar, Huezo was posted to the rebel strongholds of northeast El Salvador. There, she helped the population organize and make their needs known. Her work has had a lasting impact, particularly in northern Morazán, where, in 1984, residents founded el Patronato para el Desarrollo de las Comunidades de Morazán y San Miguel (PADECOMSM) in part to help fill the vacuum in public services created by the civil war. PADECOMSM has an exemplary record of assisting communities



Mabel Reyes oversees the production of animal feed from corn husks.



Evelyn Huezo with workers in la Nahuizalqueña, a jam-processing factory in Nahuizalco, Sonsonate, built with support from ADEPROCCA and the Italian government.

during the war and during the transition that followed. In 1998, PADECOMSM received an IAF grant to organize grassroots associations, develop microenterprises and support responsible agricultural practices. (For the IAF's study on the results of PADECOMSM's grant, e-mail [mcuevas@iaf.gov](mailto:mcuevas@iaf.gov).)

### Home from the war

As a new FMLN recruit in 1981, Huezo had expected the conflict to last a few months. When it stretched to 11 years, the personal sacrifices expected of a *guerrillera* became difficult. Huezo had headed to the warfront with her husband but the marriage could not withstand the difficulties. Women in the resistance felt that they should postpone motherhood because of the harsh conditions and also because it would take them out of combat. But, Huezo recalled, they thought about it constantly "as a dream that was slipping away." Reyes married another fighter, and admits that wartime circumstances were a challenge. "We really couldn't be together, although our commitment to the struggle sustained us."

When the war finally ended in 1992, with the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords, a home

and family became possible again, but at a price that at least some *guerrilleras* had not anticipated. The foundations of El Salvador's patriarchal society had not cracked or shifted. The opportunities afforded women on the frontlines weren't available in civilian life. While the Peace Accords had brought the military under civilian control, provided for demobilization of FMLN units as well as land transfers, and allowed the FMLN to form a political party and participate in elections, they fell short of Reyes' expectations. "The Army is back in the barracks," she conceded. "The Peace Accords said what would be done for the wounded in the war, and there was follow-up. But in terms of women, our situation wasn't mentioned. There is nothing to follow up on." Additionally, she pointed out, desperate poverty persisted throughout El Salvador.

After a decade on the frontlines, Huezo returned to San Salvador but what, she wondered, were her options for pursuing the ideals that had attracted her to the resistance? She decided to complete her university studies, and this brought her back into contact with colleagues who shared her interest.

***"The Peace Accords said what would be done for the wounded in the war, and there was follow-up. But in terms of women, our situation wasn't mentioned. There is nothing to follow up on."***

Still in school, she joined the board of directors of Fundación Promotora de Productores y Empresarios Salvadoreños (PROESA), managing projects aimed at improving the housing and livelihoods of former FMLN combatants. Experience as marketing specialist with another NGO prompted her to found Asociación para el Desarrollo Empresarial de Productores y Comercializadores Centroamericanos (ADEPROCCA) in 2001. Its partners in supporting a vast array of community priorities include the Salvadoran Ministry of Education, the diaspora in the U.S., international donors and other NGOs. In 2002, ADEPROCCA and PROESA collaborated on an IAF-funded marketing project benefiting women in central El Salvador. Some of the women are currently producing candies labeled with their own brand.

Reyes founded Asociación de Mujeres Rurales de El Salvador (ADEMUR), a current IAF grantee that

trains women to raise and market sheep and "lends" them pelibuey lambs that they can pay back with future offspring. ADEMUR also manages the water system in two villages, invoicing users, collecting fees and maintaining the system. As a legally constituted nongovernmental organization with some assets, ADEMUR purchased space and now has its own office. The work lets Reyes apply the skills she developed during the war and provides an opportunity for professional growth, and like service in the resistance, said Reyes, it demands personal sacrifice and perseverance. "But," she added, "when you get involved in things like this, your batteries get recharged and you keep moving forward." Recently the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly passed a comprehensive bill dealing with violence against women, which representatives from ADEMUR helped draft. "Maybe it's not everything we'd hoped for, but we feel like the door has been pushed open a little," said Reyes. "You have to participate and express your opinions so that you can build a true democracy." Her own participation took a new direction in 2009 when she began work as an aide to Congresswoman Sonia Margarita Rodríguez of the FMLN.

Huezo's decade in the *guerrilla* helped her advance the goals of ADEPROCCA, which provides the poor training and economic opportunities. "The war helped us develop many skills that continue to be useful today, such as political analysis and critical thinking," she said. Those skills have helped her and others make sense of the arc of their lives and reconcile participation in the conflict with work in community development. Huezo's sensitivity to social issues has been "transferred to another battlefield," she said. "I think that if women today are given the opportunity to participate, are trained and are trusted, they will respond and contribute from their trenches, just as they did in the *guerrilla*."

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*Seth Micah Jesse is IAF representative for El Salvador.*

*Rolando Gutiérrez provides liaison and advisory services for the IAF in El Salvador*

## First Juried Competition: A Forum for IAF Fellows' Findings

*Grassroots Development* is pleased to introduce a new section of the journal dedicated to short articles by IAF Fellows that have been juried by a subcommittee of the scholars who screen the applicants to IAF's program of Grassroots Development Fellowships.

The IAF is the only donor that specifically funds academic research targeting grassroots development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Since 1974, our Fellowships have supported doctoral students, post-doctoral researchers, master's degree candidates and, a handful of outstanding grassroots leaders conducting independent study. Between 2000 and 2006 the IAF suspended all Fellowships for budgetary reasons. In 2007, one component was reinstated: support for doctoral dissertation research undertaken by students in U.S. universities who have advanced to Ph.D. candidacy.

In the fall of 2010, all Fellows in the four cycles since reinstatement were invited to submit their manuscripts for judging. The peer review resulted in the selection of two for publication in this issue. We are excited about this new feature, most obviously because it brings some of the benefit of the Fellowship program to a broader audience and because it represents another credential for the authors whose work appears here. But the competition has value even for those whose manuscripts were not selected because of the thoughtful feedback that the reviewers communicate, through the IAF, to each contestant.

Our first two winners, Amanda Fulmer and Laura Brewington, bring fresh voices and a human dimension to academic research. We urge you to read their articles. *Grassroots Development* thanks everyone who contributed to the success of this first competition. We will be announcing a second round very soon. For more information on the IAF's Fellowships, visit [www.iie.org/iaf](http://www.iie.org/iaf).—P.D.



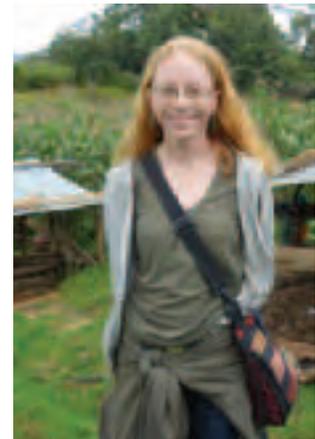
Voters in Cocachacra.

## Mining and Democracy: International Law Goes Local

By Amanda M. Fulmer

The summer before I left for more than a year of dissertation research as an IAF Fellow in Peru and Guatemala, I taught an undergraduate course at the University of Washington, where I am a doctoral student in political science. I told my students that a key unit would cover democracy and asked them to focus on two questions: What is democracy? How do we get it? I assigned works by the canonical figures who write on the topic (such as Robert Dahl, Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama). At the end of the term, I turned in my grades, satisfied that I had given a fair overview of the subject. Two weeks later, I boarded a plane for Peru, where I was to be confronted daily with my own questions: What is democracy? How do we get it?

For the next 16 months, I studied how indigenous communities resist the incursion of mining into their territories, something that had fascinated me ever since I worked in Peru with a nonprofit whose mission was to protect the rights of communities facing extractive projects in their backyards. In particular, I was interested in the right of such communities to “consultation” under Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization. The Convention, which has been



Courtesy Amanda Fulmer

Amanda Fulmer

ratified by Peru, Guatemala and 20 other countries, mostly in Latin America, requires that communities be consulted on legislation and projects that might affect them, but offers no guidance as to what constitutes a consultation in actual practice.

For the first decade after the Convention went into effect (in 1991), the provision on consultation was largely ignored. Activists had lobbied for stronger language during the drafting of the Convention (e.g., the right of communities to grant or withhold “consent” for a given project), and consultation was a disappointing alternative, considered so weak and undefined as to be irrelevant. Nonetheless, in the early 2000s “consultation” began to take on a political life all its own for indigenous peoples in Latin America. Suddenly, communities began clamoring for their right and even staging their own consultation when the government refused to coordinate one. I was convinced that this surprising development could tell us something important about the indigenous movement and about democracy in Latin America.

During the first month of my research period, I served as an official international observer at a community-led consultation in southern Peru. As one of the few consultations that have taken place in the country, the undertaking was scrutinized by a wide audience. A major mining company, Southern, had announced plans for its Tía María project in the province of Islay, in the Arequipa region, and many residents had serious reservations. The economy in Islay is based primarily on small-scale agriculture. If Southern were to launch Tía María, would the mining operation require so much water that agriculture would suffer? The company countered that its technology was the newest and most sophisticated available and that risks to the water supply were exaggerated. Mining and agriculture could coexist, Southern’s representatives claimed. In fact, they argued, Tía María could be a boon, given so few other opportunities for economic development.

But whether the mine would prove a gift or a curse, it would certainly alter life in Islay province. In view of the controversy, how should the decision be reached to permit or refuse the mine? Who should sort through the claims and counterclaims, rhetoric and fact, and make the determination? Peru is referred to as *un país minero*, a mining country, and

the Peruvian government has historically promoted mining and approved petitions for new ventures, despite fierce criticism based on environmental and social grounds. Communities have often protested, with words or with roadblocks, but have had very limited success in preventing a project from going forward.

By the early 21st century, however, expectations regarding the interaction between government and citizens had undergone a fundamental shift. After a period of autocratic rule, electoral democracy was restored in 2000. Two years later, in the northern province of Piura, the citizens of Tambogrande decided that their government was not paying sufficient attention to the opposition to a proposal for a mine there, and they staged their own consultation by organizing a nonbinding community referendum on the mine. Participants voted overwhelmingly against allowing the project to proceed, and, facing public pressure, the company withdrew voluntarily.

Because the Tambogrande case became widely known in Peru and abroad, when the consultation was scheduled in Cocachacra, I jumped at the chance to be involved. Upon our arrival there, another observer and I were ushered into a room where local authorities were hard at work on a Saturday night preparing for the vote the next day. They weren’t going to stop until everything was ready— polling places, credentials, coordination plans. Democracy requires a lot of organization.

The next morning, we had bread, avocados and coffee for breakfast at a market stall and then got to work. Thousands of residents streamed into the six polling places around the region, many coming straight from tending their fields. They were shown to a table staffed by volunteers and given a ballot on which to indicate *sí* or *no* regarding the mine. Voters who could sign their name did so; others made their mark with an inky finger. Everyone exited the polling places with their index and middle fingers stained purple to show that they had voted. I spoke to more than a dozen purple-fingered voters about why they supported or opposed the mine and about their perceptions of the proceedings. All agreed that it was an important day for Cocachacra because the voices of the community would be heard. Several people declined to speak with me; I might not be eager to

speak to a stranger about a hot-button issue. Early in the morning, busloads of police officers had arrived from the regional capital, ostensibly to keep peace during the voting, although there was never any indication that violence would break out. What would it be like to walk past armed officers to cast my vote? Democracy requires courage.

The polls closed as planned at 4:00 p.m. (actually closer to 4:15, this being Latin America) and the organizers began the tally. Serious about recording each vote accurately, the volunteers pored over the ballots where the intent was unclear. Voting is mandatory in Peru, and, as elsewhere in Latin America, dissatisfaction with available options is often registered by leaving a ballot blank. The volunteers tabulated not only *sí* and *no* but also blank and spoiled ballots. Darkness fell as the count proceeded, and the observers began to shiver: the Peruvian highlands can be

of the technicalities (or lack thereof) in an international treaty.

In addition to following two mining controversies in Peru, I studied one in Guatemala, where community-led consultations have really taken off and there have been dozens to date. I served as an international observer for two consultations in the western highlands. As part of my duties, I completed an extensive survey about what I witnessed at the assigned polling place—the adequacy of the facilities, the preparation of the organizers. The questions mostly seemed routine, but a few surprised me: “Was there music at the consultation?” “Was there an atmosphere of civic festiveness?” This brought back memories of playing with the many children who were underfoot as the organizers counted the hundreds of ballots. Ignoring the mayor’s stern admonitions to quiet down and go outside, I chased

***Democracy imposes requirements on government,  
but it also depends on the initiative of ordinary people.***

chilly once the sun disappears. Undeterred, dozens of local residents waited at the polls for the results, chatting excitedly with each other. By the light of cell phones, the count continued. It was hours before an official announcement could be made, but no one seemed in a hurry to leave. Democracy requires dedication.

The outcome of consultations on mines and other extractive projects is rarely in doubt before the votes are tallied. I expected the vote to turn out overwhelmingly against Tía María, and it did. The authorities, of course, are under no legal obligation to defer to the preference expressed. The Convention does not provide for community-led consultations. As a form of political expression, they emerged from the creativity and initiative of grassroots organizers. Democracy relies on the rule of law, certainly, but the phenomenon of community-led consultations demonstrates that the law is susceptible to interpretation, discussion and application at the grassroots level. In the eyes of the people of Cocachacra, ILO Convention 169 guarantees the right to participate in decisions that fundamentally affect them, regardless

the kids around the table stacked with ballots as they screamed with laughter. Sometimes, democracy is about pure joy and exuberance.

After hundreds of structured interviews, hours and hours in the archives and countless informal conversations, I concluded my research and returned to the University of Washington. The next time I teach on democracy, I might do things differently. I still want my students to read the work of major scholars in the field, but I also want them to understand how democracy plays out on the ground. I’ll tell them that democracy imposes requirements on government, but it also depends on the initiative of ordinary people. And perhaps I’ll liven up class. As I learned during my research period, music and a festive atmosphere are surely among the answers to my own questions, “What is democracy?” and “How do we get it?”.

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*Amanda M. Fulmer was in the 2009-2010 cycle of IAF Fellows. She expects to finish her dissertation in political science in 2012.*

## Agriculture and Conservation in the Galápagos Islands

By Laura Brewington

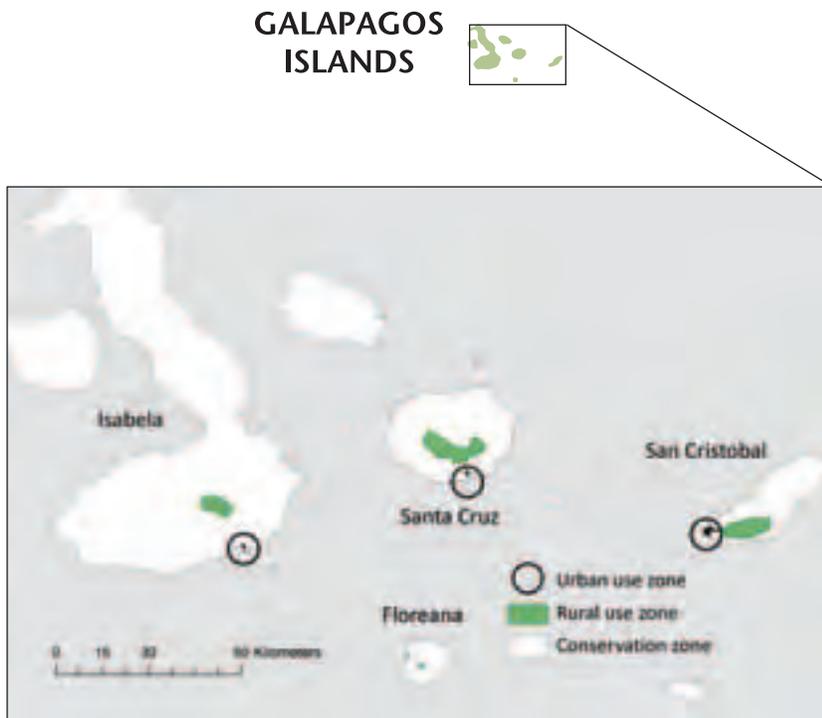
All photos and figures courtesy Laura Brewington



Laura Brewington, right, working for FUNDAR on a washroom enclosure out of recycled glass and melted styrofoam.

The Galápagos Islands of Ecuador are an ideal place to examine the relationships among conservation, development and land use. Oceanic islands worldwide are popular tourist destinations, and Galápagos topped the list of the “World’s Best Islands” in *Travel and Leisure* for October 2010. However, an increased human presence is linked to an increase in invasive species, which can be devastating to native flora and fauna (Simberloff 1995: 90) and to local agriculture. The archipelago that was once sustained by thriving farms now depends on imports to feed its 20,000 residents and nearly 200,000 annual visitors.

Although biodiversity and food sovereignty are intimately intertwined in Galápagos, they have rarely been linked in conservation policy or practice. Food sovereignty, a measure of local production relative to imports, is important in remote island territories as products that travel long distances are costly (Hughes and Lawrence 2005; Bourke and Harwood 2009; Bell et al. 2009; Mertz et al. 2010). Meanwhile, the use of privately-owned land influences and is influenced by invasive species that are already present. A growing body of literature points to the efficacy of land management programs that blend rural economic interests with conservation goals (Vandermeer and



**Figure 1**

*The Galápagos archipelago and associated urban and rural use zones on Isabela, Santa Cruz and San Cristóbal Islands. All other land area (97 percent) is part of the Galápagos National Park.*

Perfecto 1997; McNeely and Scherr 2003; Gangoso et al. 2006; Gøtz and Harvey 2008). This study evaluates land use and conservation in Galápagos, finding that the control and prevention of invasive species, as well as food sovereignty, depend on the incorporation of rural landowners into management policy.

Field research was carried out during 2009 and 2010 with support from the Inter-American Foundation. The study area, urban and rural use zones of Isabela and Santa Cruz Islands, is indicated in Figure 1. Santa Cruz is in the center of the archipelago and has the largest population (11,262), while Isabela's 1,780 inhabitants are more isolated. Traveling by boat between the islands, I

conducted interviews with personnel of Galápagos National Park (GNP) and other organizations and engaged in participant observation, interviews, and surveys of members of agricultural communities. On Isabela, I visited highland farms several times a week to participate in clearing, cultivation and harvesting. I took note of products in season, planting techniques, alternative income sources and the impacts of introduced species. On Santa Cruz, I also volunteered with the Foundation for Alternative Responsible Development (FUNDAR-Galápagos), which has rural assistance programs and operates a demonstration farm. In total, 115 individuals participated in this study.

### Land management policy and production

Because the Galápagos highlands are completely surrounded by protected areas, the boundary between the GNP and farmland is easily breached by plants introduced via livestock, birds, wind and other vectors. The GNP, however, has maintained a park-only policy with respect to species control and eradication. As one official told me, “We’re a conservation organization. What farmers do is none of our business.” This is important because it directly impacts food production, resulting in tensions with landowners. Farms range in size from two to 200 hectares, and for most landowners it is impossible to clear extensive areas of invasive plants and weeds. Pesticide and herbicide use is restricted by the GNP, but some landowners still spray their crops with prohibited weed-killers.

On Isabela, common guava (*Psidium guajava*), a highly invasive fruit-bearing tree, is ubiquitous in the highlands and surrounding GNP, and it responds poorly to most herbicides. Of the farmers in this study, 44 percent rely on hired labor to maintain their land, but migration regulations, intended to reduce population pressure, make contracting experienced workers from the mainland difficult. Without financial assistance or the labor to cut guava by hand, many farmers have simply abandoned their fields and moved to the coast. “I cut [guava] and plant trees to shade out seedlings, and that’s all I can do. I’m only one man,” said one. “What kind of conservation are they [the GNP] talking about?”

While invasive plants, such as guava on Isabela and hill raspberry (*Rubus niveus*) on Santa Cruz, pose serious problems for agriculture, their impact varies according to farming intensity. Out of a list of eight common obstacles—including insects, labor, machinery, transportation, water, and guava—full-time Isabela farmers (whose land is under crop rotation at least three-quarters of the year) ranked guava next to last. Water, either a shortage or an excess, was their most critical concern. Creative solutions for dealing with guava include making charcoal from the wood of mature trees for sale to residents and restaurants. By keeping their land cleared and under production, full-time farmers avoid the problems with guava reported by landowners who only farm part of the year.

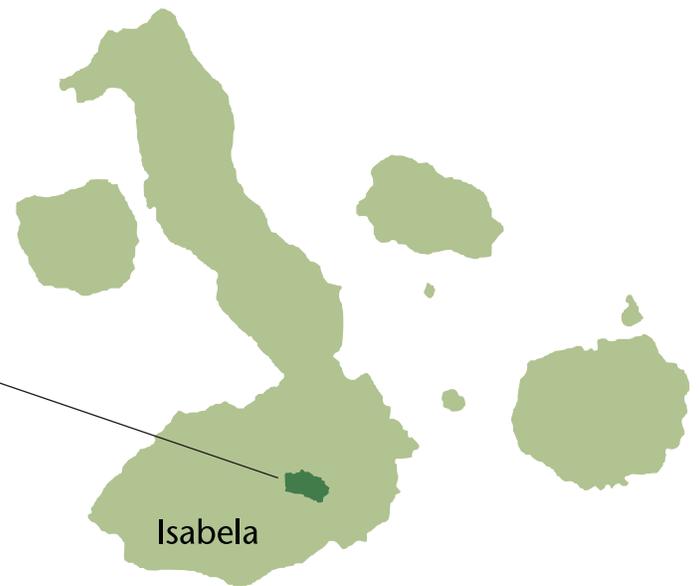
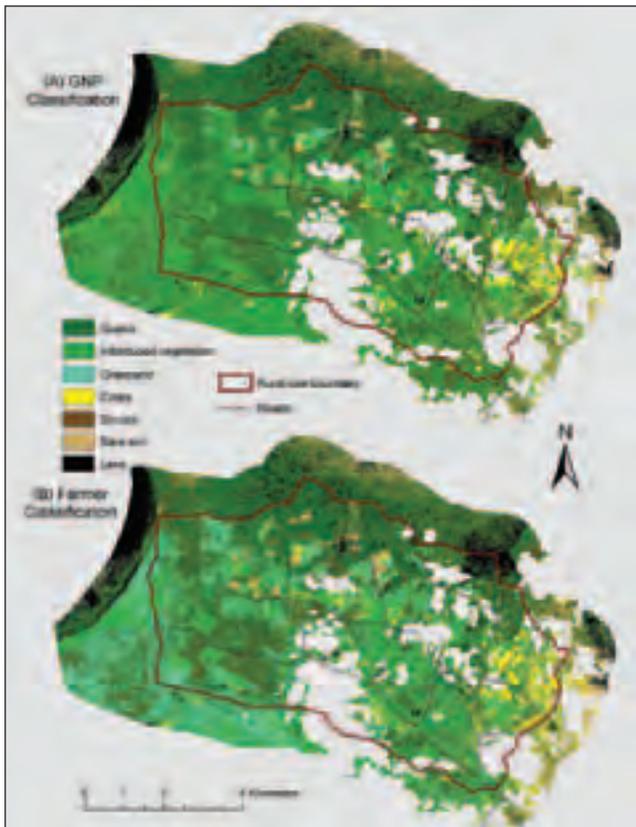
### Food sovereignty

Because of variations in rainfall and sunlight, greenhouses and irrigation systems are essential for year-round production, but only the wealthiest households can afford them. Depending on the item and the season, the market can swing from oversaturated with local produce to a shortage of fresh vegetables. Grains and most dairy products are among the 75 percent of food and other organic items that must be imported via seven cargo ships on a rotating schedule. The voyage of two and a half days costs \$1.17 per 100 pounds of vegetables, fruit, and grains. Cold storage facilities charge \$0.14 *per pound*—which quickly adds up. Due to the extra travel time, consumers on Isabela pay more than consumers on Santa Cruz for imported goods, and the same product can cost double the price charged at the farmers’ market, when available. If a cargo ship is delayed, staples disappear from stores and prices skyrocket, causing food insecurity especially among the poor. Finally, cargo ships are a known vector for new plant diseases and insects, completing what one GNP official calls a “vicious cycle of invasion.”

### Perceptions of the landscape

A classification exercise on Isabela highlighted a divergence in views of the landscape that may explain why policymakers are reluctant to engage with private landowners. I gave 25 photographs that represented a variety of land cover to 10 farmers and three GNP employees and asked them to assign a classification to each: bare soil, lava, guava, other non-guava introduced vegetation, grassland, shrubs, and crops. Each photo corresponded to a GPS point taken in 2008 that was within the spatial footprint of an October 2004 QuickBird satellite image of the area. A cloud mask was applied to the image and a supervised classification approach was employed using ENVI analysis software to generate classified images from two local points of view, one for farmers and one for GNP employees.

The images in Figure 2 reveal a complex relationship between perceptions of productivity or degradation, and I generated a confusion matrix to evaluate the level of coincidence between them. While farmer and GNP classifications were generally in agreement (65 percent overall, with a Kappa



**Figure 2**

Classified 2004 QuickBird images over the Isabela highlands (inset), illustrate two ways of interpreting the landscape. One emphasizes landscape degradation (A) while the other emphasizes landscape productivity (B). Areas covered by clouds were excluded from the analysis.

statistic of 0.58), they exhibited an extremely high level of agreement in the classification of guava (91 percent). Even in photographs that contained a variety of plant species, if guava was present both groups tended to single it out. The least agreement (29 percent) concerned what the GNP considered introduced vegetation, other than guava, which farmers considered grassland (55 percent) or shrubs (10 percent). Associated photographs contained elephant grass, ferns, and other weeds, which not all farmers regard as pests and therefore did not consider introduced plants. The classifications show that within and beyond the Isabela highlands, what the GNP regards as a degraded agricultural landscape, a landowner regards as productive.

### **A growing grassroots response**

Archipelago-wide, the marked disconnect between regulations and actual land use has resulted in marginalized producers with few resources and a growing number of challenges. However, many farmers in Galápagos believe that agriculture is the

best form of conservation, and they are finding ways to align production with conservation priorities. Maria Elena Guerra and Scott Henderson, landowners and conservation advocates, rehabilitated an abandoned farm on Santa Cruz and produce organic coffee. Their Lava Java label describes a vision bridging old divides:

*In restoring our own farm, we are able to provide seedlings of rare and endangered native plants and coffee to other farmers who choose to join us in the effort to restore abandoned land back to a healthy Galápagos ecosystem where native species thrive. We see every new farmer committed to this as a conservation ally. [Lava Java] captures the essence of the Galápagos we hope to create: a unique place where people learn to live in harmony with nature, conserving it as part of their everyday lives.*

FUNDAR-Galápagos supports conservation by providing opportunities for residents to participate in sustainable farming. “We want the community



*Farmers take a break from building a charcoal oven out of wood from invasive guava trees.*

to be involved in conservation. There are people here who say the Galápagos Islands would be better off without people. FUNDAR does not believe that," Martín Espinosa, project coordinator, elaborated. The NGO uses its 84-hectare farm to educate landowners in responsible land management, and recently published a Galápagos-specific guide to organic farming.

Coffee production has recently become the archipelago's only agricultural export and illustrates the financial benefits of a responsibly cultivated resource. Coffee trees are noninvasive, help prevent erosion and help the soil retain nutrients for later crop rotations, resulting in a product that appeals to eco-conscious American and European consumers. An organization supported by the Inter-American Development Bank assists landowners on Santa Cruz with planting native trees for shade-grown coffee,

enabling some to obtain organic certification and sales revenues up to 20 percent higher.

Despite such promise, organic agriculture has yet to catch on outside of Santa Cruz. Certification requires an investment of time, labor and capital that most Galápagos landowners, especially on isolated Isabela, aren't willing to risk. As an alternative, some have begun working in specialized "wild-life" tourism. At El Chato farm on Santa Cruz visitors walk through cave-like lava tunnels, watch giant tortoises as they feed on native vegetation, and sample juices and jams made from native fruits. Another farm, Hacienda Tranquila, operates an eco-tourism program that recruits volunteers to work in ecological restoration and food self-sufficiency. On Isabela, visitors can learn traditional farming techniques while promoting highland restoration.

## Conclusion

In terms of practical politics, the relationship between food sovereignty and introduced species should make land-management training and agricultural subsidies priority interventions by the Ecuadorian government and associated conservation institutions, especially the GNP. With more than 400 employees, a budget comparable to that of Yellowstone National Park, and a strategic location

### ***Local action and activism are essential to confronting the problems of introduced species at their sources.***

within science and policy, the GNP possesses the power to effect real change among rural Galápagos society. An endowment of \$15 million to control and eradicate invasive species is planned to ensure long-term success, and new programs to develop conservation easements and train farmers in the removal of invasive species should help the GNP shed its old image as a park-only protection agency.

The first UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Galápagos Islands are home to a unique ecosystem and to thousands of people whose presence is often viewed as a threat to its famed biodiversity. In 2010, the World Heritage Committee evaluated the conservation status of Galápagos. Its report emphasized that growing population pressures and the need for better control of introduced species make responsible land use essential to the archipelago's future (WHC 2010: 18-22). In a commendable overhaul of policy, the islands' rural residents are being incorporated into environmental planning. This study demonstrates that in addition to new top-down conservation protocols, local action and activism are essential to confronting the problems of introduced species at their sources.

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*Laura Brewington, a student at the Center for Galápagos Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, will defend her dissertation in geography in 2012.*

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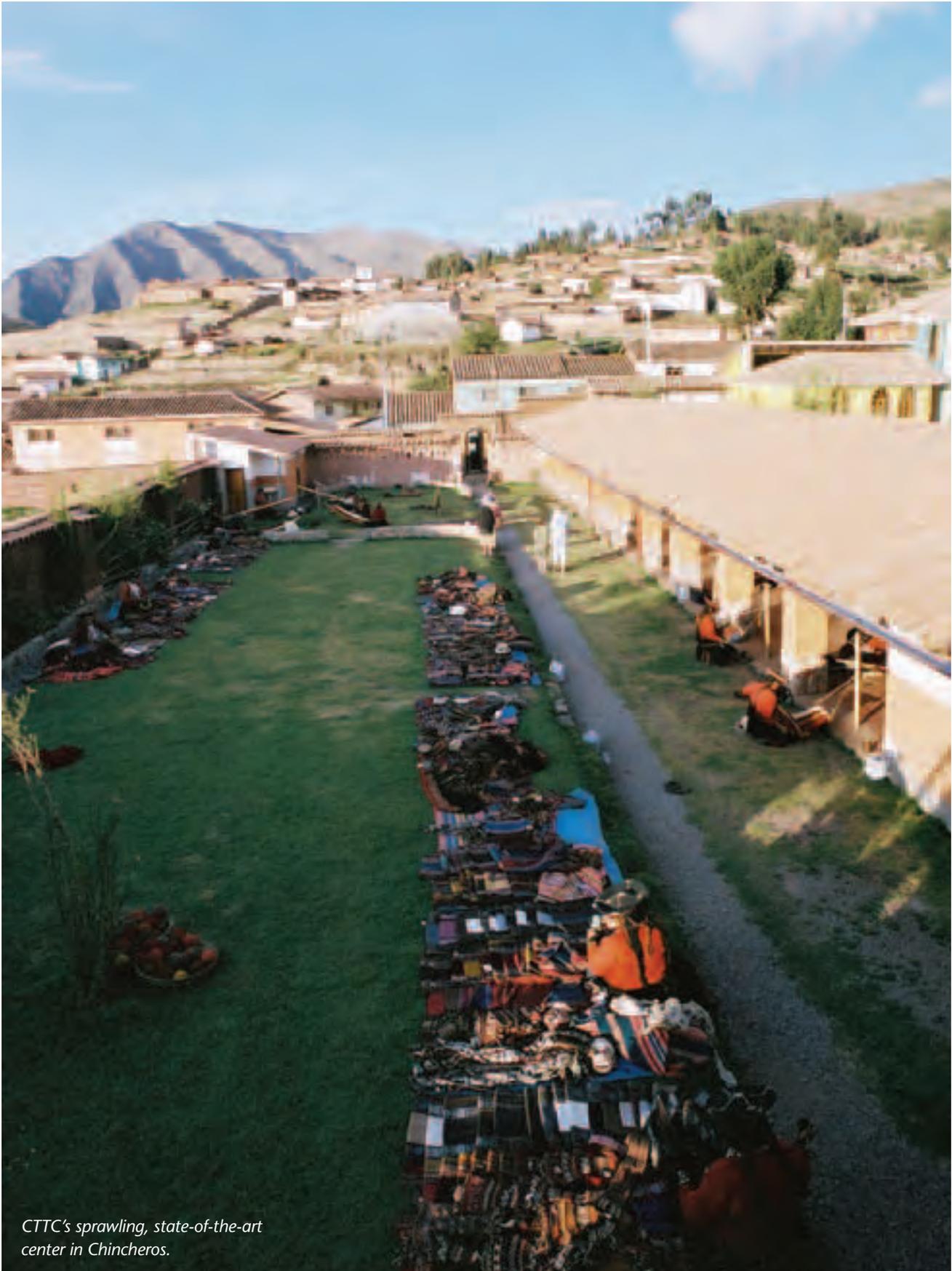
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Mark Calcedo



*CTTC's sprawling, state-of-the-art center in Chincheros.*



# Tinkuy de Tejedores

For three days in November 2010, more than 400 artisans from nine countries of the Americas came together in Urubamba, Peru, to share, describe, display and enjoy timeless techniques and beautiful textiles at the Tinkuy de Tejedores, or gathering of weavers, hosted by IAF Grantee Centro de Textiles Tradicionales de Cusco (CTTC). For many, this was their first experience with colleagues from beyond their communities. In the harmonious setting of an ecolodge, the weavers, mostly women, compared their crafts and learned how their techniques and styles were both familiar and exotic to others.

During the first two days of the Tinkuy, master weavers, dyers and spinners demonstrated their skills. These included D.Y. Begay, the world famous Navajo weaver, who described her heritage to a captivated



*D.Y. Begay, noted Navajo weaver.*

audience. Teresa Gómez, Maria Ana Lajuj and Ana Lucía Chávez, from Guatemala, shared the Mayan tradition that uses cotton. Timoteo Carita and Flortunada Flores demonstrated intricate Quechua patterns from Peru's Sacred Valley of the Incas in Cusco. Even the lunch breaks were busy as artists from Bolivia, Mexico and Peru set up their looms and answered questions. Such moments offered the chance to sell their crafts to international guests.

Jeffrey Andrés Wright

Jeffrey Andrés Wright

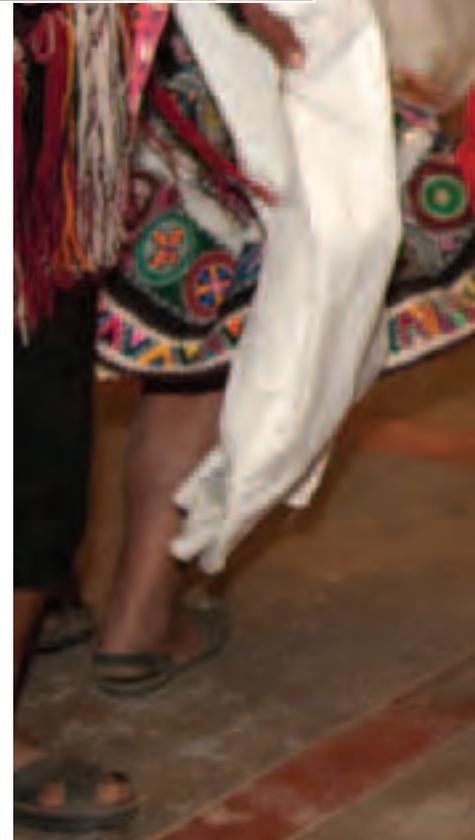


Nilda Callañaupa, director of Centro de Textiles Tradicionales de Cusco, and her mother, Guadalupe Alvarez Valenzuela, a weaver.

The second day culminated in a demonstration of the importance of local textiles as cultural expression through songs, dances and theatrical processions that drew cheers, laughter and oohs and ahs from delighted spectators. The evening ended with everyone celebrating in dance, handshakes and hugs.

In Chincheros, some 20 kilometers from Urubamba, CTTC's training center welcomed the international guests to hands-on workshops in natural dyeing, fashioning tubular edging for women's textiles, knitting the circular pattern of hats called *chuyos* and the basics of weaving with a backstrap loom. CTTC's own weavers learned about marketing via electronic catalogs over the Internet. More than 40 artisans from seven Peruvian communities crowded into a classroom to see that a digital camera and access to a computer were all they needed to reach buyers throughout the world—easily, inexpensively and effectively.

The idea of Tinkuy de Tejedores had come to Nilda Callañaupa, CTTC's director, some three years earlier and the reality did not disappoint. Hundreds of weavers went home with wonderful memories, fresh ideas, revived enthusiasm, confidence in the cultural and commercial value of their work, and plans to continue contact with their new friends.—Wilbur Wright, IAF regional director for South America and the Caribbean







*Backstrap weaving workshop, above, and demonstration.*

Joselyn Sisby



Jefry Andres Wright



*Nilda Callañaupa and Cusco men with chuyos.*



Courtesy Tlachinollan

*Abel Barrera Hernández, president of IAF grantee Tlachinollan, was honored in Washington, D.C., by the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Justice and Human Rights.*

## Exemplary Rights Advocacy

Abel Barrera Hernández, president of IAF grantee Tlachinollan Grupo de Apoyo a los Pueblos Indios de la Montaña (Tlachinollan), accepted Amnesty International's Sixth Human Rights Award at a May 27 gala celebration marking the golden anniversary of the organization, a world leader in the defense of human rights. Salil Shetty, secretary general of Amnesty International, praised the Mexican anthropologist for his unwavering commitment, often in the face of grave danger, to the rights of indigenous peoples in the state of Guerrero.

Amnesty International's recognition came just six months after the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Justice and Human Rights had honored Barrera

Hernández in Washington, D.C., with its own prestigious award. "Mr. Abel Barrera Hernández inspires us with his unrelenting determination to bring justice to the marginalized people of Mexico," said human rights activist Kerry Kennedy, the Center's founder and president and the seventh of the 11 children born to Robert and Ethel Kennedy. "His example challenges all of us to do more. His courage speaks to our better angels."

On June 6, exactly 43 years after the assassination of Robert Kennedy, Kerry Kennedy reprised her praise for Barrera Hernández in her column for *The Huffington Post*, comparing his courage to that displayed by her father as attorney general of the United States during the Civil Rights Movement. "Despite the differences in their eras, their countries and their

languages, these two men are united by their shared deep commitment to advancing justice and human rights,” she wrote. Tlachinollan’s office in Ayutla was closed following the murders of indigenous activists Raul Lucas and Manuel Ponce in 2009 after they had courageously documented the abduction and rape of two indigenous women by members of the Mexican military. “Now, two years later, on June 16,” wrote

Kennedy, “Abel and his colleagues are courageously committed to reopening the Tlachinollan office in Ayutla, with a ceremony to mark the occasion.”

Tlachinollan uses its IAF funds to work with Tlapanec and Mixtec residents of Zitlaltepec and Ojo del Agua toward better income for forest communities and the preservation and responsible use of natural resources.

## A Fish for a Feast

In February, IAF grantee Reef Check Dominican Republic, an arm of the Reef Check Foundation, inaugurated El Carey, its aquatic center in the Parque Nacional Submarino La Caleta. Reef Check has been working in partnership with 30 fishers and other residents to form the Cooperativa de Pesca y Prestadores de Servicios Turísticos de La Caleta (COOPRESCA) in an effort to shift members’ primary source of income from fishing to ecotourism, thereby aiding in the recovery of depleted fish stocks. Visitors to the park may now sign up for instruction in diving, snorkeling, kayaking and sport fishing and rent equipment. Some profits from ecotourism will be reinvested in social and conservation projects benefiting the community. The major Dominican dailies covered the center’s grand opening.

Reef Check’s work was also featured in an unlikely place, the September issue of *Gastroteca*, a gourmet magazine published in Spanish. The article encourages consumption of the lion fish, an invasive species native to the Pacific, that is as ferocious and voracious as its name implies. During the 1990s, unchecked by any predators, these fish carved a place for themselves at the top of the food chain and spread throughout the reefs of the Caribbean, decimating local species. Locals avoid eating this exotic pest because of its poisonous spine and fins, but if they are removed, the fish is safe to eat. Among the exclusive restaurants serving lion fish are Hank’s Oyster Bar, Nora’s and Poste Moderne Brasserie in Washington, D.C. In some U.S. fish



markets it commands upwards of \$24 a pound. Reef Check is working with Dominican fishers to organize sports events around the lion fish and is encouraging Santo Domingo’s seafood restaurants to include it on their menus. Biologist Pedro Alcolado of Reef Check told *Gastroteca* that he never thought he would recommend overfishing any species, but in this case, he said, “overfishing would be advisable from an ecological standpoint.” —Eduardo Rodríguez-Frías, IAF webmaster



### Conocimiento desde adentro

*Edited by Sheila Walker*

*Programa de Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia (PIEB): La Paz, 2010*

This spring, television audiences across the United States tuned in to *Black in Latin America*, a four-part series produced by Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates. As Gates admitted, four hours is not much time. Afro-Peruvians got 30 minutes, but otherwise the African descendent diaspora in the Spanish-speaking countries of South America was ignored. *Conocimiento desde adentro* can help fill that gap, at least for those who read Spanish, with a look at these fascinating communities in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela—nations not usually thought of as African-influenced.

The editor of this two-volume work, and its driving force, is anthropologist Sheila Walker. In 2003, she founded Grupo Barlovento with support from

Sebastian Aloor



*Sheila Walker.*

the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) Global Center. Meeting at Spelman College, in Atlanta, where Walker was the William and Camille Cosby Professor in the Humanities, Barlovento focused on telling the story of a people whose

presence in and contributions to the Americas have too often been invisible or denied. “We had initially included Brazil,” Walker explained the countries to be covered, “but for issues of scale, to say nothing of a different history, it didn’t fit. And we decided not to include Central America whose reality is so different.” Barlovento emphatically wanted this story to come *desde adentro*, from the perspective of “insiders” who had lived it. Getting it right meant meeting again, in Ecuador and Bolivia, with IAF support.

Walker calls the Atlantic commerce in slaves “the largest dispersal of people in the history of the world.” Gates puts the number of Africans transported at 11.5 million; most went to Latin America and the Caribbean. In her introduction to the collection of essays comprising *Conocimiento desde adentro*, Walker constantly refers to this diaspora as a puzzle. “Africa,” she said, “was cut into pieces and scattered. We wanted to put the pieces together.” These authors might not reach that goal, but the detail they provide on the amazing history of Afro-Latin America, and on the rich culture their ancestors brought with them, is indeed impressive. We learn for example, that the same governments that abolished slavery were concerned with compensating the owners of the lost property; and that technologies from Africa, as well as labor, were the foundation for the fortunes made from coffee, sugar, tobacco, rice and cotton.

“The purpose of the UNCF grant was to create curriculum materials for U.S. schools and also for Latin America,” Walker said, adding that there is nothing else currently available on the vast subject the Barlovento Group chose. Bolivian collaborator Juan Angola Maconde, found a publisher in La Paz; he and Walker presented the book at a festive gathering in the city’s Museo de Etnografía. The Barlovento Group now hopes for an English translation published in the United States and for wide use of both versions in schools and universities. Peruvian collaborator Oswaldo Bilbao Lobatón, has proposed a teacher training project. “Tasks I will have to take care of,” Walker said.—*P.D.*



**The Afro-Latin@ Reader:  
History and Culture in the  
United States**

*Edited by Miriam Jiménez  
Román and Juan Flores*

*Duke University Press:  
Durham and London, 2010*

When Jackie Robinson broke through the color barrier in professional baseball, his grace under fire catapulted him from stellar athlete to hero of the Civil Rights Movement, and his accomplishment transcended sports to become a celebrated milestone in race relations in the United States. But how many Americans, baseball fans or otherwise, have heard of Minnie Miñoso, who, just a few years later left the Negro League to become the first Afro-Latino in the Major League and, in 1951, the first black athlete to put on a White Sox jersey? Miñoso's status as a trail blazer was, in fact, seriously debated during the special election for induction into baseball's Hall of Fame in 2006, and he never made the cut. Although he had endured the same humiliations as all black athletes of that era, somehow that didn't count as Miñoso had been born and raised in Cuba.

Obviously much less is known about Afro-Latinos—with origins in Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America—than about those African descendants commonly thought of as black Americans, less still about the relation of the two communities in the United States. *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* addresses this knowledge gap with a collection of essays, articles and interviews reflecting the experiences of people in the U.S. who identify as Afro-Latinos, including a place in baseball's racist past. (The typographic character @ in the title and throughout the book is used to signal a reference to both latino and latina, singular and plural.)

Editors Miriam Jiménez and Juan Flores have both taught about Afro-Latino culture at New York University, where she is a visiting scholar in the African Studies Program and he is a professor in the

Department of Social and Cultural Analysis. Jiménez is founder and executive director of the Afro-Latin@ Forum, a research and resource center focusing on black Latinos in the United States. Duke University published this volume as part of its John Hope Franklin Center Series, named for the late African-American professor emeritus who wrote the classic *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of the American Negro*, integrated history departments in elite institutions and helped the NAACP build the sociological case so crucial to the U.S. Supreme Court's unanimous ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that race-based segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.

The 66 selections comprising *The Afro-Latin@ Reader* invite readers to explore the narrative of Afro-Latinos in U.S. culture—art, religion, sports, music and perceptions of gender—and to think critically about race. Several chapters shed light on the complex issue of identity. "Negotiating among Invisibilities: Tales of Afro-Latinidades in the United States," describes the dilemma of its author, California-born Vielka Cecilia Hoy, the offspring of a Nicaraguan mother and a Panamanian father, both African descendants. Hoy recalls filling out her census form, aware that she and her cousins would each have a different answer to the question on ethnicity. "Afro-Latin@s: Present and Future Tenses" offers a rich analysis of data collected by the Census Bureau, comparing the socioeconomic characteristics of Hispanics who self-identify as "White" (the term used by the Census Bureau) with those who check "Black or African American." This identity quagmire is hardly unique to the U.S.; the lexicon of race and ethnicity can be complicated in other countries of the Western Hemisphere as well.

The breadth and style of *The Afro-Latin@ Reader* will appeal most to readers attracted to scholarship. But while its content is dense and deeply analytical, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader* has something for everyone. Jiménez and Flores make the case that Afro-Latinos as a *colectividad* provide a link between the African-American and Hispanic communities. Unfortunately, as Adrian Burgos Jr. points out in his tellingly titled chapter on Minnie Miñoso, "An Uneven Playing Field: Afro-Latinos in Major League Baseball," many significant contributions of individual Afro-Latinos have not received the recognition they deserve.—*Amanda Hess, IAF program staff assistant*



### The Politics of Human Rights Protection

By Jan Knippers Black

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.: Lanham, Maryland, and Plymouth, United Kingdom, 2010

As a discipline, human rights can be viewed as separate and distinct from development theory and practice, but Jan Knippers Black, who teaches at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, effectively underscores their inextricable connection. International experts, including numerous economists and sociologists, would agree with her that political and civil liberties are prerequisites to sustainable development. Indeed, when abuses persist, whether perpetrated by governments or other forces, progress toward prosperity gets derailed.

In *The Politics of Human Rights Protection*, Black essentially lays out a guide to the strategies that address systemic violations of human rights. Illustrative case studies include East Timor's struggle for independence and Taiwan's often tense stand-offs with China. Black begins with a discussion of the definition of rights and abuses and offers her own "Guidelines for Anticipating Abuse and Public Response." She devotes significant space to analyzing the importance of language, particularly in "official" stories, and how an understanding of code words and euphemisms can be

Mark Calcedo



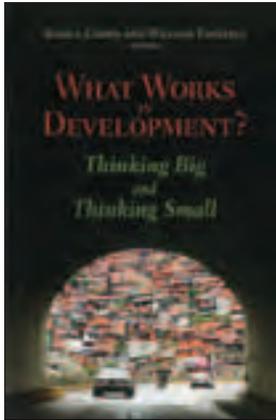
Jan Knippers Black.

crucial to recognizing violations of human rights, responding to them and, more importantly, perhaps preventing them.

Within the Latin American context, Black examines the rampant abuses by military dictatorships during the 1970s and 1980s in the Southern Cone, particularly during the regime of Augusto Pinochet in Chile, where Black had served as one of the very first Peace Corps volunteers in the early 1960s. From the military coup that paved the way for Pinochet's rule to the dramatic series of events arising out of the international pressure from those clamoring for his prosecution, Black details the processes that enable a nation to learn from its past and move on. Chile's reconciliation was especially convoluted; Pinochet remained in charge of the military during the transition, which made Chileans hesitant to demand justice. As Black so eloquently summarizes the situation, "An elected civilian government in a straightjacket—a government unable or unwilling to act on a popular mandate—may be a better safeguard for inequity than a military dictatorship."

The West has traditionally viewed human rights in terms of civil and political freedoms. However, economic and cultural rights have been part of the discourse where poverty and persecution prevail, and the debate has expanded to include social and environmental rights. Even Amnesty International which started out in the 1960s as an organization with a political orientation and focused on prisoners of conscience, usually political dissidents, has recently launched a campaign advocating a human right to dignity and freedom from poverty.

Black provides a valuable analysis via a thorough overview of the intricacies involved in examining human rights in many contexts. In spite of Black's profoundly scholastic background, *The Politics of Human Rights Protection* is not directed just at academics or specialists but rather to those curious and committed readers who believe human rights deserve protection and want to understand root causes of abuses beyond abstract analysis. As a guide to concrete solutions, the book makes a vital contribution to the literature on human rights.—  
*Nancy Diaz, program staff assistant*



**What Works in Development? Thinking Big and Thinking Small**

*Edited by Jessica Cohen and William Easterly*

*The Brookings Institution: Washington, D.C., 2009*

From this book's title, one might imagine that its 230 pages contain the answer to the great conundrum that has dogged international development for decades. Answering that question would be equivalent to one of the great breakthroughs in medicine or energy-generation. So with the optimism of a new recruit one turns to the first page and begins to read, "The starting point for the contributions to this volume...is that there is no consensus on 'what works' for growth and development. The ultimate goal of development research—remains elusive."

For the next six chapters, economists from Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, Brown, New York University, the London School of Economics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the World Bank try to explain why there is no answer and why so little is understood about the actual impact of development projects on the poor. Some authors put forth a defense of national-scale programs—"thinking big"—while others argue that the greatest success comes from more restricted interventions—"thinking small." Where they all fall short is in the exposition of their arguments. Their lapses into academic jargon and formulaic presentations would lower the eyelids of even the most focused students. Time and again one reads a paragraph espousing one approach only to turn the page and read, "on the other hand."

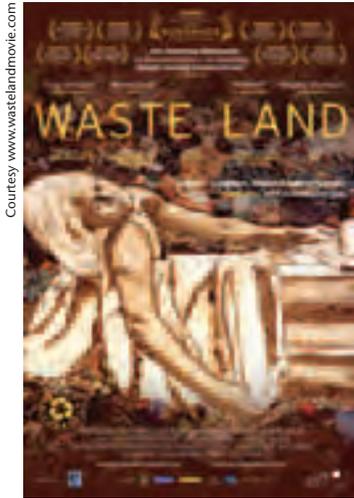
In one piece, David N. Weil of Brown University does a credible job explaining why economists, with their hypothetical utility parameters and economic calculus, have failed so miserably at finding the "Holy Grail": They simply do not understand how the world actually works. They need to acknowledge

that development is not a science and that grassroots communities are not Petri dishes cultured by a finite number of variables, but microcosms within the universe of variables that influence decisions.

Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee of MIT goes so far as to hold that economic development may be solely dependent on kismet—some unexpected factor that generates positive growth within a given country. The best that can be done in preparation for that "take off" is to support its eventuality with a social policy that engenders a feeling of hope in people and produces a commitment to the future. William Easterly, in his closing commentary, agrees with Banerjee's conclusions while contending that they are not novel but generic and confirming that they offer little useful insight. Successful development in one situation should not be interpreted as indicative of similar success in a different setting. To further generalize context-specific results into a methodology is even a greater leap of faith.

Unfortunately, economists have difficulty breaking out of the scientist mode and into that of a practitioner. They too easily fall into "economist-speak" that clarifies nothing and makes practitioners shake their heads. "When pressed," observes Lant Pritchett of the Kennedy School at Harvard University, "economists immediately see the obvious mistake of confusing narrative rationales for actions of a hypothetical welfare-maximizing social planner with positive reasons for the actual actions of real governments." After multiple readings, I understood this statement to translate into useful advice for interpreting the observed results of a development initiative undertaken by a government, but it offers little on how to respond to the obvious needs at the local level.

The writers included in *What Works in Development?* suggest that the question they are addressing has no answer, that they can only offer observations that might help in the search for one. As long as the answer remains elusive, experts will continue to present their hypotheses and try to prove their theories. Meanwhile, those working on site with real people will continue to shake their heads, put on their gloves, lift the next stone and hope for a better future.—*Wilbur Wright, IAF regional director for South America and the Caribbean*



### Lixo Extraordinario (Waste Land)

Directed by Lucy Walker

An Almega Project and  
02 Filmes Production;  
2010

When *Lixo Extraordinario* was nominated as the best documentary made in 2010, IAF staff and some 5,000 Brazilian *catadores*, or trash pickers, were swept up in Oscar fever. The film focuses on one of the world's largest dumps, sprawling over more than 320 acres, and the people who used to sift through the garbage and, for a special moment in time, transformed it into works of art.

The workers belong to Associação dos Catadores do Aterro Metropolitano do Jardim Gramacho (ACAMJG), which received funding in 2009 from IAF grantee Federação das Industrias do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (FIRJAN), the social-responsibility arm of a trade association representing some 9,000 Brazilian companies. FIRJAN's subgrants to organizations undertaking development projects, such as ACAMJG, are matched *real for real* by member corporations.

The film's other protagonist is Brooklyn resident Vik Muniz, a Brazilian-American artist, who returned to the land of his birth looking for inspiration and



found it in the Gramacho Municipal Landfill. During the two years that he spent living among the trash collectors, from 2007 to 2009, Muniz photographed his neighbors as the subjects of portraits that mimicked such consecrated masterpieces as *The Death of Marat* by Jacques-Louis David and Pablo Picasso's *Woman Ironing*. Muniz and his newfound muses used trash to add texture and depth to the settings. In *Lixo Extraordinario*, English director Lucy Walker follows the artist and his subjects, documenting the exuberance of the *catadores* as they help Muniz create these epic pieces, realizing his vision and escaping the drudgery of their daily routine.

One effort required filling the floor of Muniz's warehouse-size studio with garbage, creating a work so grand that could only be viewed and photographed from above. "The fact that they had worked on it and the fact that image was made with nothing but the stuff that they deal with every day, that for me was the most important thing," Muniz told an interviewer from Associated Press. "Sometimes we see ourselves as so small, but people out there see us as so big, so beautiful," one of the *catadores* commented to reporters at the opening of Muniz's exhibit in Rio's Museu de Arte Moderna.

On Feb. 27, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awarded the Oscar to *Inside Job*, a documentary about the causes of the recent global financial crisis, and at least some of us viewers were disappointed. But the attention *Lixo Extraordinario* received has been a factor in raising the already hefty prices that Muniz's works commanded, and he has recognized his debt to the trash collectors by donating more than \$300,000 to ACAMJG.

The gift will help ACAMJG's workers transition to other recycling activities; Rio's government shut down their dump three days after the Academy Awards ceremony. Gramacho, which was running out of space and had become a serious source of pollution for nearby marshlands, is being converted into one of the largest biogas projects in the world. Part of the income from the biogas project will be managed by the local municipality in partnership with ACAMJG for the benefit of displaced *catadores* who want to train to fill jobs in the formal recycling industry. Visit [www.wastelandmovie.com](http://www.wastelandmovie.com) for more on *Lixo Extraordinario*.—Eduardo Rodríguez-Frías, IAF webmaster



Patrick Breslin, then IAF's vice president for external affairs, shot photos of ACAMJG members working in Gramacho Municipal Landfill in 2003, a few years before artist Vik Muniz, opposite page, found inspiration there.



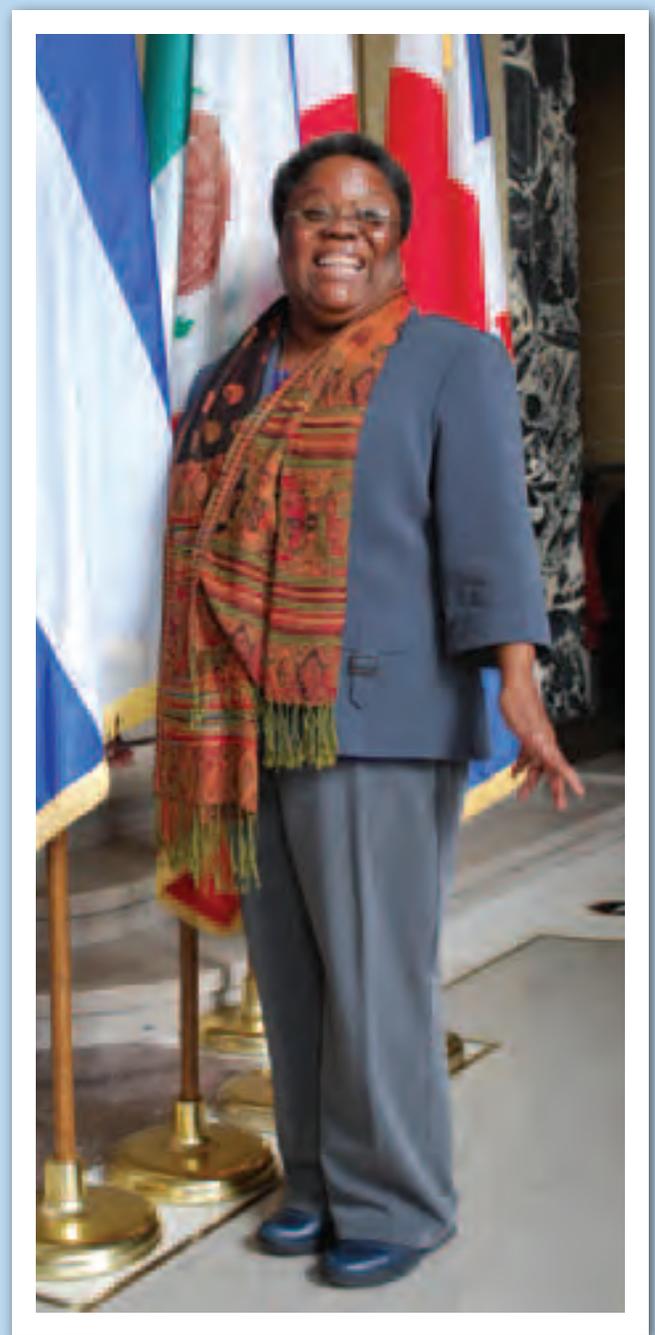
# The Last Word

“I came late to the women’s movement,” Dorotea Wilson admitted when *Grassroots Development* caught up with her at the Organization of American States last spring. Be that as it may, her life has unfolded as an uninterrupted commitment to social justice.

Wilson was born in Bluefields, on Nicaragua’s Caribbean coast, and, like many African descendants in Central America, grew up bilingual in Spanish and English. As a student in a Catholic school, she discovered her religious vocation early—and that some orders were closed to her because of her race. Determination led her to the Carmelites and their tolerance and at 19 she took her vows. Nine years as a nun taught her about ethics and values, she said, and brought her into close contact with the poor and their desperate situation under the repressive regime of Anastasio Somoza. In the mid-1970s, along with almost everyone else in the convent, she left to join the insurrection that ultimately forced Somoza into exile in July 1979.

Following *el triunfo*, Wilson became mayor of Puerto Cabezas, which jump-started her second career in community service. “I had to listen to the people and attend to problems ranging from construction of a municipal market, cleaning the streets, garbage collection, water, even arranging for a coffin,” she recalled. “The need was incredible.” Her election to a series of offices resulted in her appointment as a director of the Sandinista Party, but she eventually left politics, frustrated at the difficulty of achieving parity for women.

Today Wilson channels her energy into Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas, Afrocaribeños y de la Diaspora, which she co-founded in 1992 and the IAF has supported. It now has 450 affiliated organizations committed to fighting discrimination, xenophobia, racism and exclusion and to transforming society. On March 15, as the Red’s general coordinator, Wilson addressed the Special Meeting of the Permanent Council of the OAS in celebration of 2011 as the International Year of People of African Descent. In



Mark Calcedo

Dorotea Wilson at the OAS

her brief remarks, she urged approval of the Inter-American Convention against Racism and All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance. “I want a better world for women and for men and children as well,” she commented later to *Grassroots Development*. “I am optimistic because I can see the personal transformation in myself and in others.”—P.D.



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# Contents

## FOCUS: WOMEN GRASSROOTS LEADERS

### **Nohra Padilla: Recycling in Colombia**

The Most Tenacious Woman in the World

*Patrick Breslin*

### **Elsa Zaldívar: Technological Innovation in Paraguay**

Rolex Laureate Improves Lives with Loofah

*Jeremy Coon*

### **Laura Russell: Education in Peru**

The Fourth “R” is Art

*Wilbur Wright*

### **Deise Gravina: Construction in Brazil**

Helping *Cariocas* Crack the Concrete Ceiling

*Amy Kirschenbaum*

### **Francisca Blandón Ortiz:**

#### **Cattle Ranching in Nicaragua**

These Boots Are Made for Managing

*Mark Caicedo*

### **Louise Lexis Relus: Agriculture in Haiti**

The Long Trek from Isolation

*Jenny Petrow and Dieusibon Pierre-Mérité*

### **Leticia Toj: Health Services in Guatemala**

Health Care in the Shadow of the Volcanoes

*José Toasa and Paula Durbin*

### **María Auxiliadora Vanegas Pérez:**

#### **Microcredit in Nicaragua**

Resources for Women’s Microenterprises

*Miriam E. Brandão*

### **Evelyn Huezo and Mabel Reyes:**

#### **Community Development in El Salvador**

A New Frontline for Former Guerrillas

*Seth Micah Jesse and Rolando Gutiérrez*

## AT THE IAF

### **First Juried Competition:**

#### **A Forum for IAF Fellows’ Findings**

Mining and Democracy: International Law goes Local

*Amanda M. Fulmer*

Agriculture and Conservation in the Galápagos Islands

*Laura Brewington*

### **Development Note:** Tinkuy de Tejedores

## Grantees in the News

## Resources