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interact

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this land is
our land



Ensuring a sustainable future for the planet and its people is everyone's responsibility, writes Progressio's Executive Director Christine Allen

this land is our land

The countdown to Copenhagen has begun. The climate change negotiations in December are a chance – some argue the last chance – for global leaders to agree a set of targets to tackle climate change.

If world leaders were to waste this chance, the implications for the planet, and particularly the poorest people on it, would be severe.

In his recent encyclical letter, Pope Benedict XVI reminded Catholics of our "grave duty" to hand on the earth to future generations in such a condition that they can "worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it". We must recognise that, for the world's 1.4 billion small-scale farmers, the ability of the planet to be cultivated is a matter of feeding themselves and their families.

Over the coming months Progressio will be joining with others to bring the voices and demands of the world's poor to the climate change negotiations. You can do your bit: inform yourself (come and listen to Professor Mohan Munasinghe speak on sustainable development and climate change at the Progressio AGM on 19 October), send off a Just Add Water campaign card or organise people locally to sign up, and make plans to come to the march for a safe climate future in London on 5 December.

It's vital that ordinary people show their concern for this issue. There are lots of things to do – whatever you do, do something!

Christine

contents

Cover: Francisco Chipantasi and Consuelo Murminacho in their corn fields in Pululahua, Ecuador. Small-scale farmers in this community used to struggle with access to water, which was being diverted to large haciendas and agricultural estates. Working with Progressio development worker Germán Gálvez, the people of Pululahua built new water storage tanks to improve their access to water – and so boost their harvest.

Photo: Santiago Serrano/ Majority World

- 4 **voices**
hopes for East Timor
- 6 **insight**
farmers in Ecuador
- 10 **action**
Just Add Water
- 12 **viewpoint**
community in Malawi
- 14 **Q&A**
Prachanda Man Shrestha
- 16 **reflection**
values and responsibilities

focus

Children play on a fallen tree, taking a break from their day's work of moving stones for their neighbour's new house. Many families in Chuwitayo, Ecuador, are unable to feed themselves with their crops alone, and are forced to sell the trees on their land for timber to make ends meet. The small price they receive from intermediaries may help them survive the dry season, but the logs are later sold on, marked up by 1,000% or more.

Photo: Santiago Serrano/Majority World



hopes for the future

Ten years on from their historic vote for independence, the people of East Timor are at a turning point. They have their freedom – but how will they make best use of it?

Antonio Guterres, programme manager for the East Timor NGO Forum

My hope for the future is that our government establishes justice in East Timor. Our people would like to see an international tribunal for the people who were involved in crimes. We would like to see good governance and a system in place for justice.

Demetrio de Carvalho, executive director of environmental organisation Haburas

Before the Indonesians were kicked out, our enemy was very clear. Today it's very complicated. Poverty is one of our common enemies. Environmental degradation is one of our common enemies. If we're thinking about our future generations, we have to struggle with all these things. East Timor is a small island nation and we are very dependent on our limited resources. The only thing that can make our future sustainable is preserving nature, and conserving ecology.

Nick Molyneux, Progressio development worker with Haburas

What needs to be done is job creation and giving youth hope and purpose. Because at the moment, a lot of people who are unemployed don't have the opportunity to have an occupation, don't have skills, don't have a very good academic education. So my hope is that the government can create more opportunities for youth, which will create a more stable society, and a lot less tension within and between communities.

Melqui Aquino Ribeiro Fernandes, student

My hope for East Timor is that the government gives opportunities to people in the community – to help them to develop their own skills so that they can improve their lives and get jobs in order to survive in the future.

Francisca Alves Taolin, advocacy officer for women's network Rede Feto

Now is the opportunity for East Timorese women, and we need to encourage each other to fulfil this opportunity. More women need to get involved, so that people know that women can participate in development.

Domingas Vilanova Sequeira, Progressio East Timor project officer

My personal hope is that the government will try to minimise the poverty in East Timor, because there are people living on under a dollar a day, which is really sad. I'm also hoping... Well, I'm having a baby, so I hope that in the future, my kids won't have to go to another country to get a better education or healthcare. I hope that we will have it in East Timor.

Weng (Maria) Ladaga, Progressio development worker

I hope that ten years down the road, more citizens, more communities, will be able to engage in democratic processes. I also hope that they will not forget the lessons from the past. There's been so much tragedy in this country. I hope that they will not forget, so that it will not happen again.



Afonso Coreia, Nau Ner Community Group (pictured, with red cap)

I work as a farmer. We are currently taking the opportunity to work with a local NGO, Haburas. We are from Nau Ner Community Group, and are working to produce salt, and plant trees for our children's future.

I am concerned that we have been independent for 10 years, but we do not have electricity or water. If the government cares about us and our children, they should provide us with these things.

Mateus de Jesus Coreia, Nau Ner Community Group (pictured, with beard)

I make salt and look after the goats. I work with Haburas. What the government could do for my community is provide electricity and water.

Paul Alves, Nau Ner Community Group

Since independence nothing has changed. We have asked the government for water and electricity many times. The government should come and see our reality. We are working for the future now. But when will we get water and electricity? After we are all dead? Not everyone will agree with what I am saying, but I feel I need to say it. Why do we not have these services? There are 1,000 people in our village. If you look at other villages they have it, why not us?

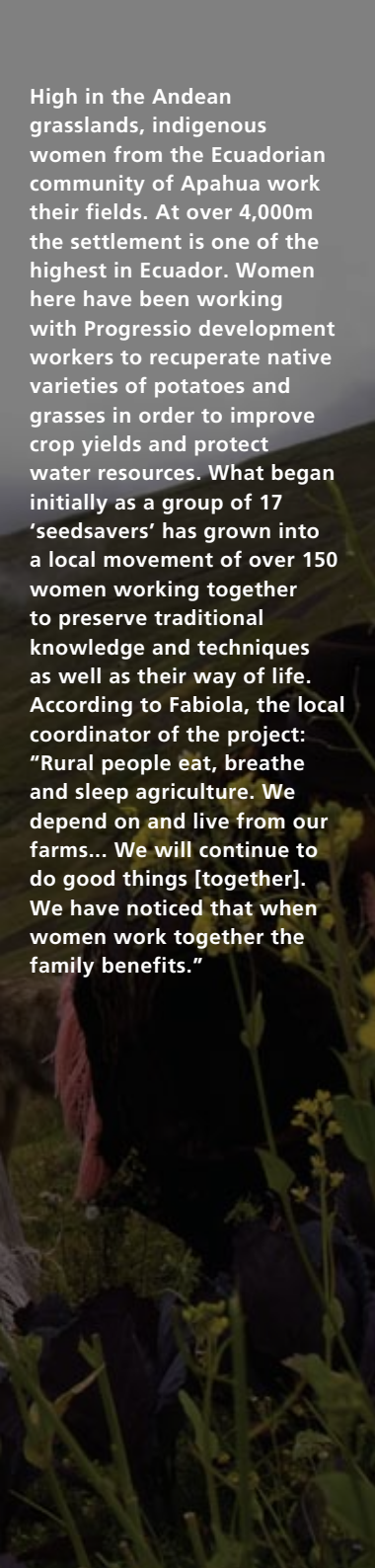
Crispin de Jesus Coreia, Nau Ner Community Group

I hope that with Haburas we can bring our concerns to the highest levels of government, and that they will listen to our concerns. And, as a young person, I am asking for job opportunities.

Interviews by Progressio staff members Claire Schultz and David Tanner, who visited East Timor in July and August 2009. Photo by Claire Schultz

this land is our land





High in the Andean grasslands, indigenous women from the Ecuadorian community of Apahua work their fields. At over 4,000m the settlement is one of the highest in Ecuador. Women here have been working with Progressio development workers to recuperate native varieties of potatoes and grasses in order to improve crop yields and protect water resources. What began initially as a group of 17 'seedsavers' has grown into a local movement of over 150 women working together to preserve traditional knowledge and techniques as well as their way of life. According to Fabiola, the local coordinator of the project: "Rural people eat, breathe and sleep agriculture. We depend on and live from our farms... We will continue to do good things [together]. We have noticed that when women work together the family benefits."

For farming communities in Ecuador, development doesn't just mean moving forward – it also means going back to their roots, writes Brie O'Keefe

"When I first arrived in Intag, the people used to sell their crops of yucca to buy things like tinned spaghetti or rice instead of eating them." So said Progressio development worker Myriam Salazar, as we climbed a steep path towards the village of El Cristal in the region of Intag, Ecuador.

"One of the first things I did was take out that intermediary step and encourage the people to eat the food they grew – to feel pride in their traditional diet."

Pride is in no short supply now in the community, where we were greeted warmly by villagers eager to show us how agro-ecology has benefited both their farms and their families.

"Before we didn't know how to care for our land properly – we burnt the fields, we used a lot of chemical fertilisers, we made so many mistakes. Then the earth became sterile – so we became organic and have seen so many benefits," said Enrique Simbana, resident of El Cristal. "Thanks to the plants we live here peacefully, we only buy salt and alcohol."

Independence

This newfound independence has even attracted city dwellers to return to the countryside – a rare example of reverse urbanisation in a country plagued by rural residents abandoning their land. Eduardo Arias and his family left their life in Ecuador's capital, Quito, after struggling to make ends meet in the overcrowded and poverty-stricken streets. "We missed the countryside," he said. "We realised that even though we are still poor here, we have more freedom."

"I wake up everyday at 6am, and work until 4pm, when it gets dark," Soila Baraja told me. "It's really hard work – we hardly ever have a day off. But I don't mind, as I have everything I need here."

The residents of El Cristal are lucky to have this independence, as small-scale farmers all over the world are losing the same battles every year: unpredictable harvests, pressure to monocultivate, lack of access to water or irrigation and expensive fertilisers mean more and more are falling through the cracks and being forced to leave their lands and head to the city to try and eke out a living. ▶



Self-sufficiency

This is not what we find in El Cristal, as we arrive to a table laid full of local varieties of potato, yucca, bananas and fruit.

Later we are taken on tours of the fields – distinguished by their patchworks of banana, yucca and potato plants planted all together to help balance soil nutrients and prevent pest outbreaks. These techniques have helped residents improve soil that had been exhausted through previous unsustainable techniques.

“We understand now that sustainability and independence must be protected. We

can’t use chemicals and contaminate our food as we need to be healthy to work our land,” explained Pedro Bolaños.

Good neighbours

Pedro and his family are residents of the neighbouring community of El Paraiso, where we are taken for lunch. In a shaded porch of the farmhouse we sit in a circle and talk. Around us, the children chase chickens and the women who are not active farmers run round collecting enough dishes, silverware and soup bowls to feed lunch to a group of 20. In the dark and



▲ *María Méndez (left), Elena Gomez and Ruth Vivanco preparing food in María's kitchen in the village of El Paraiso.*

◀ *Pedro Bolaños preparing organic fertiliser to use on his fields.*

Brie O'Keefe is Progressio's Campaigns Officer. She visited Ecuador in May 2009. Photos: Santiago Serrano/Majority World

smoky kitchen, smells of yucca soup and roast chicken with potatoes emerge. There is corn drying over the fireplace and garlic hanging from the rafters. The women cooking, all business, hand us plates and shoo us towards the table to eat.

Confidence

"If we had one message for leaders at Copenhagen it would be to protect the environment," says Enrique as he finishes lunch and prepares himself for an afternoon in the fields. "We all breathe the same air, pollution affects everyone. It

affects our crops, and our lives."

Farmers in El Cristal and El Paraiso still struggle to make ends meet month to month, but the techniques of agroecology have given them new knowledge on how to manage their farms, improving food security and enhancing their sense of independence and confidence. Once spending the little money they had on tinned spaghetti, they now proudly eat their own food, and share knowledge with neighbouring communities to ensure they can all farm sustainably well into the future.

UPDATE

The Department for International Development's white paper *Building our common future* reflects suggestions from Progressio and others that development must address environmental concerns and embrace different economic models. The paper stresses however that in the current financial climate, **development funding** cannot be taken for granted. Please take every opportunity to remind politicians that you care deeply about Britain's role in international development and want it to remain a top priority.

Progressio's **East Timor: Who Cares?** campaign culminated in a photo exhibition at the Houses of Parliament at which a collage of supporter and campaigner photos was presented to Foreign Office minister Ivan Lewis. The UK government has pledged to support East Timor's efforts to build a strong and just society.

Check out our new blog **Poverty Bites** and get your teeth into development issues: go to <http://progressio.typepad.co.uk/povertybites/>

Introducing...

Mrs Fanny Fawcett!

Many of you have already received information about Progressio's new campaign *Just Add Water* which asks decision-makers to acknowledge the crucial link that exists between water and climate change. In a 1950s style recipe booklet we follow the journey of Mrs Fawcett as she learns that poor farmers around the world are already greatly affected by the effects of climate change: namely drought, torrential rains and changing seasonality.



In many ways, Mrs Fawcett represents each one of us living in the North who cares about social justice issues. With limited time, money and information we each try to ensure we make the best decisions we can to keep our world a place characterised by fairness and justice. It's not easy, and it's often overwhelming, but like Mrs Fawcett, we realise we must try.

Water is the medium through which the effects of climate change will be felt around the world. We would ask all Progressio supporters to take the time to fill in the *Just Add Water* campaign postcard and send it to their MPs, but also to get their friends and family involved in this issue.

To help you do this, we've launched the **climate change cocoa challenge** – order an action pack now, and help spread the word about water and climate change! Using the tools provided in the action pack, in the time it takes to make a cup of cocoa, you and your family, friends or co-workers will have learned more about this important issue, and engaged to make a real difference for farmers in the developing world.

To order your **climate change cocoa challenge action pack** call Progressio or email campaigns@progressio.org.uk

eyewitness: people power

A few weeks ago, the Malawian people voted against politicians who people said “never seemed to listen to their constituents and just appeared to serve their own interests”, writes Christine Allen...

Malawi is a country facing many challenges, from lack of resources to low life expectancy (see box). Years of political in-fighting and disregard for the struggles of ordinary people mean development was stalled.

For the past four years, the country had been led by a minority government which struggled to get legislation or even a budget through parliament. This time, the people wanted a government that could deliver improvements in their lives, and voted resoundingly for President Bingu wa Mutharika’s Democratic Progressive Party. It was a routing of the old guard, some of whom had served for many years, and a clear mandate for change.

The vote invigorated democracy at a time when people were fed up with complacent politicians who were not listening to them. “They thought they were safe and they’ve had a surprise,” one voter told me.

The election also showed how civil society, and faith communities in particular, can play an active role in achieving change.

Conscious of real concerns that there would be violence during the elections, church leaders across the country called for non-violent elections while congregations engaged in a coordinated campaign of prayers for peace.

The high profile nature of this campaign made it very difficult for politicians to encourage or condone outbreaks of violence. It is a clear indication how religious communities, and the religious leadership, can influence the culture and values of a society for the good.

At the same time, the church took active steps to help ensure the vote was free and fair. Alongside the international missions were local observers, many of whom were coordinated by church organisations.

Local people spent long hours monitoring the polling stations and supervising the counting of ballots. Their commitment was evident: they were often without food and did this work for a tiny payment.

Such commitment bodes well for the future: for only when people realise their power, can they make it real. The people of Malawi have both realised and made real their power – and are ready now to make what many are calling “a new beginning”.

Since 1990, Malawi has ranked amongst the world’s 20 least developed nations. Life expectancy is just 46 years, child mortality is high and an estimated 1 million Malawians – 12% of the population – are thought to be living with HIV. The biggest day-to-day concern for ordinary Malawians, 52% of whom live on less than \$1 a day, is feeding their families. This is a predominantly rural society where a staggering 84% live outside urban areas, farming an average plot of just 0.5 hectares per household.

Christine Allen is Progressio’s Executive Director. She visited Malawi in May, shortly after the presidential elections.

letter from Malawi



Margaret (left) and Grace are small-scale farmers in Nchisi district. Both have switched to organic farming in response to the high cost of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. "We are now in control of our farming," says Grace. "We have more food to eat, and more food to sell." Photo: Marcus Perkins/Progressio

Eliza lives in a small village on the outskirts of Selima. Along with some other families, she has been tending a plot of land, on which they grow Sweet Red Sorghum. As well as being a mother, Eliza is also the secretary of the committee that oversees the plot.

With the support of Progressio's partner organisation, Environment Africa, a small Malawian NGO, they are assessing the benefits of this crop. The community works a common plot together as well as having their own individual plots.

All that they learn as a group on the common plot they then put into practice on their own land.

Higher yield

Even though the birds seem to love it, they hope that this plot will yield 7kg of Sorghum – more than double the other varieties they had been growing. Innocent Bidong Ogaba, Progressio's development worker with Environment Africa, has been working with communities like these to help them to grow crops that will be more marketable.

There is a lot of maize grown in Malawi, but the quality is diminishing and the crop often fails, with disastrous effects. Maize needs a lot of water and Malawi's rainy season is getting shorter – just one illustration of how Malawi is suffering the effects of climate change. Red Sorghum is a more drought-resistant crop and the higher yield will bring more money to the community.

Market forces

Innocent's work focuses on identifying the gaps in the market for potential crops that could grow here, or for products of these crops. On another communal plot we visited, people were growing *moringa*, a tree with nutritious leaves and seeds which can produce oil; *jetropha*, a tree whose seeds produce oil for fuel and which is also used for fencing to tackle soil erosion; and

neem trees, which have an essential oil that can be used as a pesticide.

The trees are nitrogen fixing, so are good for the land. Between the trees, they are also growing groundnuts and some vegetables, so they are maximising the potential.

Sixty families started this particular project in January. They began with meetings to discuss what they wanted to do and started the plot in March. When I went, at the end of May, the *jetropha* seedlings were well established and there were little shelters of sticks around the slightly more fragile *moringa* and *neem* trees.

Skills and potential

Working with Innocent and his counterpart, Mercy, the community already have ideas about what they want to achieve. They organise themselves in terms of how they work the land and between themselves manage the whole project. Every month they evaluate how they have done and address any issues. Innocent is bringing a lot of information and skills to the community about how they can access markets and ensure they get a good price for their produce and work.

Community care

In the face of drought and other climate change impact, food production is a challenge. Many people go hungry. But food security is only one aspect – for the long term you need to care for the environment too, and build up the skills and potential of the local community.

That's why markets are important – people can use products and sell them too. Barbara, from Environment Africa, told me: "We are looking for a transformation of this village." Who would have thought all that could come from just one field?

Christine Allen is Progressio's Executive Director. She visited Malawi in May 2009.

Prachanda Man Shrestha is a Progressio development worker from Majjubahal Chabahil, Kathmandu, Nepal. He is working on HIV prevention with the organisation Abu Musa Al Ashary in the coastal city of Hodeidah in Yemen.

Q: How would you describe yourself?

A: I am a simple, peace-loving, straightforward person who likes working with and for people who are in need of support.

Q: What is your first memory of arriving in Yemen?

A: After I arrived I went to an internet café near my hotel. It was a small, smoky room, full of people with swollen cheeks, carrying sharp weapons (Jambia traditional swords). I was frightened and wondered what terrible disease these men had. Later I realised that most of them were chewing Qat (the leaves of a plant which acts as a stimulant).

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

A: I had an opportunity to address a mass wedding ceremony attended by more than ten thousand people. On the spot I was given a few minutes to talk. I took it as a great opportunity, introducing myself as a development worker from Progressio and talking briefly about HIV and AIDS and how it can be prevented in the context of Islam.

Q: And the biggest lesson?


A: My partner organisation has enlightened attitudes, but society here is perceived to be very conservative in talking about sex and sexuality. Certain information or approaches are seen as difficult to apply in the context of Yemen, so sometimes it takes time for people to accept these ways of working.

However, despite strong stigma and discrimination, some people living with HIV have gone public and tried to form groups and gain recognition. We have found peer-to-peer groups have been a great way of raising awareness and disseminating information – whether these be fishermen, drivers, barbers, or faith leaders. Indeed faith leaders have quickly realised that they have an important role to play and have understood the need for a comprehensive approach to prevention.

Q. What is your favourite motto or saying?

A: "Love all, serve all."

Prachanda Man Shrestha Yemen



Prachanda (centre) discussing activities during Ramadan for people living with HIV with Hatim Asamiry (left), an *imam* of Al Athnan mosque, and Abdo Ali Mansoob, Director of Progressio partner organisation Abu Musa Al Ashary. They are standing outside the Arrhghan mosque where Mr Mansoob preaches.

Photo: Abdul Jalel Almarbashy



Values and responsibilities

Pope Benedict's encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate* (Love in Truth) shows us how far the realities of global politics actually lie from the things we know to be true and right. Why, when right now 1.4 billion people attempt to live on under \$1.25

per day, does Benedict need to say that the view that "a quota of poverty" is needed for the economy "to function at its best" is wrong?

Why does he need to say, as we reach crunch point on climate change, that we have a responsibility "towards the poor, towards

future generations, and towards humanity as a whole" not to abuse the natural environment?

Hear the truth

These things have to be said because they are not being heard. "Every economic decision has a moral consequence," Benedict says (*Caritas in Veritate* para 37). Bad economic decisions have appalling consequences for real children, men, and women. The United Nations has estimated that 50 to 90 million more people have been pushed into destitution because

of the global financial crisis.

Perhaps some of this is sinking in. In April I heard Prime Minister Gordon Brown say that we needed a debate on the values which as a society we wish to underpin our economy.

Or perhaps not. Because many commentators still don't get it: they don't see that the financial system needs to serve people, and not the other way around.

Live the change

But as an antidote to self-righteousness, we should remember that encyclicals are not just addressed to the great and the good, but also to each one of us, "all people of goodwill".

Politicians have to respond to their citizens. And if we want them to change, to act, on climate change, on the environment, on poverty – if we want new ethical values in our politics and economy – then we too have responsibilities: to make our wishes plain, to get out and make the case to other members of the public who may not agree with us, and to live responsible, sustainable lives ourselves.

Arguably, Benedict's letter says little that has not already been said – but in saying it again, he lays down a strong challenge to show in our own lives that we really mean it.

Tim Aldred is Progressio's Advocacy Manager.

"To defend the truth, to articulate it with humility and conviction, and to bear witness to it in life are therefore exacting and indispensable forms of charity" (*Caritas in Veritate*)