

# Grassroots Development

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Stories of Sustainability

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The purpose of this journal is to share grassroots experiences in development 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 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).



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José Alejandro Alvarez

## Contents

### Stories of Sustainability

- Módulos Lecheros: An Idea that Survived the Shining Path  
*By Martin Scurrah and Custodio Bojorquez* ..... 1
- The Weavers of San Isidro  
*By Patrick Breslin* ..... 6
- Challenging the King of the Reef  
*By Jenny Petrow, Ana Carmona, Azucena Díaz and Gabriela Boyer* ..... 14

### A Forum for Fellows Findings

- Poets, Clowns and Paperwork: Negotiating a Culture  
of Bureaucracy in Brazil  
*By Anne Gillman*..... 23
- Seeds of Struggle in Colombia  
*By Laura Gutiérrez Escobar*..... 30

### At the IAF

- Rede Ecovida and Beyond  
*By Juliana Menucci*..... 36

### In Memoriam

- Bill Dyal: Gracious Goodness and a Life Well Lived  
*By Steve Vetter* ..... 39

# Stories of Sustainability

*“The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.”*

That statement, from a poem by Muriel Rukeyser, is inscribed on a plaque in the sidewalk outside the New York Public Library and has found its way into discourse ranging from sermons to science lectures. It certainly applies to the universe as the Inter-American Foundation knows it. For more than four decades, the IAF has invested in the ideas and hard work of the organized poor, and they have reciprocated with a profusion of stories that have validated grassroots development and animated the pages of this journal. Their stories must be told, so that the accomplishments of real people prevailing against the odds are on record as proof of what is possible.

In recent years, the IAF has received capsule stories via email from organizations funded in the 1970s and early 1980s that had fallen off our radar—understandably perhaps, given our 5,000-plus former grantee partners throughout the hemisphere. Martin Scurrah’s was among the extraordinary messages that inspired this edition of *Grassroots Development*, and the story he tells here has a back story.

Nearly 30 years ago, this journal included a feature by Scurrah and others about a cluster of IAF-funded communal dairy enterprises in the Peruvian Andes. The piece ended with a “cautionary note” on the danger of the Sendero Luminoso, or Shining Path, in fact foreshadowing the devastation wreaked by the Maoist insurgency. End of story, it seemed. But not long ago Scurrah inadvertently discovered a remarkable comeback. While the grantee institution had fled and the infrastructure was gone, the idea had become rooted in a community whose residents never forgot how well it had worked. Scurrah and co-author Custodio Bojórquez’s narrative of 2015 tells of the determined farmers who had embraced the successful approach and taught the concepts and lessons to their children.

Stories like this one give us perspectives on sustainability, a word in dire need of definition. Exactly what *does* it mean? One connotation, I would say, would be continuity. The articles here color the notion of sustainable development by looking at just what continues when circumstances change. How do people work together to confront new challenges or exploit new opportunities? A Colombian community thrives even though the special weaving tradition that had taken it through hard times is less practiced and the museum that supported the weavers has closed. Livelihoods survive if fishers protect the ecosystems, so that the sea yields benefits into the future. Farmers gain independence by recovering seeds from their patrimony. And, as the IAF well knows, imaginative government programs endure when dedicated public employees believe in the mission, go the extra mile, think outside the box and help people learn.

Stories are sometimes dismissed as atypical, lacking in rigor or susceptible to bias. They simply don’t “add up.” But the power of stories to illustrate complex truths is undeniable. Those shared here are drawn from the IAF’s trove from the field, and they are testament to the ingenuity, resilience and commitment found in communities across Latin America and the Caribbean. We expect to bring you many more.



Robert N. Kaplan  
President and CEO  
Inter-American Foundation

# Módulos Lecheros: An Idea that Survived the Shining Path

By Martin Scurrah and Custodio Bojórquez

**A**gricultural programs often fail when the technology, machinery and inputs don't mesh with the context. In the 1970s, the Instituto Veterinario de Investigaciones Tropicales y de Altura (IVITA), a center for veterinary research allied with the Universidad San Marcos, the oldest institution of higher learning in the Americas and Peru's most prestigious, set out to design Módulos Lecheros, an approach to milk production suited to rural Andean communities. It involved converting irrigated land into pasture for grazing pedigreed cows. The IAF awarded IVITA a grant in 1983 toward the delivery and refinement of this "package" to five communities in the Mantaro Valley, two located on its floor and three on its slopes some 4,000 meters above sea level.

According to the description in the IAF's annual report for 1983, the award to IVITA was to be disbursed over three years. The final disbursement, however, was not made until 1991. The IAF's records through 1991 reflect adjustments over the eight years the project remained active, some clearly addressing Peru's hyperinflation that had begun spiraling upward in the 1980s and reached 2,000,000 percent in 1990. In addition to a national economic crisis, IVITA's promising initiative faced off against the Sendero Luminoso, or Shining Path, the violent Maoist insurgency that terrorized Peru between 1980 and 1992, determined to impose an extreme vision of social engineering. In its report issued in 2003, Peru's Commission for Truth and Reconciliation put the death toll at 70,000 Peruvians, making the insurrection one of the bloodiest in the history of South America. Infrastructure valued at more than \$10 billion was destroyed in a relentless campaign to create chaos and instability aimed at bringing the government to its knees.

The Shining Path would claim as "liberated zones" the highland communities participating in IVITA's project and would disrupt their very means to earn a livelihood by demanding that campesinos cease their milk production and sever their ties to the markets in the valley. Those who questioned or opposed the demands were threatened with death as were community leaders and professionals working with IVITA if they did not withdraw, including Dr. Horacio Acuña, the team coordinator. Although nobody associated with IVITA's project was killed, a U.S. citizen and a Peruvian agronomist working with a USAID project were assassinated. The intimidation worked. IVITA's technicians ceased activity, closing the project. This made all efforts seem to have been for naught.

In 2014, I returned to several of the communities in the Mantaro Valley, where, under contract to a Peruvian nongovernmental organization, I had monitored IVITA's progress in the 1980s. To my surprise, I found the landscape transformed. Highland areas

Courtesy IVITA



*IVITA veterinarians tending to an injured cow in 1986.*



previously covered with coarse yellow grass were green with improved pastures rich in the nutrients essential to milk; fields once planted with potatoes and corn had made way for alfalfa and forage grains; farms where only creole cattle had grazed now had herds of Brown Swiss cows adapted to high altitudes. In fields, communities, small towns and in Huancayo, the capital of the Junín region some 3,200 meters above sea level, a palpable level of prosperity contrasted sharply with the situation that had existed when IVITA and the IAF were forced out. Over the 25 years since the insurrection had ended, residents had worked to revive milk production and it is flourishing today despite the political violence and economic instability that had hindered it.

### An approach introduced, then endangered

During the 1970s and 1980s, IVITA's team of professionals, as a result of experimentation with the traditional European model promoted by the German aid agency in Peru, developed a simpler approach to milk production for small and medium-sized farms. This variation was tailored to Andean farming communities that had the requisite parcel measuring at least five hectares with access to irrigation once a week and planted with three varieties of grass and two legumes sufficient for grazing for 15 cows and one bull. Holsteins were to be introduced in commu-

nities up to 3,500 meters above sea level and Brown Swiss at 3,500 meters and above. Electric fencing would be installed to help rotate the animals through sections of the field. The expected daily yield per cow was between three and 10 liters, which would go on for more than 249 days after delivery of a calf. (Farmers had been averaging five liters.) The bulls provided by IVITA would also be available to nonparticipating farmers.

IAF support allowed IVITA to introduce this approach in five campesino communities across the Mantaro Valley. The farmers were highly receptive and many began to adapt the new methods to their own farms, developing pastures and using the communal bull to improve their own herds. The initial results of the application of the new techniques to milk production were promising, in spite of limited access to water and low temperatures in the highlands. But by 1990, hyperinflation and lack of security spelled the end of the project. Arsenio Damián, the current president of Chaquicocha, had also been its president when the community was a participant in IVITA's project. He recently recalled Chaquicocha's experience with the Shining Path:

*In March of 1988, [the Shining Path] destroyed the Sociedad Agrícola de Interés Social "Heroínas de Toledo," with which the community of Chaquicocha was affiliated. Because residents were unfamiliar with this level of violence they didn't consider it important. On May 1, the first "paintings" occurred. Overnight the plaza was covered with Sendero slogans, but we didn't think much of it. The suffering began with threats at night. Everything happened at night, not during the day. The terrorists started pulling people from their homes and forcing them into the plaza. They started shouting: "Who are the authorities? Where do you think the money from this milk production goes? Where do you think the money from fattening animals goes? Where do you think the money from your labor, your crops and everything else goes?" When I went to IVITA, one of the offices had been blown up with dynamite and the faculty told me that they were all receiving death threats. Dr. Horacio Acuña told me the Shining Path was looking for the team leader and that his house in Huancayo was being watched.*

*They began the destruction after what they called "consciousness raising." Then, after two or three months*

*of destruction, they continued demanding: "Get rid of this! Get rid of that!" They set things on fire and demanded that the dairy animals be distributed; everything had to be gone. Many residents asked why we had to destroy our tractors, our cattle. That's our livelihood. "What is it that you want? Do you intend for us to regress to another era? How will we work our fields?" we asked. "Everything must go," we were told. Those who complained were marked men.*

When the IAF grant ended, we thought that all was lost or soon would be. Most of the purebred cattle were slaughtered. Some campesinos managed save a few cows by hiding them when the terrorists appeared near their farms, bringing the animals into their homes, an act of defiance that endangered the entire family. Because of the threats, the community's president Arsenio Damián had to leave the country; he went to the United States to work as

a shepherd in the Midwest where he suffered from homesickness. After Abimael Guzmán, the leader of the Shining Path, was captured, Damián returned to Valle del Mantaro to begin the arduous process of cultivating the trust that would allow him regain his position in the community.

### Recovery

During the 1990s, the Peruvian government focused on stabilizing the economy and normalizing the political situation. The effects were not felt in the Mantaro Valley until the new century, when economic growth of between 4 percent and 6 percent over two decades created the conditions needed to spur productivity, including for dairies. The increased demand in urban areas due to the emergence of a burgeoning middle class attracted Gloria, Peru's largest dairy, to the Valley in 2005, a benchmark for local producers. Gloria used incentives to encourage



Kathryn Shaw

*Solar panels enabled the operation of electrified fences.*

improvements in milk quality; it guaranteed a steady price and prompt payment and brought about a boost in the price paid by its competitors on whom producers had previously depended. This helped develop a reliable and expanding market for milk. Farmers on any scale could sell to Gloria at a stable price or to less established buyers who might offer a higher price but did not always honor their commitments.

By the second half of the 1990s, social programs such as Programa Nacional de Apoyo Alimentario (PRONAA), which offered school breakfasts, encouraged production of fresh pasteurized milk and later drinkable yogurt. When PRONAA closed in 2011, some plants vanished but others, like CONCELAC and Dolce Latte, for example, had diversified to supply ice cream, yogurt and cheese to the thriving shopping malls of Lima and the provincial capitals, including Huancayo. Like Gloria, these enterprises paid competitive prices for high quality. The milk producers of the Huanchar community, on the valley floor, were CONCELAC's first supplier.

With a stable market, individual farmers and producer associations became more willing to risk investing in breeding better cattle, in boosting the area and quality of their grasslands, in planting forage and in building silos and milking sheds. More funding for municipal governments, a result of Peru's move to decentralize official functions and devolve public resources, allowed local authorities to invest in infrastructure that benefited farmers, such as irrigation channels, storage areas and milking facilities. A new irrigation channel running along the right bank of the Mantaro River, for example, helped increase alfalfa production for markets on the outskirts of Lima, and was a boon to farmers developing pastures, later encouraging an increase in cattle. Grasses in the valley and forage cereals displaced some traditional crops, such as potatoes. Thanks to highways that have improved access, other regions of Peru now supply corn and potatoes to markets in Lima, while the valley, once considered Lima's pantry, benefits from the capital's lucrative market for dairy products. Milk not only yields more revenue for farmers than corn and potatoes but offers a steadier and more

dependable flow of cash all year round, as opposed to seasonal payment for harvests. And in the context of climate change, agriculture is riskier than milk production, which can better withstand frost and hail.

Under conditions that favor their enterprise, producers often benefit from displacing competitors who are not as well situated, but this doesn't seem to be the case in the Mantaro Valley. Of the large cooperative associations created as a result of the agrarian reform undertaken by the military government of the 1970s, only two have survived and the Valley has only a small number of medium-sized commercial dairy farms. A significant volume of the milk still comes from farmers in communities producing on a small scale who have continued to improve the size and quality of their herds, pastures and forage.

The five communities where IVITA had introduced its experimental approach continue this work under the management of the children of those who were in charge back in the 1980s. They slowly rebuilt what Shining Path had destroyed and they did it without resources from IVITA or the IAF. "The farmers have invested very slowly, according to the resources they have on hand, because banks are dangerous," said Damián, whose experience has made him loan-shy. "These campesinos are very careful and go little by little, slowly making improvements to their milk production."

Most farmers lament that had they benefited from external support or just not been forced to start over, their cattle, their grassland and their cheese production would be better. But they are proud of the skills that their parents had learned from IVITA's professionals and passed on to them and of what they have accomplished. Those skills have endured and spread from one community to another, resulting in better milk production and at least somewhat improved cattle. "Of course the production is not what it used to be back before the project ended, because those were good cows," said Miguel Paguiyouri, a farmer from Iscos, another community that had participated in IVITA's project. "I remember one we named Poronguita. She produced some 20 liters per day. Twenty liters!"

## Conclusion

In the 1980s, the economist Albert Hirschman published *Getting Ahead Collectively*, a book based on his analysis of a series of IAF grantees. Among the ideas he presented was his notion of the conservation and mutation of social energy. He observed that when collective efforts for change become frustrated or repressed at a particular moment, the energy from what was learned didn't disappear but was preserved to emerge and flourish once again when conditions were appropriate.

IVITA's milk production program exemplifies this theory. At the end of the 1990s, political violence and economic crisis seemed to have wiped out the milk producers in the Mantaro Valley. But even though the terrorists of the Shining Path forced the farmers to destroy everything they had, the farmers stayed in the valley and, without any external assistance,

revived their previous way of life when the economic and political context improved. Today these campesinos continue adapting the approach introduced by IVITA in the 1980s without any loss of its distinguishing features. Furthermore, they have adjusted to the new market and changing climate, so that fruit emerges from a seed planted in what once seemed to be arid soil.

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*Martin Scurrah is an independent researcher who provided support services to IAF-funded projects in Peru in the 1980s. Custodio Bojórquez, a specialist in pastures with an M.S. from Massey University in New Zealand, teaches in the School of Veterinary Science of San Marcos University in Lima. He was on the team that developed the approach introduced in communities in the Mantaro Valley. The authors thank everyone who contributed to this article, especially Edgar Olivera for his help with interviews.*

## All in a Day's Work

*IAF staff, contractors and grantees have had to negotiate precarious situations perpetrated by regimes, insurgencies and, recently, criminals. Carlos Lingán, a certified public accountant and the dean of the IAF's corps of auditors, has been on the job for more than 30 years and conducted audits during the days of the Shining Path.*

In the early 1990s, I was auditing an IAF-funded revolving seed bank housed in a convent in Humachuco, in the highlands near Trujillo, some 550 kilometers from Lima. From the Trujillo airport I boarded a bus for Humachuco, and in the sierra, it had a flat tire. According to other passengers, the area was controlled by the Shining Path, the Maoist insurgency that terrorized Peru from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s. Oddly enough, the situation struck me as normal; I had traveled through such places before. The tire was replaced and I reached the convent at nightfall. The grantee's staff handed me all the documents I needed to begin my audit.

We left early the next morning to visit farmers to verify they had received seeds and finished close to nightfall. On the way back to Humachuco, at 5,000 meters above sea level, we had a flat tire, only this vehicle didn't have a spare. We hiked some four hours in the dark to get help. I think the project manager was navigating by the stars. At almost 9:00 p.m. we reached the main road, hungry, thirsty and cold. At that hour, there was no public transportation, given the constant threat of terrorism, but we sat down and waited. About an hour later, we heard the roar of a 10-ton truck. The project manager approached the driver. "We are saved," I thought, and I introduced myself. Two police officers with automatic weapons interrogated me, military style, then said we could ride in the back with the cargo. Having no alternative, we climbed up over the back tire and jumped inside, where we found a third armed officer. The cargo we were riding with was boxes and boxes of dynamite en route to nearby mining operations, escorted by the military for fear that terrorists might hijack the explosives. A single spark in that truck, and I wouldn't be around to tell this story.

# The Weavers of San Isidro

By Patrick Breslin

In 1982, Deborah Szekely made her first trip to Colombia as the Inter-American Foundation's third president, shortly after assuming the position. In Bogotá, she discovered the Museum of Folk Arts and Traditions, an IAF grantee that advised artisans and helped them get better prices by improving their crafts and marketing. On display was a collection of woolen weavings from San Isidro, a community tucked into the mountains that flank Bogotá on the east. Szekely, the owner of two high-end health spas that showcased art and handicrafts, the Golden Door in California and Rancho la Puerta in Tecate, Mexico, announced her intention to buy all 15 weavings. To the staff at the Museum and at the IAF the gesture seemed an impulsive whim typical of a

wealthy North American. But Szekely had her reason. "I realized the weavings were the history of the community," she explained. "If they were sold separately, the narrative would be lost. So I decided to buy them all, to keep them together."

Since then, most of those weavings have been stored in her home. Last year, she decided to exhibit them at the reopening of the New Americans Museum she had founded in San Diego. She thought the story the weavings told was relevant to the museum's celebration of Latin American and Asian immigrants and of their contributions to the diversity of the United States and its culture. But with the passage of 32 years, the details of the story had faded and the few labels attached to the weav-



*San Isidro.*

All photos by Patrick Breslin



*Carmen Samper, Cecilia Duque Duque, Sara Cerón and Marina Cerón in Samper's home.*

ings said little about their creators. Szekely recalled some mention of an IAF grant awarded to a former Peace Corps Volunteer to teach weaving to women in the community. Given its bottom-up approach to development—funding the ideas of people at the grassroots rather than deciding what they needed to learn—that didn't sound like the way IAF operated. So who did teach them? What were the weavings about? Some, for example, depicted trucks and soldiers in uniform. San Isidro resembled the thousands of squatter settlements in Latin America, where the poor threw up flimsy shelters on government or private property and resisted eviction. It was easy to guess that the soldiers were removing people from the land. So how had the barrio survived? And what had become of the weavers?

Last August, Szekely asked me to trace the San Isidro weavers and pin down their story. New Americans Museum had opened in 2008, but two years later, a legal dispute shuttered it. It took Szekely four years to get the keys back. To attract people to the reopening in January she planned to exhibit the weavings' depiction of a community built by refugees and also paintings and mixed-media displays by Colombian-American Carolyn Castaño. The Los Angeles-based artist's work had grown out of her own experience with a more recent group of Colombian women forced from their homes by political violence,

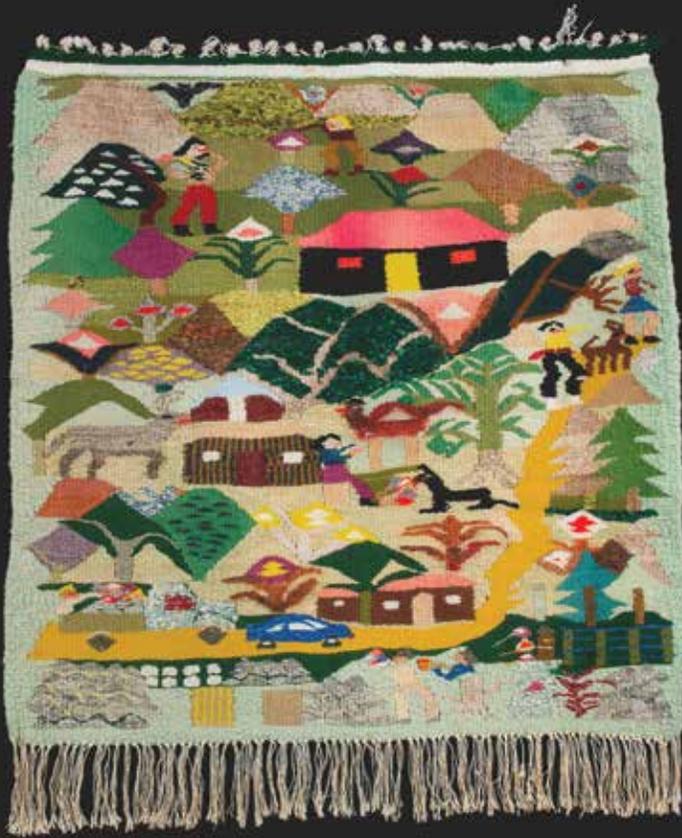
who were learning to weave in shelters in the city of Medellín.

Former colleagues pointed me to Colombians who had been involved with handicrafts and with San Isidro in the 1960s and 1970s. No one remembered a Peace Corps Volunteer, but another name emerged: Olga de Amaral, an internationally-known Colombian artist famed for her shimmering, often monumental, hangings that combine wool yarn with diverse fabrics and precious metals such as gold. Armed with color photos of Szekely's collection, I flew to Bogotá to see Cecilia Duque, the founder and director of the Museum of Folk Arts and Traditions, where Szekely had first seen the weavings. An internationally-known authority on handicrafts, Duque has published large format books documenting folk traditions throughout Colombia. In 1990, President César Gaviria appointed her director of Artesanías de Colombia, an agency within the development ministry charged with aiding artisans. She would hold the position under five successive presidents. (See *Grassroots Development* 2009.)

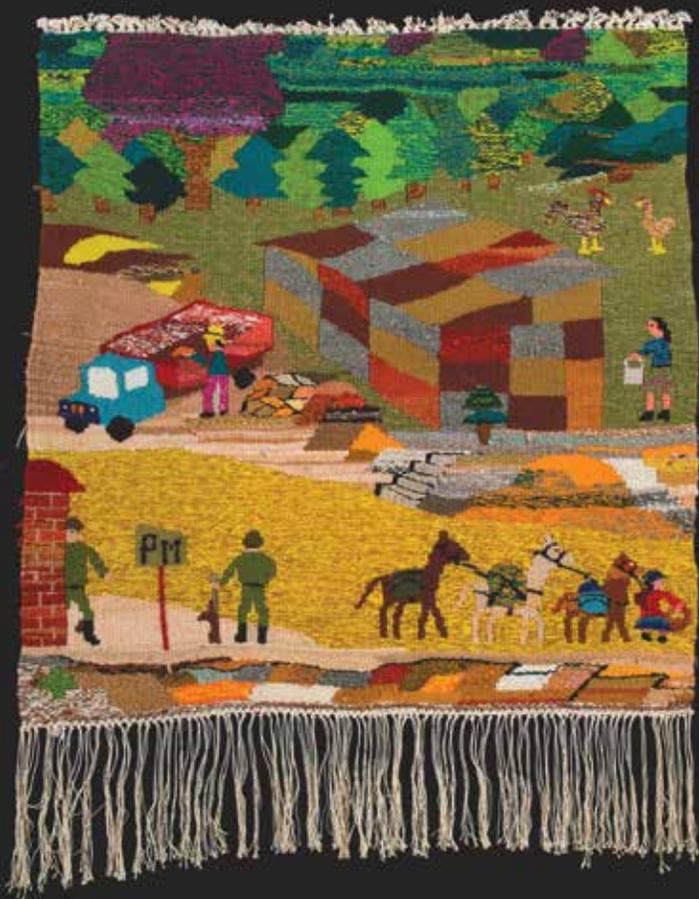
By the time I arrived in Bogotá, Duque had traced some of the weavers still in the barrio and arranged a meeting. I was surprised to learn that the character of San Isidro had been undisturbed by Bogotá's relentless growth to a population surpassing 7 million. Over the last 60 years, the Colombian capital

1. *The jungle landscape imagined by Ricardo and Jesús Chipó.*
2. *Ana Irene de Hernández' depiction of a dinosaur.*
3. *A day in the life of San Isidro.*
4. *San Isidro's school.*
5. *"The textures of life are woven into these tranquil scenes."*

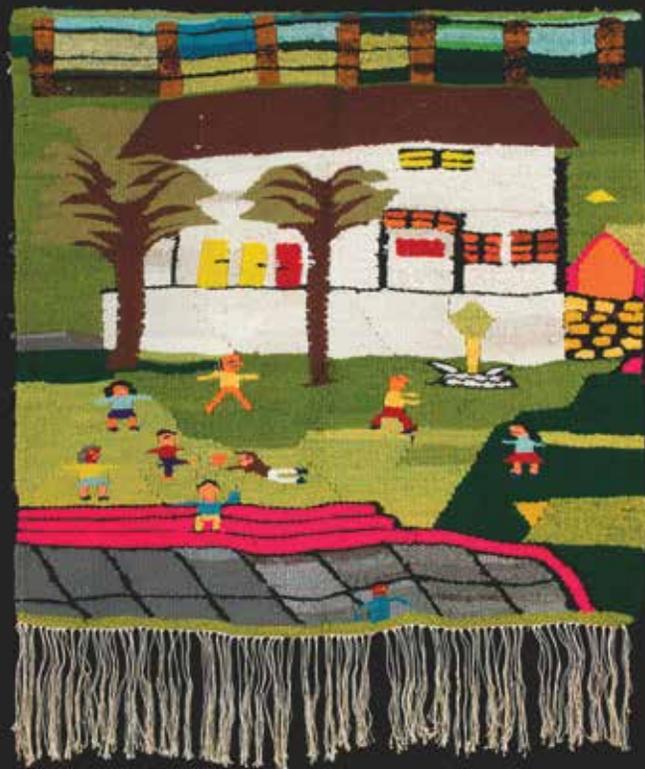
1.



2.



3.



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5.

has spread across the surrounding flat savannah like a river in flood, but the eastern mountain range, a crease of which shelters San Isidro, is a dike that channels new construction along a north-south axis.

Duque and I met in the spacious apartment of Carmen Samper in a high-rise a few blocks from the foot of the mountains. With Samper was Sara Cerón, one of the original weavers, dressed in a skirt and sweater, only a few hints of gray in her dark hair, and Marina Cerón, her daughter, trim and casual in jeans, shoulder-length chestnut hair brushing her fitted leather jacket. Samper walks with difficulty and suffers from respiratory problems. Widowed, she moved to the apartment from her house in a neighborhood called El Refugio, on the edge of the city just below San Isidro. There, in the 1960s, she and Silvia de Liévano, both members of the local social action committee, wondered about the almost daily procession of women and children carrying berries and bunches of wildflowers from the high slopes down to Calle 85, a busy thoroughfare, where Bogotá residents came to buy. "We would see them coming past our houses," Carmen recalled, more than 50 years later. "I wondered about their education. 'No,' they told me, 'we don't have a school.' The building had collapsed. So Silvia and I started to organize a school in my home and to think about what else could be done. Some of the women were interested in learning to weave. We turned to our neighbors for help." One of those neighbors was Olga de Amaral, already a successful artist.

I contacted Diego Amaral, her son, and learned she was recovering from surgery and couldn't receive visitors but would agree to a telephone interview. "When Carmen and Silvia approached me, I had just read a book that showed weavings of landscapes from Egypt done on a simple loom," Amaral told me over the phone. "It inspired me to see if something like that could be done in Colombia." In 1964, she took a couple of rustic looms up to San Isidro, and she also invited two women from the barrio to her studio to learn more about the craft. "We began teaching, and the women liked the work," she said. "It's a simple technique, easy to teach. I told them to just weave the scenes they saw around them, the scenes from their daily lives." Later, she sent an assistant to continue



*Ricardo and Jesús Chipó as boys, and right, today.*

the training. Sara Cerón remembers up to 61 people learning to weave at one time.

A few weavers quickly moved beyond Amaral's advice. A close look at some of the weavings reveals fantastical creatures. In one, a fierce looking beast with taloned feet shares the scene with birds, pack-horses and people. "It's a dinosaur," weaver Ana Irene de Hernández told me matter-of-factly when I visited her home in San Isidro. "I just liked to put dinosaurs in." Some weavers employed perspective in their works; houses farther up the mountains are smaller than the ones along the road. Other weavings are flatter, more like art naïf, but the figures seem to move on diagonals or zigzag, lending dynamism. A scene of the Nativity shows the three wise men approaching from the distance. Another complex weaving full of tension, with masses of figures confronting one another, is not a representation of the community at all, but of the way two teenaged broth-

ers, Jesús and Ricardo Chipo, inspired by a popular radio adventure serial, imagined a jungle landscape populated by “natives” with spears and red headbands, a bestiary of wild animals and birds, and even fiery dragons.

For the most part, however, the weavers hewed to Amaral’s suggestion. Their creations depict daily life in San Isidro and key events in its history—tiny looms signifying the introduction of weaving, prefabricated housing that replaced makeshift shelters of tin and cardboard, and the opening of the school whose appearance testifies to its central role in the community and the residents’ aspirations. The looms were simple upright rectangular frames, without a

shuttle. Fingers do all the work. The weaver stretches cotton cords vertically around the horizontal bars, then threads colored wool through the cords to make the figures, tapping down each line with the fingertips or a dinner fork to make the weave tight. “At first,” Samper said, “Olga provided wool from her workshop. Later, we arranged with another neighbor, whose family owned land where people raised sheep, to buy wool.” As the weavers began producing tapestries, attention shifted to them as a source of additional income for their families. When the first weavings were ready to be sold, they were displayed in Carmen de Samper’s house, but Samper became uncomfortable with so many unknown people pass-



ing through her home. That's when Samper and Liévano turned to Cecilia Duque for a more appropriate outlet and the weavings were marketed through the museum.

The display that caught Szekely's eye in 1982 had been produced in a burst of creativity that started in the late 1960s. The weavings depict a busy community: people tend animals; men work the quarries and load the rock in trucks or split firewood; women and children gather flowers and wild berries to sell. New houses go up and couples move furniture into them; children run and play games near the school. The textures of life are woven into these tranquil scenes. But San Isidro's founders had been migrants, and migration in Colombia's tragic history has usually been spurred by violence. To learn about the barrio's origins, I arranged with Marina Cerón to visit her home.

To get to San Isidro, you board a *colectivo*, or small bus, on Bogotá's Séptima, or Seventh Avenue, to La Calera and ride for about 10 minutes, alighting when you see along the roadside rows of garden fountains shaped from white stone and layered like wedding cakes beside piles of paving stones and slates of varying hues. The barrio rises steeply from the highway, the main road into it passing by a school with a wide, fenced patio and winding up the hillside through a maze of brightly-painted, tin-roofed, one or two-story dwellings framed by thick pine forests on the higher slopes. Flowering trees and bushes dot the hillside and grace the houses. Recently, San Isidro was incorporated into the city of Bogotá and renamed Bosques de Bella Vista for the splendid view of the northern suburbs and the savannah beyond. Sixty-five years ago, these slopes were covered with a variety of trees and plants, especially wildflowers, and honey-combed with rock quarries. The land and the quarries belonged to the Colombian military, whose Cavalry School was on Bogotá's edge, at the bottom of the mountains.

Marina led me on a tour of the barrio, including a visit to her aunt, Ana Irene de Hernández, also from the original group of weavers, and then to the compact compound where three generations of her immediate family live, beside the weaving workshop that houses MAKO, the family business. There I met her father, Ismael Cerón, a small, sturdy man in a

gray poncho who clearly learned everything anyone needed to know about correct posture during his military service in the 1950s.

In 1948, a political assassination in Bogotá touched off a conflagration throughout much of the country, sparking the longest guerrilla war in Latin America, one that continues today. (The government and the main guerrilla organization are currently meeting in Havana to try to negotiate peace.) By 1950, as I learned from Ismael Cerón and Marina's aunt, Ana Irene, who were children at the time, the violence swept through towns like Albán and Guaduas, near Bogotá, killing some of residents and sending survivors fleeing to the relative safety of the capital. (Ana Irene later composed and still sings a ballad about her memories, as a five-year-old, of the events.) Around the same time, the Cavalry School was expanding and needed stone from the nearby mountain quarries. Several of the male refugees found work in those quarries, and, with the Cavalry School's acquiescence, settled with their families on a nearby slope in houses improvised from cardboard, wood scraps and tin. The Army provided some materials, as well as tents.

In January 1964, Cerón, by then a community leader, ran into the new commander of the Cavalry School, who was making his initial inspection of its installations, including the quarries. The two men recognized one another from their service together a decade before, which gave Cerón an opening to discuss San Isidro's needs, especially for a school. The colonel was not only sympathetic; he knew of a government program to build schools around Bogotá, and he helped get one started in San Isidro the same year. During the search for teachers to staff the school, he assigned some of his officers as instructors. Isabel Cerón, Marina's sister, recalled with laughter an attempt to play hooky that ended when a soldier tucked her under his arm and jounced her down the rough path to the classroom. Education was interrupted a few years later when part of the school's foundation gave way and half the building crumbled. Families in San Isidro set about raising the funds to rebuild it through bazaars, raffles and the eventual assistance from El Refugio that also led to the introduction of weaving.

The rebuilt school was inaugurated in 1968, an event celebrated in one of the works on exhibit. Electricity finally reached the town in 1985. But the same year, the Army decided to reclaim the land on which the community stood. That kicked off a long struggle, with various cases set for trial in district courts around Bogotá. The community prevailed, thanks to Ismael Cerón's personal contacts with high-ranking military officers, residents' willingness to protest by blocking roads, a sympathetic press, pro bono legal services and El Refugio's steady support. A law recognizing the property rights of people who had occupied the same land for 20 years resulted in a string of rulings against the Army and it gave up its battle in the courts. By 1994, the residents of San Isidro had clear title to their plots and their homes were secure.

Weaving became a flourishing enterprise in San Isidro, providing families income for some 15 years. "When we began to sell weavings," Virginia Martínez said, "we opened bank accounts. Our lives improved." Households became more stable and cohesive. The community became known for skills. Surrounded by looms and colorful weavings, children grew up to follow in their parents' footsteps. "I learned to weave before I learned to read," said Marina Cerón, who still actively practices her craft. Studying a photograph of one of Szekely's weavings, she pointed to a small figure of a bird she remembered inserting as a school-girl. Recurring motifs and signature styles enabled her to identify the families that had produced specific works. We took the photos on a walk around the barrio to confirm her analysis, visiting Lucía Zorra; the Chipo brothers, Ricardo and Jesús; and Virginia Hernández, one of the two women whose apprenticeship had taken place in Olga de Amaral's studio. In each home, the photos evoked a receding but warmly remembered past and were welcomed like an unearthed time capsule.

After 10 or 15 years, many families gradually stopped weaving as booming Bogotá, a short commute down the hill, offered employment with steady salaries and benefits, often a more attractive prospect than selling on consignment and waiting, sometimes months, for payment. Weaving was supplemented, then replaced, by other sources of income. But it had brought San Isidro education and connections to the

nearby city, opening opportunities for the weavers, their children and their grandchildren, now in their 20s and 30s, many of whom have graduated from universities and entered professions. Some residents commute to Bogotá for work, others stay home and fashion decorative items for house and garden from the abundant white rock. Carvings and building materials for sale along the road below the community confirm that stone working is still an important business in the barrio.

Members of the Cerón and Chipo families continue to weave in the traditional style. MAKO, the Cerón family business, also supplies distinctive and colorful abstract designs for fashionable leather bags sold in Bogotá's shops and malls. Sara, the matriarch of the family, is MAKO's manager as well as an environmental activist. In two hothouses that produce fruits and vegetables for her family, she teaches conservation practices to school-age children. "Our grandchildren are learning that what's happening to us today," she said, "the lack of water, the reforestation with Canadian pine whose needles smother other plants and flowers, is because of all we've destroyed." Part of her hothouse space is a nursery for native plants and trees intended to restore the hillsides above the barrio.

After two days in the barrio, as I rode the *colectivo* back down to Bogotá, it occurred to me that what makes the story of the weavings significant is what's left out of them: the violence and terror that gave birth to San Isidro. Full of the details of daily life, of little boys' fantasies, of biblical scenes, the weavings vividly testify to a desire to leave behind a past of adversity, even mortal danger, to work toward a better future. In the process, these Colombians created a solid community that has kept its identity and progressed steadily over half a century, providing their children and grandchildren peace, stability and a better starting point.

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# Challenging the King of the Reef

By Jenny Petrow, Ana Carmona, Gabriela Boyer and Azucena Díaz

**T**he flamboyant lionfish, or *pterois volitans*, is a nocturnal hunter that seems to devour everything in its path. Native to the Indo-Pacific, the lionfish is fairly new to the Caribbean, where it has no natural predators, reproduces at the rate of 30,000 eggs every four days and gorges on up to 30 fry and fingerling an hour. Snappers, lobsters and other local species hardly stand a chance against this ravenous horde, which puts the ecology of reefs at risk. Also endangered is the livelihood of fishers in Caribbean enclaves. IAF grantee partners in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and Mexico have been working to reduce the numbers of these invaders at the top of the local aquatic food chain, so that the diversity of Caribbean ecosystems is protected from their voracious appetite and the sea continues to sustain fishers. “It will take a concerted effort across territorial waters to control the lionfish,” said Marcy Kelley, the IAF’s managing director of grantmaking. “The IAF hopes to support grassroots initiatives in every country of the Caribbean Basin.”



*Red lionfish have a voracious appetite and reproduce at an alarming rate.*

### The Nemo effect

In the Disney animated hit “Finding Nemo,” the title character, a little clown fish that inhabits Australia’s coral reefs, is scooped up by a diver eventually to live in an aquarium decorating the dental offices of “P. Sherman, 42 Wallaby Way, Sydney.” Nemo’s father spends most of the movie trying to find his offspring and bring him home. In the end, Nemo is flushed down the toilet back into the ocean where he is reunited with his father.

While the plumbing was the conduit to Nemo’s salvation on screen, in real life releasing tropical fish into the ocean, now known as “the Nemo effect,” can seriously endanger marine wildlife. Biologists believe the Nemo effect led to the introduction of the *pez león*, or lionfish, in the crystalline waters of the Caribbean. Unknown in the Atlantic before the 1980s, the lionfish made its appearance *en force* in the coral reefs of the Dominican Republic’s marine protected area of La Caleta in 2011, “*de la noche a la mañana*,” according to local fisherman Gregorio “Kikito” Batista—“overnight.” La Caleta, just east

of Santo Domingo, the capital city, is home to Cooperativa de Pescadores y Prestadores de Servicios Turísticos de La Caleta (COOPRESCA) that works with IAF grantee partner Reef Check Dominican Republic. Prompted by the desire to keep their economic options open for the long term, COOPRESCA’s members had themselves designated La Caleta a “no-take zone,” moving their fishing beyond its boundaries and offering services to tourists as an alternate source of income. Protecting native wildlife, they reasoned, would assure the catch for the future and would attract divers and snorkelers.

But the lionfish put that plan at risk as it gobbled up tropical fish, larvae, crustaceans and other sea creatures at an alarming rate. According to Rubén Torres, Reef Check’s director, in addition to having no predators or diseases in its new habitat, the lionfish proliferates because native species haven’t evolved the mechanisms to detect it as an enemy. Devouring way more of these easy pickings than it requires to survive has made the lionfish, said Torres, “the only species of fish that is clinically obese.”



Jenny Petrow

*Gregorio "Kikito" Batista.*

### In check in the DR

That corpulence ended up being a boon for the fishers in COOPRESCA. “The first time we caught lionfish in our nets, we just gave them away,” said Rafael “Bronco” García. But then they discovered that the fish was delicious. In 2012, Reef Check and COOPRESCA, in collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative’s Regional Lionfish Committee and Pagés BBDO, a public relations firm, embarked on a plan to generate a demand for this seafood that would give fishers an incentive to catch lionfish for a most efficient predator: *homo sapien*.

As COOPRESCA’s fishers were among the first in the Dominican Republic to market lionfish, they had to convince Dominicans to eat it. Many people believe the lionfish is poisonous, and its protective dorsal spines do contain venom, but the flesh is perfectly safe for human consumption. To change the perception, Reef Check and COOPRESCA launched “*Cómete un león*” [Eat a lion], targeting supermarkets, restaurants and consumers. Soon the lionfish provided grist for news stories, a photo for the cover of *Gastroteca* magazine and a new item on the menu for Santo Domingo’s finest restaurants—the vaunted Vesuvio Malecón, Mitre, Travesías, Asia Mía and El Agave, among others. Some of the capital’s best chefs were showcasing it in original recipes. Reef Check expanded its campaign to the rest of the island.

The lionfish resulted in an unexpected benefit for COOPRESCA: its first successful effort to sell a



product as a cooperative. By mid-2012 the fishers of COOPRESCA were supplying 100 pounds a month to restaurants and supermarkets, a reason the catch plummeted from between 70 and 80 fish a day to just two or three. Essentially the species is under control—for now, at least within La Caleta. Meanwhile, the work of Reef Check and COOPRESCA has inspired other Dominican communities, producing a similar decline in the lionfish population. The fishers of COOPRESCA regret the corresponding loss of income, but, said Kikito, “The future is in tourism.” The decrease in lionfish means an increase in other species and that diversity draws visitors, ultimately a more reliable source of income. For more about COOPRESCA’s campaign and the attractions of La Caleta, visit <http://reefcheckdr.org/> and view “videos RCDR online.”



José Alejandro Álvarez

COOPRESCA is counting on the diversity of underwater life in the Caribbean to draw tourists.



### Tico fishers in the fray

In August 2104, the IAF officially committed \$135,000 to Asociación de Pescadores Artesanales del Caribe Sur (ASOPACS), a new organization on the southern coast of Costa Rica, for its three-year effort to improve the quality of life for its fishers and preserve the local marine ecosystem. That meant controlling the lionfish, which the fishers were already trying to do via their association with the University

of Costa Rica and a small grant from the United Nations Development Programme.

To combat the invader, ASOPACS uses *nasas*, the traditional traps that its fishers build from wood and wire. To date, they estimate having placed nearly 300 *nasas* over some 30 square kilometers, which they check every three days one by one, a process that takes seven hours. Like their Dominican counterparts, ASOPACS' fishers had no idea that the lionfish



*La Esquina, a restaurant in Puerto Viejo, offers lionfish on the menú.*



Mark Caicedo

*ASOPACS uses nasas to trap lionfish off Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica. Baited with fish scraps and coconut, nasas are taken six kilometers offshore and lowered to depths of 50 to 100 meters.*

was edible and initially tossed them as trash. Today they are weighed, measured and packed for delivery to local restaurants, a market that has motivated fishers who were not using *nasas* to build them and has prompted ASOPACS to study the feasibility of selling in San José.

ASOPACS has harvested thousands of fish since entering the fray and the fishers take advantage of every opportunity to call attention to the cam-

paign. Its visibility got a boost when Luis Guillermo Solís, president of Costa Rica, visited and was photographed pulling lionfish from a nasa. The Costa Rican Ministry of Environment has been recruited to the cause, which spearheaded the creation of the Ministry's National Commission for the Management and Control of Lionfish in Costa Rica. The fishers themselves have traveled to strategy sessions in Cuba, Panama and the United States and have contributed to efforts conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce. "We can only address this problem together," said José Ugalde, who manages the project. "We thank all the collaborators." These include community residents who compete in ASOPACS' annual fishing tournament and its monthly five-hour dives to hunt lionfish with harpoons. To learn more, email the fishers at [asopescadores@gmail.com](mailto:asopescadores@gmail.com) or visit <http://www.facebook.com/AsociacionDePescadoresDelCaribeSur>.

Mark Caicedo



*Costa Rican plato típico includes lionfish, patacones, or fried plantains, and salad.*

*Martín Froilán of SCPP with a lionfish harpooned in the Biosphere Reserve Sian Ka'an.*



Citlali García

*SCPP technician Liz Tamayo and Citlali García of COBI measure lionfish captured during a tournament sponsored by SCPP. Such tracking provides valuable information on breeding rates and population size.*

### **Predators—from lenders to lionfish**

“We have to recognize that [when it comes to the lionfish] the fishers of this cooperative were pioneers in taking responsibility,” said Eduardo Pérez Catzin, president of Sociedad Cooperativa de Producción Pesquera Cozumel (SCPPC) located on the island off Mexico’s Yucutan Peninsula. Pérez Catzin is no stranger to challenges. When he was first elected to head it in 1995, the cooperative was in the thrall of predatory lenders. His austere approach to leadership had the cooperative debt-free within three years, but at the cost of a reduction in membership from which SCPPC is now recovering.

SCPPC has benefited from concessions granted by the Mexican government to fish in Sian Ka’an Biosphere Reserve and the National Reef Park of Cozumel—areas rich in coral reefs and other aquatic life. The use of scuba equipment is generally prohibited in the concession and the fishers dive to depths of some 10 to 15 meters without it to harvest most of their annual catch of some 25 tons of lobsters, retrieving them one by one from concrete structures built to mimic the crevices where the crustaceans

burrow. To assure the sustainability of stocks, they release any specimen measuring under 13.5 centimeters and refrain from fishing during the breeding season that extends from March to July. They also have a long-standing ban on nets that, if they used them, would ensnare dolphins, sea turtles and manta rays as bycatch. SCPPC’s environmental stewardship has been recognized with an award from Mexico’s Secretariat for Environment and Natural Resources.

In 2007, SCPPC was among the six cooperatives that joined forces with IAF grantee partner Comunidad y Biodiversidad (COBI) to develop the skills necessary to track and measure fish and lobster stocks and recover marine populations via the designation of a no-take zone. The participants were also worried about illegal fishing and the pressures of tourism on an industrial scale. To those concerns has been added the need to control the lionfish, whose presence in the concession the fishers and COBI staff had witnessed as early as 2005. By 2009, when the Mexican government warned of the threat to fish stocks, the lionfish was already voraciously consuming juvenile lobsters in SCPPC’s structures. But, commented Pérez Catzin, “Where the government perceived a risk, we sensed an opportunity.”

Like other fishing communities struggling to control the lionfish, SCPPC decided to make a meal out of it. “At first there was not a lot of demand,” Pérez Catzin and sales fell short of expenses. With COBI’s support, SCPPC launched tastings in Cancún and Playa del Carmen and slowly the public came to accept it. Lionfish is on the menu in SCPPC’s restaurant and other facilities on the island, in Mexico City and the United States, which has raised the price, benefiting other cooperatives on the Yucatán Peninsula as well as SCPPC.

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*Jenny Petrow and Gabriela Boyer are IAF representatives; Ana Carmona and Azucena Díaz provide IAF liaison services in Costa Rica and Mexico.*



## Forum for Fellows' Findings

The IAF complements its grants furthering bottom-up, citizen-led development with a Fellowship Program funding academic research into the context and trends that affect the efforts of the organized poor and the groups that support them in Latin America and the Caribbean. This commitment to scholarship at the grassroots dates almost as far back as launch of the IAF's grant program in the early 1970s. To date, IAF Fellowships have reached 1,145 Ph.D. and master's candidates as well as social entrepreneurs pursuing independent study. Since 2007, the IAF has offered support for doctoral dissertation research by students from throughout the hemisphere who are enrolled in universities in the United States.

For the past four years, the IAF has issued an annual invitation to all alumni of recent Fellowship cycles to submit manuscripts for publication in *Grassroots Development* pending a rigorous review by an anonymous subcommittee of the scholars who scrutinize application for the IAF's Grassroots Development Fellowships. This year's jury selected the manuscript by Laura Guitiérrez Escobar for this issue. *Grassroots Development* thanks everyone who contributed to the success of this competition, which 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. The section leads off with the manuscript of Anne Gillman, of the 2014-2015 cycle of Fellows, which she adapted for publication here from her paper that had been accepted for presentation at the 2015 Congress of the Latin American Studies Association.

We remain excited about this feature of our journal. Most obviously, it brings some of the benefit of the Fellowship Program to a broader audience and it represents another credential for the authors whose work appears here. For more information on the IAF's Fellowships, visit [www.iie.org/iaf](http://www.iie.org/iaf).— *P.D.*



Anne Gillman, her son and Brazilian musicians.

All photos courtesy Anne Gillman

## Poets, Clowns and Paperwork: Negotiating a Culture of Bureaucracy in Brazil

By Anne Gillman

Pontos de Cultura (PdC) is a program of the Brazilian government that funds grassroots-generated cultural initiatives in poor communities throughout the country. Upon learning of it, I can attest to being caught up in the same *encantamento*, or enchantment, that PdC participants frequently described to me in interviews. In the spring of 2004, musician Gilberto Gil, a cultural icon and President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's new minister of culture, was touring the United States to discuss his cultural agenda. During a visit to my university, Gil eloquently outlined a new policy

that would allocate Ministry resources to the diverse creative endeavors bubbling up from the grassroots in underserved areas. Gil's proposal sounded as poetic as the lyrics of his songs; the PdC program would *descesconder*, literally "unhide," or bring to light, cultural expressions of excluded populations by funding and officially recognizing previously undervalued, sometimes even persecuted, practices and embracing them as part of Brazil's rich patrimony. "Culture is life, and life is flux," he explained. I nodded vigorously, clasping the guitar that I had brought in the

hopes that I would get a chance to ask my question, which, by the way, I eventually did: “How about a song, Minister Gil?” He graciously complied.

Culture may be life, and life may be flux, but the instruments for transferring state funding to marginalized cultural groups in Brazil are not so flexible, it turns out. Although Gil and his fellow visionaries in the Ministry may have intended that the PdC policy “unhide” the creative activities of subaltern groups, states have particular ways of “seeing” their populations, as political scientist James Scott famously observed, that tend to miss, obscure and distort precisely the kinds of practices upon which popular culture is built. The tools of documentation that states use in efforts to render “legible” their citizenry—for example, census or employment data—generate “abridged maps” of social reality that often fail to represent its complexity and the ways things

actually get done. When states intervene in people’s lives through official policies, the gap between de facto social practices and these representative abstractions can lead to disastrous results. By the time I began visiting the PdC program’s state-funded community projects, or “Pontos,” as part of my pre-dissertation research, these tensions were apparent.

The PdC program aims to encourage cultural production, however what the Brazilian state ultimately counts are receipts. In the words of one *ponteiro*, as the Brazilians who comprise the Pontos are called, the state cares about fiscal notes, not musical notes. Upon being selected as a Ponto, cultural groups submit detailed work plans outlining the activities they will undertake and expenses they will incur. At the end of each year, Pontos must send hard copies of valid receipts for each good purchased or service contracted as evidence that public resources were used according to the plan. An entire half floor of the Ministry houses a staff of technocrats tasked with sorting through the stacks of paper that tower on their desks and determining whether Pontos have sufficiently accounted for funds disbursed. In contrast, a small storeroom holds a random array of CDs, videos, paintings, sculptures, writings and other cultural paraphernalia that *ponteiros* inevitably include with the boxes of paperwork they submit in earnest efforts to demonstrate the fruits of their labors.

If meticulous planning of popular and folkloric initiatives three years in advance seems problematic, even more difficult is accurately mapping out how such projects will unfold in communities where daily life is unpredictable and precarious. Gun fights, floods, lack of electricity, and military occupations ranked among the reasons Pontos that I visited diverged from their work plans. Even if a plan is rigorously followed, in most of the rural townships, urban squatter settlements, indigenous villages and other marginalized communities that the program reaches, financial documentation is simply unobtainable. Commerce operates via face-to-face exchanges—I tell you the price, you hand me the cash, I give you the drum. At best a monetary figure might be scrawled on a piece of paper.



*Sculptor from a Ponto de Cultura in Santa Catarina.*



*Folkloric dance troupe, another Ponto in Santa Catarina.*

Government workers and *ponteiros* alike affirmed to me that the vast majority of Pontos are generating innovative outputs, but this is rarely corroborated by what the state “sees” through its rigid processes of financial documentation. The stakes for complying with the program’s accounting requirements are high, since funds are disbursed as advances that must be returned with interest if not “properly” used. On a few occasions, *ponteiros* referred to “the clown who went to jail” for noncompliance—a likely apocryphal, but nonetheless revealing tale that conveys both the perceived danger and the absurdity of the program’s bureaucratic hurdles.

Yet the PdC program has flourished and expanded over the past decade. Pontos throughout Brazil continue to engage in cultural activities through the program, and new Pontos are selected and funded each year. Few, if any, clowns have actually been prosecuted. In fact, in spite of the profound incompatibility between the program’s innovative mission and its ridiculously complex administrative

requirements, many *ponteiros* relate that the policy has produced positive transformations in relations between poor communities and the Brazilian state. How could this be the case?

I spent a year trying to answer this question, hanging out with *ponteiros* and with government workers, primarily in the states of Rio de Janeiro in the southwest and Alagoas in the northeast. I interviewed poets, clowns, cellists, rappers, ballerinas and minstrels, as well as bureaucrats, elected officials, accountants and government contractors. I sat through seemingly interminable meetings in Brasilia in which *ponteiros* and technocrats debated the minute details of proposed modifications to PdC accounting processes, and I danced to a traditional Northeastern *forro* played by a band of octogenarian accordionists in a small town three hours down a road lined with endless sugar cane fields. I also spent three months giving piano lessons at a Ponto located in the favela of Santa Marta in Rio de Janeiro. An upright piano had somehow miraculously made its

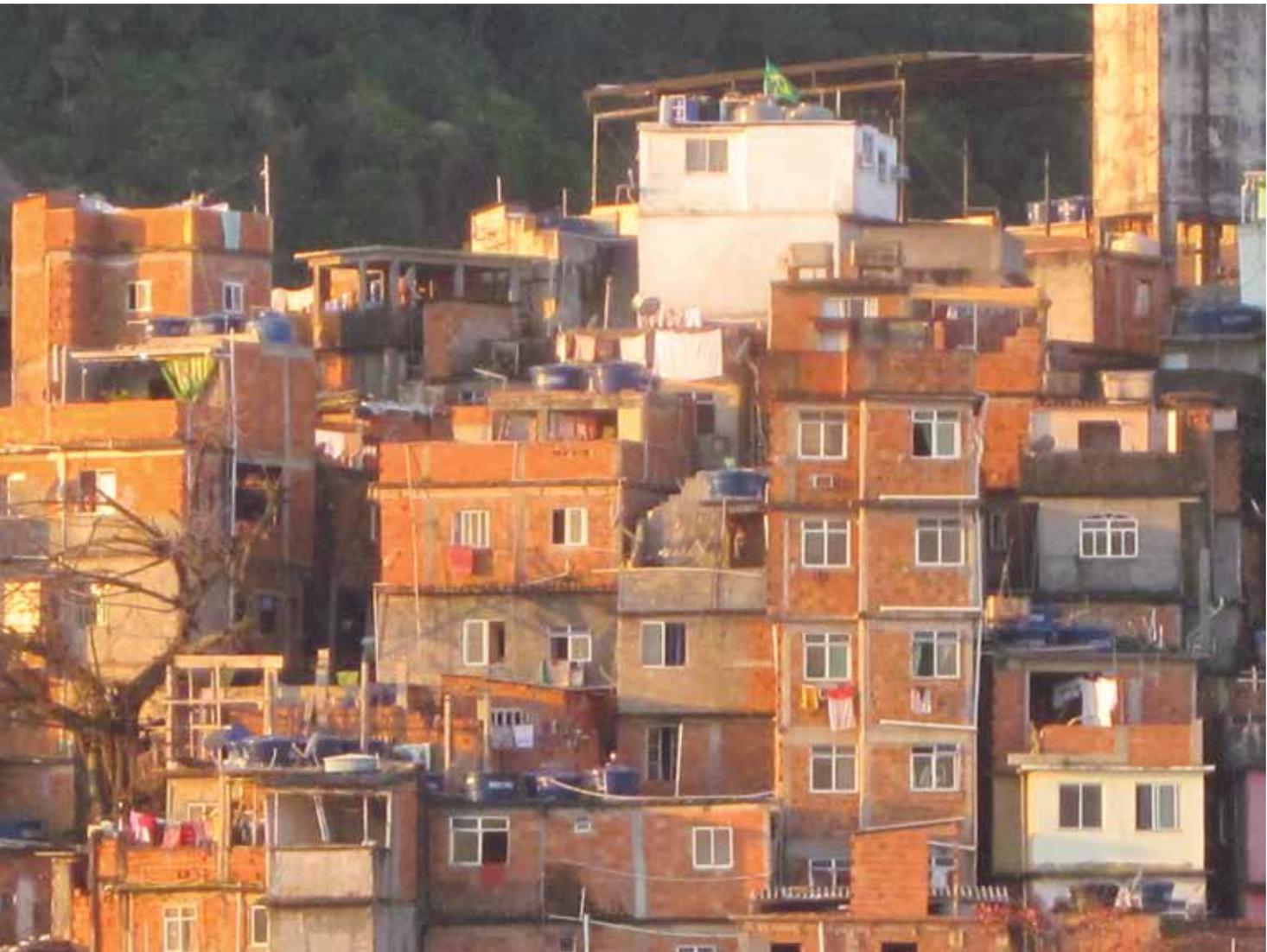
way up the favela's steep narrow pathways and, even more improbably, remained in tune.

Here is what I found. The key to the puzzling outcome emerging from the clash between the PdC program's divinely creative mission and its arduously bureaucratic form lies in the close relationships between *ponteiros* and bureaucrats. Early in my research, it became clear that the paperwork requirements of the PdC program serve as a main point of contact. During the three weeks I spent hanging out in the Alagoas Secretariat of Culture, for example, I observed an almost constant flow of *ponteiros* dropping in to ask questions and seek advice. Almost all of these solicitations related to some form to be filled out or the details of some administrative procedure.

Many individuals who passed through had never had any contact with a state official or entered a government office before their group was selected as a Ponto de Cultura. I asked one *ponteiro* how many times she had visited the Secretariat after her theatrical troupe was selected as a Ponto. "I lost count," she replied with a chuckle.

Repeated encounters do not necessarily produce positive relationships. The four trips I made to the Federal Police to try to extend my visa did not endear me to the Brazilian state, though I did become intimately acquainted with the sterile waiting area and stale snack options. Familiarity can just as easily breed contempt, not to mention extreme frustration, as it can collaboration. The critical ingredient in the

*Favela Santa Marta, where the author gave piano lessons.*



PdC program is a cadre of committed managers who defy stereotypes of the typical bureaucrat. Of the more than 30 government employees whom I interviewed, almost all had a personal connection to the arts and were passionately committed to the program. Fernanda, coordinator of the program in Rio de Janeiro, is related to Chico Buarque, one of Brazil's most heralded cultural figures, a brilliant composer and dramatist known for his resistance during the dictatorship. Alexandre, a mid-level bureaucrat and lifelong Carnival enthusiast, spent his youth running errands for samba groups to earn a chance to parade with them. Such individuals do not "see" like a state.

PdC managers serve as critical intermediaries between Pontos and a rigid, rule-bound state apparatus. They respond to and are constrained by legislation that governs the transfer of public resources and by the less formal institutions and routines of bureaucracies. But they also understand the complex social realities within which Pontos operate, and they genuinely appreciate and admire their cultural initiatives. They go out of their way to assist *ponteiros* with navigating administrative hurdles. "The Pontos call for help, and we do everything we can," explained a PdC manager in the Secretariat of Culture of Rio de Janeiro. "We go there, we converse with them. We have our reality here, which is our day-to-day bureaucracy, and our work, yes, is bureaucratic. But the relationship with the Pontos is really different. It is about trying to understand, about putting ourselves in their shoes. We are the bridge between the bureaucratic side and the human side." PdC bureaucrats give *ponteiros* the number of their personal cell phone, make home visits, work late into the night and generally over-extend themselves to help Pontos produce the necessary documentation. Their dedication is fed by Pontos' cultural outputs. A state worker and I visited a new Ponto in Rio de Janeiro, where a young black man performed a dramatic representation of a poem he had written reflecting, ironically, on his instruction as a child to always smile. We spent the entire trip home marveling at his talent that the simplicity of the context had accentuated—one man on an empty stage in a church, his audience in folding chairs. Rio's poor urban communities have served as archetypical cases of the ways state-society interactions produce mar-

ginality, but also of the special places marginalized communities occupy within Brazil's cultural landscape. Observing the warm exchanges between the bureaucrat and the artists in this context, I felt I was witnessing firsthand how initiatives to cultivate the cultural resources of excluded populations can help these margins shift.

Part of the managers' bridging role involves mediating between Pontos' inspiring cultural expressions and what gets reflected on paper. Alexandre described a rural organization that had purchased a cow, since the work plan included a line item for participants' food. Legally, however, a cow is personal property, not food. Therefore the group's initial accounting was rejected, since, technically, the expenditure diverged from the plan. "How are you going to tell someone from the country that a cow isn't food?" Alexandre exclaimed in exasperation. He advocated within the bureaucracy to resolve this misunderstanding and ensure the Ponto was not required to return spent funds. Such intervention is common. "We really put ourselves out there with other sectors," another PdC worker commented. "Maybe by their training they [accounting sectors] see the guy [*ponteiro*] as a stack of papers, but we know he has an amazing project. So we say, 'Hey, let's try some flexibility, let's see what we can do.'"

Exchanges between government representatives and *ponteiros* generate learning on both sides of the equation. The program is, said one *ponteiro*, "turning artists into bureaucrats." Through the intense learning-by-doing process of managing public funds for the first time, often with hand-holding by dedicated bureaucrats, *ponteiros* acquire the technical skills and knowledge needed to navigate dense administrative processes. In many cases, *ponteiros* then apply these skills toward other goals, for example, accessing other sources of public funding. But state representatives and *ponteiros* alike recognize that something is lost if culture becomes too bureaucratized, so they collaborate to push for changes that enable the Brazilian state to "see" cultural practices and reach and respond to marginalized groups. Sometimes this involves informal modifications to regulations and practices, such as extending deadlines. Collaborations have also led to formal changes in rules and legislation (a subject meriting more discussion than is

possible here). For example, when applying for status as a Ponto de Cultura, indigenous groups are now permitted to describe their activities orally rather than in writing.

The PdC program is in fact helping transform state-society relations in Brazil by the direct transfer of public resources to grassroots cultural groups in poor communities, although not exactly as Minister Gil might have envisioned. Certainly the artistic content of the policy plays a critical role in this process. Culture is an arena in which poor communities may be particularly rich; some of Brazil's most valued musical styles, samba and forró, emerged from impoverished urban and rural areas. Recognizing these areas for their resources not their deficiencies, the PdC program encourages the creativity of excluded groups, laying the ground for distinctly different forms of interaction between marginalized populations and the Brazilian state. Ironically, paperwork is also a key driver in these transformations, serving as the primary motive for engagement between participants and government workers. These fruitful encounters often leave *ponteiros* better able to access and influence the Brazilian state, and the Brazilian state better able to accommodate the practices of marginalized cultural groups. In these processes, friction between paper-pushing and culture-making generates combusive energy. *Ponteiros'* and state workers' shared enchantment with the PdC program's creative mission, nurtured by their ongoing engagement with its inspiring cultural outputs, provides the grease.

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*Musicians from "Meninos do Sítio,"  
a Ponto de Cultura in rural Alagoas.*







*Traditional corn varieties preserved by a seed saver in Canamomo and Lomapieta.*

All photos courtesy Laura Gutiérrez Escobar

## Seeds of Struggle in Colombia

*By Laura Gutiérrez Escobar*

Who holds the right to use and reproduce seeds has pitted Colombian farmers against the biotechnology industry in a struggle that has intensified since 2012. At issue for the farmers is “seed sovereignty,” or their right to decide which kinds of seeds to grow and how they circulate (Kloppenborg, 2010: 153). Seed sovereignty parallels the term “food sovereignty” coined by the transnational social movement La Vía Campesina. It refers to farming that responds adequately to the need for food while being culturally appropriate as well as compatible with social norms and the responsible use of the environment

(La Vía Campesina, 2008; Desmerais, 2007; Gutiérrez Escobar, 2011).

### **The roots of conflict**

The escalation of this conflict is rooted in (1) the promotion of transgenic or genetically modified (GM) crops, especially corn destined for commodity markets as raw material for agrofuels and animal feed, and (2) claims that plants and their genetic material are increasingly subject to intellectual property rights. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Colombia and the United States, which became effec-

tive in 2012, six years after it was signed, requires Colombia to join the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) of 1991, a system that restricts farmers' rights to use the seeds they grow. UPOV91 does this by recognizing the property interest of breeders, usually industrial, in hybrid and GM seeds and in seeds considered "essentially derived" from the protected varieties. Its protections extend to seeds that might in their natural state share the characteristics of the engineered seeds and even to varieties involving no creative process but that were "discovered" and had not been previously registered anywhere as intellectual property. (Grupo Semillas, 2011; Gutiérrez Escobar and Fitting, 2015). Vandana Shiva, an activist in India, calls such corporate claims to ownership "biopiracy" and dismisses them as illegitimate. She emphasizes that the seeds claimed are really the product and patrimony of the farmers who have cared for and developed them over millennia (Shiva, 2001: 49). Among the most vigorous activists working in Colombia for the right to save seeds and against the proliferation of GM crops are farmers in Cañamomo and Lomapieta, a name that refers to a single *resguardo*, or indigenous territory near the town of Riosucio, department of Caldas.

### The *resguardo*

Cañamomo and Lomapieta, located on Colombia's coffee-growing axis, is one of four *resguardos* belonging to the indigenous Embera-Chamí people. The Colombian Constitution of 1991 recognizes the right of native peoples to recover territory and their identity and to political autonomy. In 2009, to protect agrobiodiversity and prevent the entry of GM crops and food, particularly maize, residents, claiming to exercise their constitutional rights, declared Cañamomo and Lomapieta a "transgenic-free territory," one of the few in Colombia. They also created a *Red de Custodios de Semillas*, a Network of Seed Custodians, and they built a community seed house—initiatives intended to control the kinds of seeds valued as well as their ownership, cultivation and circulation. The Network of Free Seeds (NFS) has actively supported Cañamomo and Lomapieta. NFS comprises grassroots and nongovernmental organizations that campaign against GM seeds and legal

protection for claims to plants as private property and in favor of initiatives toward seed sovereignty. The *resguardo* has worked closely with the Colombian nongovernmental organizations Corporación Custodios de Semillas and Grupo Semillas, and with SwissAid, all members of the NFS. A crucial ally is the municipal government of Riosucio, whose mayor became the first indigenous Colombian elected to the position—after three other indigenous candidates were assassinated while campaigning.

The *resguardo's* declaration holds that seeds constitute an indigenous people's patrimony and belong only to *Pachamama*, mother earth. Therefore, it says, seeds can neither be "altered or contaminated in their natural condition nor privately owned." The declaration prohibits "programs of food security and agricultural development that include GM seeds, food or packages of technology that put at risk our traditional seeds, ancestral knowledge and territory." Finally, it declares the *resguardo* committed to growing and preserving traditional seeds, meaning native or creole varieties, to valuing relevant knowledge and to supporting seed savers or custodians—farmers steeped in agrobiodiversity and dedicated to propagating traditional seeds even when the investment in time is considerable and the return is low. "People admire the varieties but don't sow them. It's too demanding. They congratulate you for the effort, but that's it" Said a seed saver whom I will call Pedro. (All farmers interviewed requested anonymity.)

The autonomous government, or *cabildo*, of Cañamomo and Lomapieta, has supported local networks of seed savers and seed fairs that connect them with savers throughout Colombia. It allows seed savers to plant on communal land and provides them seeds from other indigenous communities as well as inputs such as green manure. The *cabildo* built the Casa Comunitaria de Semillas, or Community Seed House, where seeds are sold at prices that the Seed House determines fair for both savers and buyers. A farmer who accepts seeds free of charge is considered to have incurred the moral obligation to return to the Seed House up to 50 percent of the amount received, "payable" in kind from his/her own production.

The *cabildo* and the network have participated in a nation-wide Study of Creole Maize of Colombia, initiated by SwissAid and Grupo Semillas to identify



Laura Gutiérrez Escobar at a seed fair in Riosucio, Caldas.

which creole maize varieties are important to farming communities in terms of their cultural practices, their economy and sources of food and medicines. The study indicated the existence of 87 varieties, of which only a quarter are still abundant in the coffee-growing zone. The rest are considered endangered and some have been lost (Campaña Semillas de Identidad y Grupo Semillas, 2011: 13-15). The study helped the *resguardo* evaluate the dwindling diversity of maize, identify the causes and decide how mitigate the risk of further loss, assess the threat of contamination from GM varieties and prevent their introduction.

### Threats and resistance

The active resistance of Embera-Chamí communities in Riosucio might seem premature because to date no GM variety of coffee has been developed and there are no large fields of other GM crops nearby. Of the three GM crops approved for cultivation in Colombia—cotton, maize and carnations—only maize is grown in the department of Caldas. In 2013, total cultivation amounted to 319 hectares (Agrobio, 2013). GM maize is engineered to tolerate the herbicide manufactured by the respective biotechnology company. For example, Monsanto's "Roundup Ready" seeds are resistant to glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, which was recently classified by the World Health Organization as "probably carcinogenic to humans." Manufacturers also transfer genes from the bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis* (*Bt*), which makes the GM crop resistant to insects but also breaks down the evolutionary barriers to inter-species breeding and the long-term consequences for the plants and the environment might be insufficiently understood and unpredictable. Bt toxin may be harmful to bees and other insects key to pollination. Additionally, GM crops have caused the development of resistant "super" weeds and pests. This has prompted the industry to develop new varieties even more resistant to toxic chemicals such 2-4D, an ingredient in Agent Orange, the herbicide that continues to cause genetic defects, gene-linked illness and cancer in Vietnam as well as in their children and to affect veterans exposed to it during the war and their children (ETC Group, 2008).

The Colombian Institute of Agriculture (ICA) has prohibited GM crops in fields within a radius of 300 meters, or some 1,000 feet, of indigenous territories. However, the seed savers in Cañamomo and Lomapieta consider extremely worrisome any cultivation of GM crops, even the currently small quantity of maize, because of the threat of contamination of traditional and wild varieties. They argue that the ICA's measures are ineffective against wind and insects, including bees—vectors that disperse pollen with no regard for the 300-meter radius set by law. In addition, ICA's biosafety measures do not address the risk of contamination posed by imported GM maize and its potential use in government- and privately-sponsored programs intended to assure food

security and advance agricultural development. As a result, seed saving is increasingly interpreted as resistance in defense of indigenous territories and a way of life.

### Seed systems, savers' networks

Both *cabildo* and seed savers in the *resguardo* view GM seeds and the application of intellectual property rights to plants as central to the export-oriented, corporate-driven agriculture that they perceive as driving land grabs, seed commodification and competition from food imports along with contamination of traditional varieties. They defend “live seed systems” characterized by seeds developed on farms—or “in-situ conservation”—based on their shared heritage and hands-on experience.

To consider seed systems “alive” is in stark contrast to the concept of “ex-situ conservation,” which occurs in germplasm banks, some managed by the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) that draws its funding from biotechnology companies, major philanthropic foundations and multilateral agencies. Seeds frozen and stored in germplasm banks are “beyond the reach of farmers and the earth as if they were dead,” in the words of seed saver Juan. “I have eagerly asked for new seeds to cultivate,” he said. “It’s not about keeping them in jars or shelves.” According to seed savers, live systems produce seeds that, unlike GM and hybrid seeds, are well adapted to local conditions, benefit the environment, confirm the value of farmers’ knowledge and further food sovereignty (RSL, 2013; Gutiérrez Escobar, at press). “Seeds are power and sustenance for the farm and for you,” said seed saver Jorge.

Seed savers like Jorge consider both hybrid and GM varieties harmful to the environment and to food sovereignty because they are intended for extensive monocropping with intensive chemical inputs—producing the equivalent of a second Green Revolution. Furthermore, double recessive genes that appear in subsequent generations result in the loss of the very characteristics engineered to make the original GM or hybrid seeds desirable, so that farmers must buy new seeds for each agricultural cycle. The *cabildo* and the seed savers in Cañamomo and Lomapieta cite the hybrid, sun-grown vari-

eties developed for monocropping by Colombia’s Federación Nacional de Cafeteros (Fedecafé), the National Coffee Growers Federation, and intended, they claim, to replace the biodiverse *bosque cafetero*, or “coffee forest,” an agro-ecosystem where coffee grows in the shade of native trees and is intercropped with plantains, corn, beans and medicinal and aromatic plants (Corrales, 2002). Seed savers resent that Fedecafé’s varieties work well only in conjunction with expensive technology packages that they claim jeopardize the soil, biodiversity and their own food sovereignty, especially when international prices for coffee plummet. Although Fedecafé distributes its *colombia* and *castillo* varieties to farmers free of charge, indigenous activists complain that credit and technical assistance are conditioned on their use.

For seed savers, the coffee-forest model using traditional varieties is better for keeping soil fertile and their food supply reliable and it reduces dependence on chemical inputs. According to seed saver Carlos, “*Pajarito* [little bird] coffee, introduced here about 150 years ago, does not require fertilizers. Just keep it clean and adjust the shadow and it produces well. Pests may attack these plants but they can’t kill them or cause serious damage.” But some indigenous farmers in Riosucio, who do not belong to the seed savers’ network, say Fedecafé’s varieties often yield a bigger crop and more effectively resist the worst pests: the fungus *roya*, or coffee rust, and the coffee-borer beetle. However, they agreed with the seed savers that the performance of Fedecafé’s varieties depend on expensive inputs that they can ill afford in the current context of a poor economy and the plunging price of coffee.

### Solidarity toward sovereignty

The Embera are literally “people of maize.” Maize is an element in their ritual meals; in their *minga*, the community work force that dates back centuries; and in the inauguration of their governors (Campaña Semillas de Identidad y Grupo Semillas, 2011: 9-11). The recovery of traditional maize varieties is seen as linked to their recovery of political and economic autonomy, their indigenous identity and their traditional relationship with plants and the environment (Escobar, 1998). In addition to seed saving, assertions of seed sovereignty in Cañamomo and Lomapieta

include opposition to legislation that protects the claims of agribusiness to seeds as property. Seed savers in the *resguardo* refer to both hybrids and GM varieties as *semillas desmejoradas* or “degraded seeds,” a designation directly challenging the primacy of industrial scientific breeding.

The Seed House rejects conventional schemes to certify hybrid and GM seeds according to criteria that turn on yield and homogeneity. The standards of safety and quality in its own Sistema Participativo de Garantías, or Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), consider the knowledge that gives farmers the ability to preserve and develop heterogeneous varieties on their plots and to incorporate only as they deem appropriate elements of what they consider “Western” science (RSL, 2014 Seed House staff judge seed quality as it relates to food sovereignty and local diets and might apply some conventional standards for germination, cleanliness and the desirable percentage of humidity. But the staff also requires savers to supply seeds adapted to local conditions and grown and reproduced without the use of chemicals. The staff applies a mix of preservation techniques. The purchase of refrigerators for storage is under consideration, but hot pepper and other traditional elements are used to repel weevils and seeds are kept by the stove to prevent infestation by other insects. Bags labeled with information on quality and origin, confirm seed saver Rosa’s observation that PGS is about “trust and solidarity among seed savers; about knowing how the seed was grown and in which community.”

The *cabildo* in Cañamomo and Lomapieta, with support from the municipal government of Riosucio, is pursuing two other initiatives toward seed sovereignty. First, the *cabildo* has called upon its unarmed indigenous force charged with protecting the community to confiscate GM seeds so the territory stays free of transgenics, according to one guard on the force. The *cabildo* is also trying to regulate the use of seeds by the Colombian government and other donors to programs extending food and agricultural aid. The fear is that nongovernmental organizations and government agencies might distribute GM maize and soybeans from the United States and Argentina, which are increasingly available in local markets at prices lower than non-GM domestic varieties



Bags of seeds in the community seed house are labeled: “This seed is not a commercial product, its price reflects the care and dedication of the curator. Free Seeds.”

(Gutiérrez Escobar, at press). Both the *cabildo* and the municipal government rejected the *Red de Seguridad Alimentaria* (ReSa), or Food Security Network, an official program of the Colombian government, because it required farmers to use seeds certified by the ICA. “We told them [ReSa’s staff]: We’re sorry but here we have our own proposal, our own seeds, and we don’t want certified seeds, so you can turn around and take your program somewhere else,” Rosa recalled saying at a seed savers’ meeting in September 2014. “We decided that we are not going to be afraid,” she added. “If one day the ICA comes to the *resguardo* to

seize our seeds, I believe we will be strong enough to prevent it.”

Finally, seed savers consider seeds a sacred and collective good—a commons—the “heritage of farming communities for the benefit of humanity,” not a means to facilitate the accumulation of capital nor a collection of genes susceptible to private ownership. Accordingly, the Communitarian Seed House rejects intellectual property rights in favor of a distribution system that allows for reciprocity and does not commodify seeds. The label on the seed bags clarifies as much: “This seed is not a commercial product. Its price recognizes the seed saver’s effort and dedication.”

## Conclusion

In Cañamomo and Lomaprieta, seeds are considered a vehicle for maintaining political autonomy, traditional and agroecological knowledge systems, cultural identity and food sovereignty rather than commodities by which to accumulate capital. For savers, seeds should continue “to pass freely from farmer to farmer.” They respond to the call of the Network of Free Seeds for civil disobedience when laws restrict the free circulation of seeds and for the rejection of development that turns farmers into “entrepreneurs” offering to maintain biodiversity and use their knowledge as “environmental services” to be traded in financial markets (RSL, 2013; Escobar, 1998). Seed savers in Cañamomo and Lomaprieta are aware that declaring their territory free of transgenics means clashing with powerful corporations that are prepared to defend their interests. Regardless, these Embera-Chamí communities continue to claim their right to use seeds from their heritage to grow food, without depending on industrial products. Their tenacity has set an example for like-minded communities throughout Colombia.

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*Laura Gutiérrez Escobar is a candidate for the Ph.D. in anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was in the 2013-2014 cycle of IAF Fellows. Her research was subsequently funded by the Colombian government’s Francisco J. de Caldas Doctoral Fellowship. She wishes to acknowledge the guidance of Germán Vélez from Grupo Semillas and the anonymous jury drawn from the IAF’s Academic Review Committee.*

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# Rede Ecovida and Beyond

By Juliana Menucci

Since the Inter-American Foundation began awarding grants in the 1970s, initiatives in agriculture and food production have consistently ranked as the major component of its portfolio. The contemporary twist is that increasingly farmers in IAF-funded organizations are turning to agroecology, a system of practices directed at benefiting production, the environment and the consumer. The Ninth Meeting of the Rede Ecovida de Agroecologia (Ecovida), held April 20-22 in Marechal Cândido Rondon, Brazil, brought together more than 100 farmers and staff from 60 of these IAF-funded organizations working at different points along the agroecology spectrum in Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru.

Of the organizations comprising Ecovida's membership, several have been with the agroecology movement since the late 1970's, when they opposed the Green Revolution with its widespread use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers and its model of the large-scale agribusiness. Since 1998, Rede Ecovida has led the movement in Brazil toward a more responsible way of farming focused on family-based production. Today Ecovida counts more than 200 member-groups, representing 2,000 families, as well as over 20 support organizations from 170 municipalities scattered throughout rural Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná and São Paulo, Brazil's bread basket but also the site of farms supplying other foods—beans, mate, fruit—produced on a smaller scale. Ecovida's grassroots and nongovernmental members have included several IAF grantees: Centro de Estudos e Promoção da Agricultura de Grupo (CEPAGRO), Centro Vianei de Educação Popular (AVICITECS), Centro de Tecnologias Alternativas e Populares (CETAP), Centro Ecológico, Associação de Estudos, Orientação e Assistência Rural (ASSESOAR) and

Associação dos Agricultores Agroflorestais de Barra do Turvo/SP e Adrianópolis/PR (COOPERAFLORRESTA).

Ecovida has been a leader in the Brazilian debate on audits related to organic certification, which require an external inspector to assess crop quality—a service families farming on a small scale can ill afford. Among its accomplishments is the pioneering, peer-driven system that it developed for certifying produce, which was officially accredited by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2010 and is now a reference point for other networks throughout the hemisphere. These Sistemas Participativos de Garantia (SPGs) were the subject of one of the 27 seminars and workshops available to the 1,500 attending the April meeting. Other topics included the impact of pesticides and genetically modified organisms, the recovery and preservation of native seeds, beekeeping, building a consumer base for agroecological products, and strategies for reaching local markets. Rede Ecovida has played a key role in linking cooperatives from all three southern states and São Paulo. This concerted effort has been an enormous step toward tackling a major challenge: supplying clients a sufficient quantity of diverse and consistently high-quality produce throughout the year. The Ecovida event was also the site of Feira de Sabores e Saberes, a traditional-style showcase of the season's produce, foods processed from it, native seeds, crafts and the stories behind the goods on display.

Post-conference, the farmers from IAF grantees traveled some 250 kilometers south, past immense monocropped fields of soy, to Francisco Beltrão, where, over two days, ASSESOAR hosted more discussions and shared its members' extensive experience with the system specifically adapted to their land. A highlight was a visit to small farms where ASSESOAR has helped develop technologies to respond to the challenge of diversification and to water scarcity.

Visitors witnessed agroforestry as an undertaking to which entire families contribute. They also saw cisterns, more common in the semiarid regions of the Brazilian Northeast but now a necessity in the South because of the alarming intensity of the water crisis there. ASSESOAR has helped farmers build cisterns as an alternative to drilling wells that reduce groundwater levels and endanger sources. By storing water channeled from roofs or protected springs during rainy seasons, cisterns are not only cheaper but more responsible.

ASSESOAR's work with native seeds also impressed. "I'm delighted to visit Isac Miola and his seed bank," said Edgar Campbell of the Asociación de Organizaciones del Corredor Biológico Tamanca Caribe (ACBTC) in Costa Rica. ACBTC, whose farmers are of African descent, encourages agroecological principles toward organic certification of cacao and native fruit trees. "Isac showed us a type of ancestral corn recovered in the region, as well as other seed varieties. It's amazing what they've done to preserve our source of food." ASSESOAR's commitment to increasing the production of seeds free of genetic modification and chemical contamination is a polar opposite of agro-industry's emphasis on transgenic seeds and pesticides applied on a massive scale. In this context, ASSESOAR and other Ecovida members play a critical role in preserving and reproducing the genetic base for agroecological systems.

The visitors and technical staff also discussed marketing, management of groups producing coffee and cacao, advocacy in political forums, certification, education and communication, the role of young people, networking and land tenure, particularly as related to African descendants and indigenous peoples. "The opportunity to learn from each country's cultural, social and environmental diversity, through the people that have come together here, makes us grow as human beings," said Aluísio Marques of Centro de Educação Popular (CENEP), located in the semi-arid Brazilian Northeast.

Victor Hugo Morales, from Centro Campesino para el Desarrollo Sustentable (CAMPESINO) of Mexico, had attended Ecovida's conference in 2012. His organization trains Mexican farmers in conservation and the development of community-based businesses. "The event helped us organize producers



Jenny Petrow

*After the Ecovida conference, Genaro Calán Patzán, Edgar Campbell and Juan Luna visited sites in Francisco Beltrão, where their Brazilian counterparts have revived traditional varieties of seeds.*

and consumers to respond to the Organic Products Law laying out rules and requirements for organic certification in Mexico," Morales recalled. "We also learned the importance of each organization's role on the political scene to assure that the voices of our communities were being heard." Ecovida's 2015 conference bolstered by the exchanges, should have a ripple effect as participants share their experiences at home and maintain contact with like-minded organizations throughout the hemisphere.

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*Juliana Menucci, of IAF local and advisory services in Brazil, consulted Formação e consolidação da Rede Ecovida de agroecologia e a sua experiência de certificação participativa by Luiz Carlos Rebelatto dos Santos as well as publications developed with IAF support: ASSESOAR's Coleção Tecnologias Ecológicas, Vols. 1-4 (Francisco Beltrão, 2014); and CEPAGRO's Coleção Saber na Prática, Vols. 1-4. (Florianópolis, 2013).*

# William M. Dyal

## 1928–2015

**A**s its founding president, William M. Dyal built the Inter-American Foundation from the ground up. More than three and a half decades later, the IAF continues to function as he insisted it should: committed to social justice, responsive to the ideas of the organized poor and cornered on the conviction that they, in fact, “know how.” The oldest of three sons born to a railroad worker and his wife, Dyal never forgot his origins or how parents sacrificed to enable him to be the first in his family to go to university. He came to the IAF from the United States Peace Corps and later headed the American Field Service and St. John’s University. Known to the staff as Bill, he will always be remembered at the IAF for his definitive presidency that lasted from 1969 to 1979. Dyal is survived by his wife, Edie; daughters Cathy, Debby and Lisa; and nine grandchildren as well as the many professionals inspired by the example he set. Among those present at the memorial service held Feb. 7 in Fredericksburg, Va., was IAF veteran Steve Vetter whose eulogy recalled Dyal’s leadership and lessons.



*Dyal with Jamaican grantee Mathews Unified Youth Group.*

Steve Vetter

## Gracious Goodness and a Life Well Lived

*By Steve Vetter*

As we mourn the passing of Bill Dyal and the deep loss for all of us, we also celebrate his legacy. Each of us has grown immeasurably because of him. What explains the remarkable impact wherever Bill Dyal walked and worked?

I first met Bill in the mid-1960s, when I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia and he was the new country director. I was in a hospital in Pasto

suffering from a ruptured kidney and high fever, overlooked and forgotten until he came and sat with me assuring me that all would be well. I don't think either of us ever imagined that our friendship would span a full half-century. I am deeply indebted to Bill. Many of the good things that have happened to me can be traced to him. I am honored to share the lessons that I hope to carry forward and also how he

touched the lives of his many other friends. This is a challenge because there is simply too much about Bill Dyal for any one individual to capture. Not many men or women in leadership who have the qualities of a Bill Dyal.

Community was the thread that ran through Bill's work wherever he went: the Baptist missions, the Peace Corps, the IAF, American Field Service International and St. John's University. He had that rare talent for bringing together diverse individuals with a common purpose and then providing the environment conducive to solving problems. I vividly recall when he arrived to become president of St. John's University in Annapolis, Md., where I was living at the time. Through several neighbors who taught at St. John's I had learned that the university was suffering from division, conflict and rivalries. "We have no sense of academic community," someone commented. That would change with Bill Dyal.

"He made an enormous and lasting impact on the college during his time here," recalled Chris Nelson, who succeeded Bill as president of St. John's. "Faculty loved and admired him; students looked up to him. He was accepting, wise, friendly and, particularly, courageous."

Bill remained remarkably self-effacing, notwithstanding his considerable influence on United States foreign policy toward the Western Hemisphere. Recall that up until the 1970s U.S. foreign assistance was channeled via government relationships. There was no role for nongovernmental organizations, let alone official recognition that the poor work together to solve the problems facing them. As the founding president of the Inter-American Foundation, Bill was able to demonstrate that the organized poor are capable of self-help toward improving their conditions themselves. One of the first publications that Bill brought forward was *They Know How*, which chal-

*Bill Dyal and family after Dyal was sworn in as the president of the Inter-American Foundation in 1971.*



IAF archives



IAF archives

*Dyal on the job at the IAF with his senior staff in 1972.*

lenged the statist, top-down view of development. “Bill was able to actually change the direction of the wind when it came to the top-down policies of the U.S. government and demonstrate how bottom-up development could produce results,” said Tom Ramey, who served under Bill as vice president of the IAF and later headed Liberty Mutual International.

Bill took great delight in finding individuals that he considered diamonds in the rough and supporting their talent and potential for leadership. His advice was to listen better and to develop the self-awareness and critical reflection that lets us recognize ideas that no longer work. “I want you to know the difference between hearing and listening,” he used to say. “Unlearn everything you think you know. Get behind community leaders, not in front. And then we can figure out next steps.” That was Bill’s great gift to me and it is still paying dividends.

I watched Bill go into some highly charged situations. He simply had no fear and always spoke truth to power and, for that matter, to everyone. At times I wondered if he had an allergy to fear. “Don’t let fear be your guide” was a favorite quote. He would listen impatiently to someone who was wrapped up in the

fear of everything that could go wrong. “I don’t want you to worry anymore about this. Just let me handle it,” he would say, then push through the fear and move us forward. This ability to reach out beyond the normal boundaries and connect is powerful medicine in toxic, polarized situations. I often think that what Bill was all about was, as someone commented, “gracious goodness.” He believed in the power of kindness and in respect for each individual’s essential dignity.

Bill took his guiding principle from the well-known lines of a poem by Antonio Machado: “There are no paths; paths are made by walking.” To him, those words meant that solutions emerge from trying to solve problems. In January, I learned that Bill had been placed in a hospice and I traveled to Fredericksburg to sit with him. He was unable to open his eyes or talk and so I began telling him old IAF stories and mentioning the names of staff. That got a faint smile and a stronger grip. Then noted that I had created a Machado Award in his honor at Partners of the Americas and had recently used it to recognize six volunteers. This made his eyes open wide; a smile followed, then a stronger grip. On the wall facing him was the plaque from his IAF staff, inscribed Machado’s words: “*Caminante, no hay camino.*” Every time a new pathfinder receives the Machado Award, I share the lessons of Bill Dyal’s life.

The many books that Bill kept on his shelf also included a volume of work by Robert Frost whose “Two Tramps in Mud Time” captures that sense of slogging through difficult times, always hoping for something better. “Only when love and need are one, is the deed ever done, for heaven and future’s sake,” it concludes. Bill brought love and need together in a meaningful way. His life’s work, the body of his many accomplishments, will stand the test of time. They are for “heaven and future’s sake.” May we carry his spirit and many lessons forward.

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*Steve Vetter is president of Partners for the Americas. His IAF career from 1975 to 1996 spanned positions ranging from representative to vice president for programs to acting president.*

*Bill's early leadership established the IAF as a different kind of U.S. foreign-assistance agency committed to supporting the poor as citizen-protagonists in their community and in their nation. While much has changed in Latin America and the Caribbean, this mission is just as important today as ever before, and the IAF remains committed to Bill's vision. We, and the more than 5,000 grassroots partners that the IAF has supported over the last 45 years, count ourselves as heirs to Bill's legacy of respect and partnership with some of the poorest people in the region.*—Robert N. Kaplan, president, Inter-American Foundation

*[T]he poem by Antonio Machado encapsulates and animates Bill's life. Your path in life is made by walking. Look back and you'll see paths that'll never be walked again. Go forth, go forward. And Bill did. That's how I understood the breadth of things he did, the range of people he befriended, his openness to adventure and to the edges. He didn't pretend that it was simple or easy. The poem is a wonderful play on the contradictions that made the whole man. Bill loved ephemera and was romantic and still and always had feet firmly planted on the ground, almost as if another person who was unsentimentally attached to unvarnished truth. That has never left me, right along with an openness to change, a clear-eyed insistence on dealing with things as they are, a wry sense of humor and a sucker for talent.*—Alberto Ibarguén former president, the Knight Foundation; former editor, Miami Herald.

*Bill was a prophet of his times, a guru, a visionary, a game-changer, a man of the people, a free spirit. He displayed moral courage, integrity and imagination in driving the IAF mandate forward, leading the way on how to be responsible and responsive in Latin America. I think many were skeptical he could pull it off. Well he did. The IAF is going strong and the institutional culture and spirit that he shaped are still present. Bill and I shared only a few my 36 years at the IAF but the impact on my values, aspirations and perspectives was profound, for which I will always be grateful.*—Kevin Benito Healy, adjunct professor, the George Washington University; former IAF representative

*It was my enormous privilege to work under Bill's leadership. Those years shaped my approach to development*

*and to life. Key to Bill's approach was his understanding that if you take risks, some ventures are going to fail. The important thing was to admit it, to recognize what went wrong and to learn from it. Whatever happened, Bill's stock response was "Don't over-react" One of the first phrases I remember hearing from Bill was "Style is our substance." As I recall, the message was reinforced by a policy of no locked files, no classified documents.*—Marion Ritchey Vance, former IAF representative

*Bill was able to see things in me that I was unable to see. He would reveal his insight about how I could grow, stretch, to do more to make this a better world and then got out of the way and let me perform. In this cynical world, how do you say that someone like Bill is a great human being without someone being suspicious? How many other great people do we know who were in fact monsters in their own homes? Bill Dyal is the real thing.*—Hal Levin, internationally recognized specialist in sustainable architecture

*Bill was the most important influence in Doug's and my professional lives, and we met no finer person in our four decades in D.C. As he did for so many others, he showed us how we could translate our personal values into support for the knowledge, vision and efforts of people organized on the ground around the world for change. In my view, the widely accepted belief today that people must participate in social and economic decision-making at all levels that affect them emanates from Bill's own vision and the way he put it into action. We were so fortunate, weren't we, to have met him and had the chance to work with him at such an impressionable age? That excitement and inspiration shaped our subsequent work and lives on. How can we not be eternally grateful for that gift that he gave us? —Steve Hellinger*

*When you are going up against entrenched interests that are associated with very real political power, it is ultimately courage you need to effect change. Bill Dyal is one of those rare, courageous visionaries who also knows how to act and implement meaningful programs that affect the lives of real people.*—Bill Moyers in *The Other Caribbean*, a PBS documentary on the IAF

# Contents

## STORIES OF SUSTAINABILITY

### **Módulos Lecheros; An Idea that Survived the Shining Path**

*By Martin Scurrah and Custodio Bojórquez*

### **The Weavers of San Isidro**

*Patrick Breslin*

### **Challenging the King of the Reef**

*By Jenny Petrow, Ana Carmona, Azucena Díaz and Gabriela Boyer*

## FORUM FOR FELLOWS' FINDINGS

### **Poets, Clowns and Paperwork: Negotiating a Culture of Bureaucracy in Brazil**

*By Anne Gillman*

### **Seeds of Struggle in Colombia**

*Laura Gutiérrez Escobar*

## AT THE IAF

### **Rede Ecovida and Beyond**

## IN MEMORIAM

### **Bill Dyal: Gracious Goodness and a Life Well Lived**

*By Steve Vetter*