

interact

The magazine of PROGRESSIO



Standing together
for climate justice

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Somaliland elections

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SPRING 2011



Our work is about helping people gain the power to stand on their own, says Progressio's Executive Director Christine Allen

What communities want

The kind of long-term support Progressio offers isn't always easy to quantify. One way to measure it is to ask partner organisations and their communities about the difference that's been made by working with us. That's why we recently participated (along with 24 other international NGOs) in a survey of local partner organisations. You can read about it on our website at www.progressio.org.uk/content/transparency

The main finding was that local partner organisations value the sort of approach that Progressio takes. They don't want to be sub-contractors delivering an externally-set agenda. They want long-term support (or capacity-building) so that they can become strong, independent organisations in their own right, and can themselves respond to the needs and priorities of local people.

That's precisely what Progressio does – and exactly what we have done over the past 35 years in Ecuador (see page 4). Although we are now leaving Ecuador, we feel confident that civil society there is in a stronger position, in part thanks to our work.

It's always sad to cease working in a country. Yet we have to remember that saying goodbye is part of our mission. And if we have not left organisations improved and civil society strengthened, then we have failed in our task of development.

Enabling people to stand on their own is a sign of honest and mature development. It's also, as the survey suggests, exactly what partners and local communities want.

Christine



focus

Elections in Somaliland in July last year were “an authentic expression of the will of the people,” says Progressio's Steve Kibble, who helped coordinate the team of international election observers. Women had a visible presence as campaigners and voters: “Young excited women leant out at alarming distances from the campaign buses – a great opportunity to get out and about, free from the usual restrictions.” Read Steve's blog, and more on the elections, at www.progressio.org.uk (once there, do a search on Somaliland)

Photo: Claudia Simoes/Progressio



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Cover: El Salvador: residents from San Francisco Menéndez at a climate justice march to the Presidential House to present a climate change policy proposal, October 2010. Read more on page 8

Photo: Maggie von Vogt/Progressio

People power in Ecuador



After 35 years of work in Ecuador, we say goodbye to a wonderful country – but we are proud of what we have achieved, writes Osvaldo Vasquez

When I joined CIIR (as Progressio was then known) 25 years ago, my first role was Programmes Officer for Ecuador, Peru and the Dominican Republic. I still remember the development workers I met on my first visit to Ecuador – among them, the agronomists John Greenwood and Rob Lavender, working on sustainable agricultural production with indigenous farming communities; the audio visual specialists Peter Bullock and Brenda Lipson, working on empowerment projects with communities in Quito and Guayaquil (see page 6); and the architect Eric Dudley, working on improving the resilience to earthquakes of traditional adobe houses in rural communities.

Solidarity and partnership

I noticed straightaway that CIIR's style of work was based on strong solidarity with those working to eradicate poverty and marginalisation, and strong partnership with local organisations playing a leading role in



The Holguin family from La Trinidad community sorting coffee beans. The project was supported by Progressio and partner organisation Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio (FEPP)

Photo: Graham Freer/Progressio

this process. These values still remain at the heart of Progressio's work today!

Over the years our programme built strong ties with the Ecuadorean indigenous movement. I remember the great privilege of receiving briefings from indigenous leaders like Ampam Karakas and Blanca Chancoso – people who valued our contribution, and were always prepared to share their views with us.

The people's champion

The indigenous movement in Ecuador is now one of the strongest social movements in Latin America, a key player in championing the people's needs. I feel proud and humble that Progressio has played such a part in helping to build a strong civil society in Ecuador.

The history of our programme in Ecuador is very rich, full of sacrifices, achievements and wonderful memories. For me our Ecuador programme, our staff, and all the different generations of development workers, will always represent the best of Progressio: commitment, solidarity and people powered development.

Oswaldo Vasquez is now Progressio's Programme Manager.

"Whether it's beekeeping projects, micro-finance, local development, or promoting small businesses, the focus of our work together has always been the human person. Not only as an economic entity, but their intelligence, feelings, relationships, spirituality, ethics, culture... A person grows when, with ideas and knowledge, they develop their ability to act to transform reality, and find new socio-economic structures and policies to replace the exploitative and oppressive structures that are still present in our society."

José Tonello, Executive Director, FEPP

Ecuador changed my life, writes former development worker Brenda Lipson

August 1980 – touchdown in steamy Guayaquil, then a port city of 1.5 million people (now double that). The majority were immigrants from highland or rural coastal areas, who had arrived looking for work, and established precarious homes on stilts above swampland or perched on hillsides. I was 26, and was achieving my dream to live and work in Latin America.

The challenge I faced was to make sense of the new world around me. I would need to find out how much of my previous work experience – using visual media to help community groups in inner city London lobby for change – was relevant in this very different context. My Ecuador work was to be for two years, but turned out to be seven. It changed my life.

Changes and challenges

Those seven years in the 1980s witnessed many changes and challenges within Ecuador. Called the 'lost decade' because of economic turmoil and hyperinflation, the country suffered many extremes, from extreme weather (major flooding in 1982), to extreme political events – including high social unrest with student protests, general strikes, guerrilla activity and consequent repression of social movements.

This vivid and vibrant environment brought into sharp relief the lives of the vast majority of the population. Working with the tools of my trade, I was privileged to gain insights into the multiple realities of Ecuadorean lives. Recording radio programmes about the impact of the '82 floods on small-scale rice producers and their families; producing educational tape/slide shows about the links between the economic crisis, international debt and subsequent measures taken by the IMF;

producing photo-comic strips about the lives of shanty town dwellers to be used in discussion groups about what they could do to change their situation. These were the products of our efforts.

Identifying solutions

Working first with an Ecuadorean NGO and then with a union federation, the aim was to reinforce the efforts of the poor and the marginalised to respond to their situation. Facilitating an understanding of that situation was the critical first step, and the use of media was an innovative way of doing that. Seeing or hearing their situations reflected in radio programmes, tape-slide shows or comic strips triggered group discussions about the factors that caused the situation, and led on to the identification of solutions.

Identifying solutions meant working out what was in their power to change, and how best they should organise themselves to do that. So we also worked to strengthen their organisations, such as training on how to run meetings and on the role of leaders in rice farmers' cooperatives, workers' unions, and shanty town associations: what today is known as civil society capacity building.

In time I moved on from that 'coal face' work of development, and became a development 'professional', working in various roles across the region and globally. But those seven years in Ecuador were never forgotten. They gave me the rich bedrock of images, voices and experiences which guide me in my daily work. I am forever grateful to CIIR/Progressio for giving me that opportunity to learn from the Ecuadoreans.

Brenda Lipson was a member of the board of trustees of CIIR/Progressio from 2002 to 2009. She now works as an independent consultant on civil society capacity building.

Here are five things I know about Progressio in Ecuador, writes Luis Camacho

One

During my 18 years with Progressio in Ecuador, I've worked with many development workers: people of different nationalities, different professions and different backgrounds; people with different perspectives and different political views. But despite this rich diversity, they all had one thing in common: the willingness and readiness to contribute to improving the quality of life of people and communities by passing on their skills, and so contributing to the empowerment of people and organisations.

Two

The individuals and organisations we've worked with in Ecuador have come from different realities, regions and experiences: peasant farmers, women, health promoters, indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian officials, technicians and professionals. We've had the privilege of walking together and seeing them grow stronger, play their part in social processes and political events, and build the participatory knowledge and mutual learning which is the work between people that Progressio stands for.

Three

As an organisation we've been through many changes, but throughout, we've approached our task with optimism, dedication and passion, and with the commitment to continue to adapt and respond to new demands. In doing so we have had successes and failures, but have always kept one goal in mind: to establish respectful relationships, and encourage people to have their own voice, forge their own destiny, and build the change they need.



"The opportunity to be part of this story has been an unforgettable experience"

Photo: Graham Freer/Progressio

Four

The story of Ecuador, since I started my work with CIIR in 1992, has been dynamic, vibrant and contentious, but the strongest feature has always been its people. Social movements, community organisations and civil society have been key players in the process of change and the search for a new direction. We as Progressio contributed to this process through our partners and the work we do with them.

Five

I've been privileged to get closer to the people of my country, to share their needs, dreams and aspirations, and to contribute to achieving their aims. I've enjoyed the satisfactions of successes, learned from mistakes, and most of all, shared experiences with colleagues and friends. All this has made me grow as a person. And I'm proud of it.

Luis Camacho was Progressio's Country Representative in Ecuador from 1992 to 2010.

Standing together for climate justice



The climate talks in Cancun were not just a talking shop for governments, writes Maggie von Vogt

“Central America demands a climate where peace, social justice, and environmental sustainability flourish.” That was the message of the Mesoamerican Climate Justice Campaign at the global climate summit in Cancun in December. It was my privilege to be there to hear it, and to witness how the campaign developed in El Salvador over the past year.

The Mesoamerican Climate Justice Campaign (representing civil society in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador) was based on a year’s worth of consultation, popular education, and exchange. From this, the campaign ensured that its demands came direct from the people most impacted by climate change, and the civil society organisations that work with and represent them.

Challenging top-down solutions

One such is Progressio partner organisation Unidad Ecológica Salvadoreña (UNES) in El Salvador. Together with organisations of fishermen, indigenous people, women, faith-based communities, local governments, and other NGOs, UNES created a series of community-based referendums. A set of policy proposals came out of this, and were presented to the El Salvador government after a march for climate justice on 13 October 2010.

Representatives of civil society putting their voice forward at Cancun

Photo: Maggie von Vogt/Progressio



The government took these proposals on board – and Angel Ibarra from UNES was invited to join the official El Salvador delegation to Cancun, as a representative of civil society. But just as important was the alternative forum. Carolina Amaya of UNES put it like this: “We have to know what our governments are negotiating on the inside in our name. But we are also strengthening alliances with people in other countries. We are the ones who are experiencing climate change, so this is the space for us to exchange, debate, and vision together.”

It's time for us to go back and fix things

“Since this is a global problem, sometimes you feel like you cannot do anything,” said Carolina. “But for example, today, we learned about people in Ixcán, Guatemala who fought and won to stop the construction of a dam in their community. Today an indigenous compañero told us, ‘when you get lost, you have to go back to where you came from’. We have taken the wrong path as civilisation, we have made mistakes. So we need to go back as humanity, and fix our mistakes.”

The idea is to build both genuine, participatory processes and also concrete proposals from the bottom up, so communities can forge their own paths towards sustainability, justice, health, and sovereignty. No one has it all figured out, but these are steps in that process.

Maggie von Vogt is a Progressio development worker in El Salvador.

Progressio has been campaigning for the impact of climate change on water resources to be addressed – and at Cancun six countries, including El Salvador, proposed that water should be put on the agenda for the next meeting of the body which provides scientific and technical advice to the UN climate convention. Petra Kjell, Progressio policy officer, hailed it as a “breakthrough”. Lumumba Di-Aping, a negotiator from Sudan, said: “Getting water on the agenda will help us to identify the challenges and propose solutions.” Read more, and catch up on Progressio’s “virtual climate journey”, at www.progressio.org.uk – go to ‘Get involved’ and ‘Take action’.

Rebuilding Haiti

What do leaders, organisers and activists in Haiti think about the reconstruction process so far?

Fr François Kawas, Director, Cedar (Centre for Social Research), Port-au-Prince

"We feel excluded. We think the government should have initiated a broad consultation about the refoundation of the country. This is not just a matter for the government but for the whole nation – and every Haitian citizen – but the leadership is just not interested."

A member of a Haitian civil society organisation who wished to remain anonymous, Port-au-Prince

"Although we also need to be realistic, it is important to recognise that social transformation in Haiti is very difficult, due to the attitude of an elite that has benefited for the last 200 years from the poverty and illiteracy prevailing in the country.

"I'm fully convinced that a prime opportunity to call for national unity was lost in the first few hours after the earthquake. Aside from the shock created by the devastation, during the first three weeks after the earthquake there were things that the Haitian government could have done to appease the population, which might have developed some trust and a new dialogue going forward.

"It does not mean that things cannot get better, but there have been very few coherent responses which call for a new social contract/dialogue between the Haitian state and its civil society."

Fr Lazard Wismith, Director of the Jesuit Refugee and Migrant Service, Port-au-Prince

"Haiti is a country that was already in crisis before the earthquake. After the earthquake, Haitians were very hopeful that change was imminent, but without proper leaders, this failed. People became very disappointed in the lack of direction, and the lack of consultation with civil society organisations in the reconstruction process has not helped at all."

Colette Lespinasse, Groupe d'Appui aux Rapatriés & Réfugiés, Port-au-Prince

"The Post Disaster Needs Assessment was written by external experts without consultation with Haitian civil society organisations... If the reconstruction process is carried out in the same exclusionary manner, and without consensus and respect, we will not be eliminating poverty in Haiti. On the contrary, we will be building more fragmentation and divisions in a process that requires building consensus."

A displaced person living in Belladere

"These international organisations should talk to us and learn about what we need. Development should be led by grassroots organisations supported by the international community, not the other way round."



Adeline Julien in Camp Henfrasa, Port-au-Prince, June 2010, where she had been living since the earthquake

Photo: Natasha Fillion/Progressio

A member of a Haitian civil society organisation who wished to remain anonymous, Port-au-Prince

“Aid continues to be centralised in the capital, which creates a lot of problems for communities outside of Port-au-Prince. The tension between communities is growing because help has not reached them despite hearing in the media that vast amounts of money have been promised to Haiti.”

A woman settler living in Lascahobas, Central Plateau

“If we invest in local development, municipalities can become strong actors for local and trans-border development. We need to increase the visibility and potential of local leadership and the role of women at local level. Up to now, all the assets – financial or human – leave for Cap Haitien and Port-au-Prince. This is bad for communities who are left with nothing.”

A member of a Haitian civil society organisation who wished to remain anonymous, Port-au-Prince

“The earthquake has opened a space for positive and constructive engagement between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. There is potential now for developing new models of cooperation and engagement which are coherent with improving bi-national relations. Both nations should be searching for opportunities to capitalise on the solidarity and willingness expressed by their own people.”

These interviews were conducted in May and June 2010 and were published in the Progressio report *Haiti after the earthquake: Civil society perspectives on Haitian reconstruction and Dominican-Haitian bi-national relations*. Read the report – and lots more about our work in Haiti – at www.progressio.org.uk

Letter from Timor-Leste



Bravery and perseverance will change attitudes to HIV, writes Tibor van Staveren

In Timor-Leste just before Christmas, there was a Christmas party with a difference. More than 40 people living with HIV celebrated life, and remembered loved ones, at a party held by Estrela+ – a support group set up for and by people living with HIV.

The existence of Estrela+ is itself a remarkable achievement in a country where stigma and discrimination is still the norm – and where people living with HIV are still fighting for recognition. The Estrela+ group has made great strides, holding a seat on the National AIDS Commission and the Country Coordination Mechanism for the Global Fund, and having strong ties with other local and regional networks.

Uphill battle

But it still faces an uphill battle to be legally registered as an NGO (non-governmental organisation). There are individuals who believe that HIV-positive people cannot have the responsibility for managing and running their own affairs, which of course undermines the group's recognition. As



Dawn in Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste

Photo: Marcus Perkins/Progressio

group member Millie (not her real name) comments: "Having the virus does impact on our health, but it does not mean we are stupid or dangerous."

Misconceptions

They are also working to change the commonly held view that sees people with HIV only as victims or patients, or public enemy number one. An example of how widespread misconceptions are is that at a recent consultation for Global Fund Round Ten proposals in Timor-Leste, when Estrela+ wishes were being discussed and the concept of a drop-in centre for people living with HIV was explained, a health professional in the group thought this was a good idea so that "we can catch them and keep them under control." Another participant at the same meeting suggested that the way to halt the transmission of the virus is to isolate people living with HIV on a remote island.

Getting stronger

Yet the Timorese Ministry of Health has an excellent medical programme which provides ARV treatment free to Timorese citizens. It's just that people don't know about it. As one member of Estrela+, Lia (not her real name), put it: "Many people think there is no cure for HIV, but they forget that drugs are available to help us live longer, stronger lives."

Since March 2010, Progressio has been supporting Estrela+ through development worker Fi Oakes, who helps them with building their organisational capacity and supports them in developing advocacy strategies to reduce stigma and discrimination.

Let's hope 2011 is the year when the message of the Ministry of Health and Estrela+ finally reaches the hearts and minds of the Timorese people: "The one who has HIV, he or she is my friend!" – or in the local language, "maluk ne'ebé iha HIV/AIDS ona, nia mós ita nia kolega!"

Tibor van Staveren is Progressio's Country Representative in Timor-Leste.

Malawi: Bearing fruit



Our faith requires us to protect the environment and serve those who are vulnerable, says Barbara Banda (interview by Cathy Scott)

How do you think the call of the gospel invites us to work for the environment?

The environment is a free endowment to humanity – and we are called to stewardship. If we look at the parables, for example, we are called to sow seed, prune branches and bear fruit. We reap what we sow. All these teachings are encouraging us to take care of our environment.

What does justice, peace and integrity of creation mean in practical terms when you are addressing Malawi's needs?

This is about the equitable sharing of God's gifts, access for all and being responsible and accountable – thinking of generations to come. It means raising awareness and advocating good practices.

Here in Malawi at the moment, access to resources is unjustly distributed. If you never access the education system, your life is almost certainly destined to end in poverty. If you do not have access to water or land, you will lack food security and will be vulnerable and powerless. You could lose your life if you do not know what your rights

Farmer Betty Mkusa running a workshop for other farmers, under an Environment Africa project to improve agricultural production

Photo: Marcus Perkins/Progressio



are, and the laws which can assist you. There is also a lack of gender justice.

What Biblical text is a particular inspiration to your work with Environment Africa?

The story about the true vine (John 15) talks about the need to undergo change – the pruning of branches in order to bear more fruit in the long run. The change can often entail pain, but in enduring that pain, you can see a benefit will come out of it.

When we work with communities we look at where they are currently at – try to understand their context and then work with them with love to see how things might be done in a different way. We do not denigrate what they have already achieved – what they are is valuable – but

we can formulate plans with different models and achieve more. The important thing is that we give them the ownership – it's their project, and their work, not ours...

How would you sum up the inspiration that drives your work?

For me, the work we do with communities is based on fundamental Christian values of sharing and inter-dependency. You give because you love, and because you love, you grow. But we start with believing passionately in what we are doing. The passion is important – it means our heart is in our work and we are committed to the end product.

My greatest inspiration has been the song that the communities in Salima sing when they greet us as we arrive in their village: "Environment Africa, hold my hand so we can walk the road together – there is victory in this journey if we stand together, nothing can defeat us..."

Barbara Banda is Country Director of Progressio partner organisation Environment Africa in Malawi. EA is not a faith-based organisation, but many staff draw inspiration from their Christian faith. Cathy Scott is Progressio's Regional Manager for Africa.

Thought you knew Benedict XVI?



Gertrude Usaiwevu (right) leads a volunteer group of 15 women in the Zvimba district of Zimbabwe. Despite having few material possessions, the women work tirelessly to find money for food and school fees for children orphaned by AIDS

Photo: Marcus Perkins/Progressio

Love received and given* is Progressio's brand new guide to Pope Benedict's encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate

In *Love received and given*, we're asked to think again about development and to see ourselves differently.

This short guide explores five key themes which are illustrated by stunning pictures and stories from our work. Great for your J&P group, to read at home or to share with a friend – so take a look, give it a read, and be inspired!

You can download a free copy and share your responses, reflections and ideas online at www.progressio.org.uk/civ

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