

interact

The magazine of **PROGRESSIO**
CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES



Coming Out

People take control
of their destiny

In this issue:

HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe and Peru
Saying no to 'free trade' in Latin America
Environment and indigenous culture in Ecuador

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Contents



- 4 **voices:** disability in Zimbabwe
- 6 **news:** WTO fails on trade justice

insight: working on HIV and AIDS

- 8 Turning the corner
HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe
- 10 Opening up
People living with HIV and AIDS in Peru

analysis

- 11 Going against the flow
Latin America resists free trade agreement

action

- 13 Say no to suicide seeds
Take action against Terminator Technology

viewpoint

- 14 The natural way
Organic farming takes on GM in Zambia
- 15 The art of the unexpected
The meaning of development in Yemen

reportage

- 16 Everything is alive
Protecting the environment in Ecuador



- 18 **reflection:** lessons from abroad
- 19 **review:** Voices of the San
- 20 **perspective:** the need for action



editorial

Coming Out

You will notice a few changes in this edition of Interact – the first to be published under our new name, Progressio.

But one thing that remains the same is the prominence we try to give to the voices of our partners – the people we work with, and the people who make our work possible. I hope you will find these voices not only in the new section on page 4, but throughout the magazine.

Interact aims to give readers a taste of the work of Progressio. In our new 'reportage' photo essay section on page 16, we focus on the work of our partner organisation CEPCU in Otavalo, Ecuador. I hope the photos and the stories give a real sense of the people, the place, and the work we are part of.

But Interact is not just about Progressio and our work – it is about the development issues, the hopes and fears, the setbacks and triumphs of people throughout the world who are coming out, standing up and trying to take control of their own destiny. Sometimes – such as for people in the developing world living with HIV and AIDS – they do this against tremendous odds.

Every step they take should be an inspiration to us. As I hope you will find in the stories in Interact, they are showing us the way. And we cannot interact just by standing and watching: we must accompany them on that way.

Cover picture: A Zambian HIV-positive woman, Micah Chansa. Initially rejected by her parents when she told them of her status, she has now been accepted by her family, and her sister is doing her hair again. The picture is part of a photographic project by Pep Bonet called POSITHIV+. Photo: Pep Bonet/Panos

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Gaining confidence

Irene Banda is a Progressio development worker with the Bulawayo branch of the Zimbabwe Parents of Children with Disabilities Association (ZPCDA)

THE STAFF AND MEMBERSHIP of ZPCDA is composed of parents with disabled children and there is therefore a great range of skills and capacity. The membership numbers keep increasing as those parents who had been hiding their children at home gain confidence to come out as a parent with a disabled child.

ZPCDA is a very visible association – we have regular spots on radio programmes to raise awareness, we give interviews, we produce a newsletter and write articles for local newspapers.

We have also taken part in two documentary films, one of which is being subtitled into English.

The majority of members are single mothers as the husband or partner often leaves when a child is born disabled. However, there is also the added problem of spouses returning to the family once they fall ill (often as a result of HIV infection).

There remains a strong belief that disability occurs as a result of witchcraft and traditional remedies or advice are often sought. We therefore raise awareness regarding the physiological or genetic reasons for disabilities to combat this misperception.

Interviewed by David Tanner, Progressio programme coordinator for Africa, Middle East and Asia.

The membership numbers keep increasing as those parents who had been hiding their children at home gain confidence to come out as a parent with a disabled child



Irene Banda

David Tanner/Progressio



One step forward

Tracy Magiza is Irene Banda's local counterpart at ZPCDA. Irene's capacity building work includes providing training in leadership, fundraising and advocacy skills

THROUGH OUR REGULAR MEETINGS and advocacy work, parents are realising more and more that it is possible to have their disabled children placed within mainstream schools – and are increasing their demands for this to happen. There is still a great deal of stigma towards disabled children among teachers and headmasters but there have been improvements in several schools.

We need to further target local leaders and the church to raise awareness and understanding about disabilities – for example by having the issue of the disabled raised within priests' sermons. There is still a significant level of stigma even about taking your disabled child to church.

Through networking we have managed to secure for several members paid employment that they could not have secured alone. Also ZPCDA-Bulawayo, helped by Progressio, has implemented a revolving fund scheme. Small groups guarantee member loans. Although there have been some problems, the scheme works well. Members use the loans to undertake livelihood activities such as craft making, vending of vegetables or fruit, copra making, and so on.

We have been lobbying local councillors for housing provision for the disabled and there is now a bylaw across Bulawayo which states that housing must be provided for the disabled. However, the reality is that securing housing remains very difficult as landlords often turn away families with disabled members or children.

In December we held a HIV and AIDS awareness day



Members of ZPCDA: Tracy Magiza is on the far right (with shoulder bag).

where we provided materials specifically targeted at the disabled. However, we think that mainstream material on HIV and AIDS should also consider the disabled.

There is still a high level of stigma in the community towards HIV positive people. Members, however, were becoming ill and once the first member came out as being infected they have encouraged others to admit their status. This has helped member support and raising awareness – including about prevention measures aimed at the disabled.

ZPDCA is a national body and as the Bulawayo branch we feed in our concerns and help develop specific policy issues – for example, that proposals from local councils must consider the needs of the disabled and help combat the stigmatisation of disabled people. Indeed, all development projects and activities should consider the specific needs of disabled people as a matter of course.

We want to keep on growing. The association has been offered a large site and we would like to build our own education centre, day care centre, office and demonstration garden. A city planner has voluntarily drawn up the plans for the site. Funding is yet to be secured, but we have submitted a proposal. We may need to break it down into smaller sections that could be funded by particular specialised donors.

Whatever happens, we are confident now in our ability to move things forward.

Interviewed by David Tanner, Progressio programme coordinator for Africa, Middle East and Asia.

We need to further target local leaders and the church to raise awareness and understanding about disabilities.... There is still a significant level of stigma even about taking your disabled child to church

Two steps back

A disabled woman describes the hopelessness and despair caused by the government's controversial operation Murambatsvina ('clean up the trash')

ROSEMARY (name changed) is 36 years old and can only move around with crutches. She is married to a disabled man, and they have three children. Since 1989 the family had housed itself precariously in the backyards of Bulawayo. At least they could feed themselves and the children could attend school. But the family's shack was destroyed along with most of their few possessions by the government thugs implementing operation Murambatsvina last June, and the family became homeless. With no other place to go, they took refuge in the grounds and outhouses of Progressio partner organisation Jairos Jiri, along with some 60 other disabled refugees.

While it is sympathetic to their plight, Jairos Jiri cannot support these desperate people indefinitely. The living conditions are, to put it mildly, basic. Women and men are segregated, and five families are squashed into each hut or outhouse. Already two vulnerable individuals have died, their physical conditions worsened beyond hope by the stress of the whole situation.

Conditions are such that Jairos Jiri has had to ask the people to leave. The problem is, they have nowhere to go.

'We cannot go back to our village in the countryside,' explains Rosemary. 'There are no facilities for the disabled there, and here the children are getting schooling. We could not survive there. If JJA does throw us out, we will end up on the streets.'

Amazingly, Rosemary does not seem to blame the government for operation Murambatsvina. She just seems to think they should have planned it better. They should have thought through the implications for the disabled, she complains. 'We could not salvage our things, because we were physically unable to do so. Disabled people suffer from discrimination and stigma. We are the last people in the best of times to be offered accommodation. At least in the backyards, we had somewhere to live.'

Local government authorities have offered those made homeless plots of land. The most able are turning their skills to constructing new homes. This is not possible for disabled people who have neither the physical nor the financial ability to even get started. 'We have no money to buy materials,' laments Rosemary. 'We cannot just live on open land.'

'I see no light at the end of the tunnel,' she says. 'The only option for us is to roam the streets.'

Interview and story by Catherine Scott, Progressio regional manager for Africa, Middle East and Asia.

We could not salvage our things, because we were physically unable to do so. Disabled people suffer from discrimination and stigma.... At least in the backyards, we had somewhere to live.

Environment website launched



PROGRESSIO HAS LAUNCHED a new website called eco-matters to help raise awareness of how policy and practice in the North can contribute to environmental degradation and poverty in developing countries.

Progressio works with small-scale farmers in six Latin American

countries – Peru, Ecuador, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. We aim to help farmers implement sustainable agriculture practices and manage natural resources to reduce their poverty and environmental vulnerability.

We back this up by advocating for more and better support to small farmers in developing countries so they can grow food in sustainable ways appropriate to their circumstances and needs.

'Policies and practices at international and national level need to take into account the socio-economic and environmental needs of small-scale farmers,' says Progressio's environment advocacy coordinator, Eli Lopez.

'Eco-matters will enable our members and supporters to keep up to date with our environment advocacy work. It will also allow them to be informed and take action on different environmental issues.'

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To find out more, go to www.eco-matters.org

Somaliland urged to build on success of elections



SOMALILAND NEEDS to build on the success of its recent parliamentary elections by promoting the wider participation of women in politics and governance, according to a report published by Progressio in January.

Further steps to democracy: The Somaliland parliamentary elections, September 2005 was launched at a debate in the House of Commons on Somaliland's future. The meeting was attended

by MPs, several Somalilanders including the leader of the country's opposition, and members of the Anglo-Somali society.

The report said the elections were 'reasonably free and fair' but Somaliland faced further challenges in reinforcing its democratic processes. Dr Steve Kibble, Progressio's advocacy coordinator for Africa and Yemen, and co-author of the report, said at the launch: 'We pay tribute to the 800,000 or so Somalilanders who showed high levels of enthusiasm to cast their democratic votes and look forward to working with Somalilanders on their future.'

Mindanao celebrates week of peace

MORE THAN 20,000 PEOPLE took to the streets of Zamboanga City during an annual week of peace focusing on women and youth in the conflict-prone region of Mindanao, southern Philippines.

Held under the patronage of the Bishops-Ulama Conference in Mindanao, the event at the end of November has grown each year since it was first celebrated in 1988.

One of the main organisers of the festivities is Peace Advocates Zamboanga, a partner of Progressio's programme for interfaith peacebuilding in South East Asia.

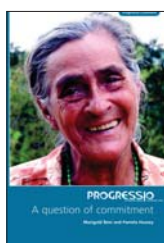
This year's peace programme in Mindanao included dance theatre, tree plantings, family events, a speech competition and interfaith events for prisoners at the local prison. The opening parade saw 20,000 people take to the streets to appeal for lasting peace and harmony between religious communities.

Jane McGrory, Progressio's advocacy and research coordinator for South East Asia, said: 'The event saw the people of Mindanao send out a clear and compelling message of peace and interfaith harmony, despite the sounds of war that continue to echo around them.'

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Further steps to democracy is available as a free download from www.progressio.org.uk. Printed copies are also available price £5 plus p&p.

Progressio publishes new Comment



COMMITMENT IS A FASHIONABLE WORD nowadays – but what does it mean, and is it even necessarily and always a good thing?

The latest in the renowned Comment series – and the first under the Progressio name – argues that our commitment must always be to what is life-giving and life-enhancing. It draws on inspirational examples ranging from Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador to the 'unhistoric acts' of ordinary people around the world. The authors challenge

people to live out a commitment to life through their own lives – 'Everybody is called', they write, to help change things for the better, and make another world possible.

'A question of commitment' has been sent to Progressio members and supporters in the same mailing as this Interact. Further copies cost £2 each from Progressio.

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order online at www.progressio.org.uk

Report condemns Mugabe's human rights record

ZIMBABWEAN PRESIDENT Robert Mugabe's human rights record has come in for heavy criticism in a report issued by the Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), a body of the African Union.

The report, published following the commission's meeting in Banjul, the Gambia, at the end of 2005, raises concerns over 'the continuing violations and the deterioration of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe, the lack of respect for the rule of law and the growing culture of impunity'.

It is the first time the commission has broken its silence about the growing evidence of human rights abuses in Zimbabwe. Many hope that this new pressure will force Mugabe to restore the rule of law and end the government-led evictions of people from their homes.

The commission said it was 'alarmed by the number of internally displaced persons and the violations of fundamental individual and collective rights resulting from the forced evictions being carried out by the government of Zimbabwe'. It also found that the Mugabe government had violated the African Union's charter, which Zimbabwe has signed, as well as other international laws including the United Nations' declaration of human rights. Mugabe is being urged to allow an African Union delegation to go on a fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe.

Dr Steve Kibble, Progressio advocacy coordinator for African and Yemen, said: 'The fact that the ACHPR has for the first time been prepared to criticise Zimbabwe is not just because of the Harare government's lamentable human rights record but is also down to ongoing lobbying by African and international NGOs – particularly the Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum.'



Nick Sireau/Progressio

Rich countries refuse to deliver trade justice

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY and Trade Justice Movement campaigners have lambasted the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial meeting in Hong Kong in December for failing to deliver 'justice for the world's poorest people'.

'The positions taken by the major developed countries in Hong Kong favoured the rich over the interests of the world's poor,' said a statement released on behalf of the campaigns.

'Outrageously, the developed countries, particularly the European Union and the United States, tried to use the WTO meeting to aggressively push forward their agenda to open the markets in developing countries for the interests of their corporations. This shameful abuse of power showed no respect for poor countries' right to decide their own trade policies to help lift millions of people out of poverty and stop environmental damage,' said the statement.

The statement said that the conduct of the EU negotiators was in such direct contrast to their stated commitment to development that the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (of which Make Poverty History is the UK arm) demanded Europe's trade

commissioner Peter Mandelson remove the white band he wore in Hong Kong.

'EU decision-makers have been quick to echo the words of trade justice campaigners when responding to the demands of the general public in 2005 but they

'The positions taken by the major developed nations in Hong Kong favoured the rich over the interests of the world's poor'

have not changed their policies and practices,' said the statement.

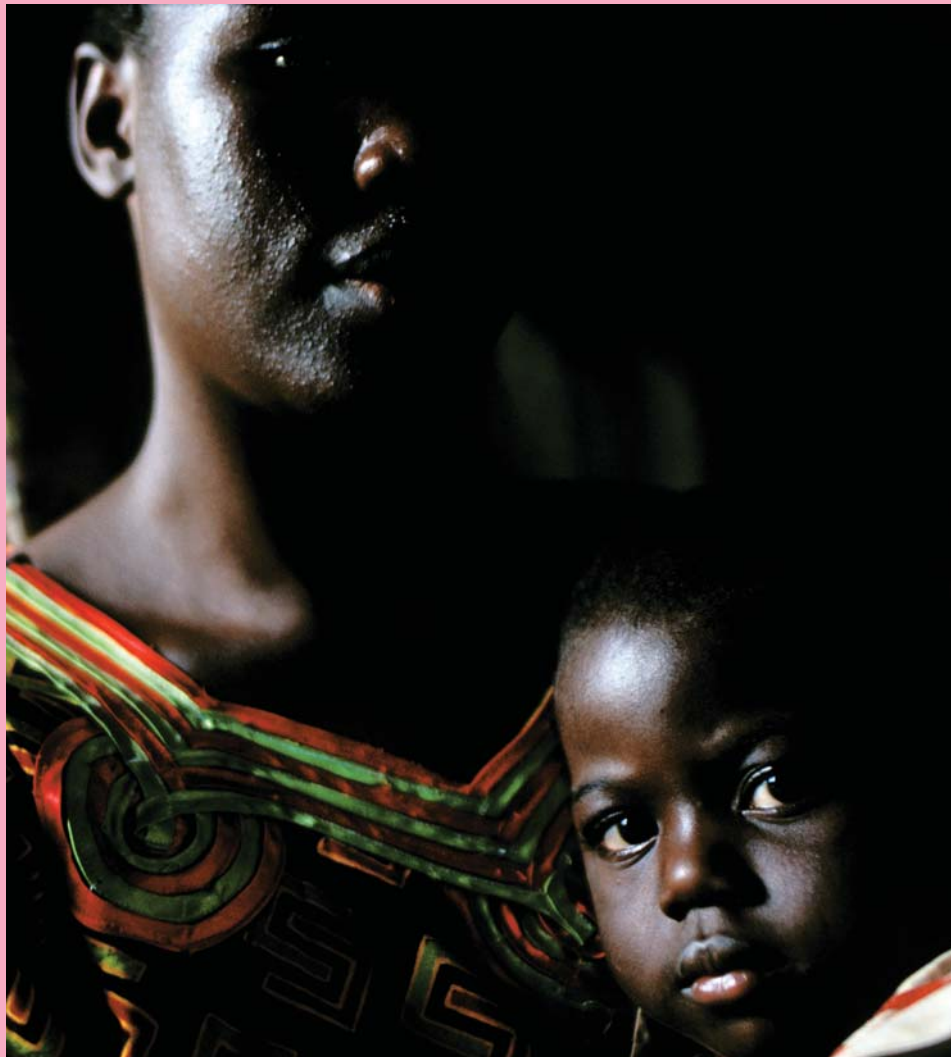
Trade talks have now moved back to the WTO headquarters in Geneva and campaigners have vowed to continue to press the UK government to follow through on its stated commitment 'to making poverty history through trade justice and no forced liberalisation'.

'We are not satisfied with empty rhetoric and political posturing,' said the Make Poverty History and Trade Justice Movement statement.

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For further information and ways to get your voice heard, see www.tjm.org.uk and www.makepovertyhistory.org

Make Poverty History campaigners at the G8 summit in Edinburgh in July 2005.



A mother and daughter in Busia, Kenya. They are both HIV positive and undergoing anti-retroviral treatment.

TURNING THE CORNER

David Tanner describes the reality of trying to tackle HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe

During a recent trip to Zimbabwe I was lucky enough to meet Progressio development worker Tsitsi Choruma and visit partner organisations working in the field of HIV and AIDS. Having worked in international development for a while I felt I had a good overall understanding of the main issues surrounding HIV and AIDS. We read about the high infection rates in southern Africa, remember the hard-

hitting 'iceberg' TV adverts of the late 1980s, and are aware of the importance of safe sex. But how many of us based here in the UK deal with the reality of HIV and AIDS?

Zimbabwe has been in serious decline for several years. It not only has the fourth highest HIV positive infection rate in the world at around 20 per cent (UNAIDS), leading to an estimated 3,000 deaths a week from AIDS, but rapidly deteriorating economic

conditions compound the impact of the disease. Life expectancy is down to 30 years, unemployment is estimated at 80 per cent, and hyperinflation at over 500 per cent means food prices have gone up ten-fold, while wages have remained low and static. Aid agencies estimate that 70 per cent of Zimbabwe's 12 million people now survive on one meal or less a day. These conditions recently led the United Nations humanitarian chief, Jan Egeland, to describe Zimbabwe as being in 'meltdown'.

The reality of these figures becomes clear during my discussions with Tsitsi and two of her colleagues at the Centre and Network for Zimbabwean Positive Women (CNZPW) in Harare. The centre grew out of an informal home support group during the 1990s organised by a HIV+ Zimbabwean woman, Lynde Francis. In these early years few people publicly disclosed their HIV+ status because of the stigma and discrimination surrounding the disease. Several of the women were thrown out of their family homes after disclosing their status.

Today in Zimbabwe there is far less stigma for people who are HIV+ or living with AIDS. HIV issues are always in the media and testing is routinely carried out in hospitals. However, very few celebrities

They are often in shock, depressed and unsure of how to deal with their positive status

and no government ministers have come out regarding their status, and many clients still drop into the centre on the basis of anonymity.

Positive approach

The centre has grown considerably over the years and has a permanent base that provides a drop-in centre, counselling services, testing, emergency accommodation, some medication and advice on contraception and nutrition (with a demonstration vegetable and herb garden). They also carry out a great deal of awareness-raising work and lobby government over HIV and AIDS related issues.

Local hospitals soon began referring people who tested positively for HIV directly to the centre. Most people arrive having had no pre-test counselling. They are often in shock, depressed and unsure of how to deal with their positive status. The staff at the centre outline the basic facts surrounding HIV and AIDS and offer support and advice on dealing with the disease, disclosure to family and friends, good nutrition, the use of herbal remedies and access to anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs.

In a country where there is a shortage of ARVs and the majority of people do not have the finances to purchase them anyway, it makes sense to focus on developing a positive approach and lifestyle. This is done through support groups combined with good nutrition and the use of herbal remedies for the treatment of a variety of conditions to combat the onset of AIDS. However, the centre is also lobbying hard to try to get equal and fair access to ARV treatment for all.

Overcoming adversity

The overwhelming majority of the 32 centre staff are HIV+ women. This has an inevitable impact on the work of the centre. Tsitsi and the centre lost two colleagues to AIDS-

related conditions during 2005 and several staff were hospitalised for months at a time. It is a situation that the centre has to work around. Tsitsi has been working alongside the staff to better organise the work the centre carries out, clarifying roles and building up the skills of staff in report writing, documentation, planning, lobbying and strategising as well as building up the staff training programme, strengthening the centre's board, and establishing links with the private sector.

The economic climate in Zimbabwe is seriously affecting the centre's work. Testing was previously carried out by two local doctors on a voluntary basis. However, the time and finances available for voluntary work become harder and harder to find. Fuel can only be bought at exorbitant prices on the black market, there are food shortages with prices rising, and work demands on medical staff have increased as colleagues leave the country. For example, Harare hospital has serious staff shortages with 30 nurses leaving during a two week period in November alone. Only one out of 30 midwifery tutors' positions are filled, two of 32 nursing tutors, 17 of 51 medical specialists and three of 30 x-ray unit staff. The demands on those staff who do stay are clear.

The economic problems have also affected the clients of the centre, with less and less of them being able to afford to travel to the clinic for counselling, advice, follow up testing or pay for medication – including ARVs. In addition, for the ARVs to work, people must adhere to a strict regimen. For example, the drugs must be taken at precise times and on a full stomach. These requirements can be impossible to meet for people living in unstable conditions who often do not know where their next meal is coming from.

Fuel can only be bought at exorbitant prices on the black market, there are food shortages with prices rising, and work demands on medical staff have increased as colleagues leave the country

Operation Murambatsvina or 'clean out the trash', undertaken by the government since May, has made an estimated 700,000 families newly homeless and deprived 300,000 of their livelihoods. This has exacerbated the problems of working within HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. The centre has lost track of clients who have been displaced and in many cases have therefore had their ARV treatment disrupted. The home care programme has also been seriously disrupted. As people have their houses and livelihoods destroyed, overcrowding, poor nutrition, exposure to the elements, increased stress and disruption to treatment regimes all lead to an increased risk of AIDS developing in those that are already HIV positive.

However, despite these difficulties, the women have established, and continue to develop in innovative ways, the centre into an HIV and AIDS organisation that is widely regarded as one of the best NGOs within its field in the region.

David Tanner is Progressio's programme coordinator for Africa, Middle East and Asia.

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In July 2005, the G8 promised to get as close as possible to 'universal access to AIDS treatment by 2010'. The Stop AIDS Campaign – of which Progressio is a member – is campaigning to turn this commitment into a reality. Visit www.stopaidscampaign.org.uk for more information.

OPENING UP

An organisation in Peru is proving that self-help is the best way forward for people living with HIV and AIDS, writes Alastair Whitson

I AM BEING SHOWN AROUND the offices of PROSA, an organisation in Lima, Peru, that is run by and for people living with HIV and AIDS. Julio César Cruz, the director of PROSA, stops to show me a photo displayed in a small frame. It's a snapshot of a group of about 20 people. I recognise a much younger Julio in the photo.

'That was when we first founded PROSA,' he says. 'That's me, and that's Mama Lila, one of the founders,' he adds, pointing at a distinguished-looking elderly woman. 'The rest of the people in this photo are now dead.'

Julio's remark brought home to me the reality of HIV and AIDS. Anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) can now help people manage the virus and hold it back from developing into full-blown AIDS. But 15 years ago, when PROSA was founded, HIV infection was usually a death sentence.

Unique

PROSA was unique then, and – although it is changing – it is still unique. It was set up by people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHAs) to provide help and support to PLWHAs – the first such organisation in Peru. Most of the people who work there are volunteers. They think of themselves as members rather than staff. The PROSA offices are a warm and welcoming place.

Initially the organisation offered health information, but the members soon realised that

a major part of the problem was the stigma and discrimination faced by PLWHAs. The first people in Peru to come out in the media as living with AIDS were members of PROSA.

It was a brave stance in a country where there are still powerful prejudices against HIV and AIDS. Even now, says Susana Araujo, a Progressio development worker working with PROSA, the stigma is such that 'if you put up a banner saying PROSA outside the offices, people would not come near.'

Empowering

PROSA continues to provide support services: visiting people in hospitals or their homes, running support groups and therapy groups for families, providing one-to-one counselling. Ana Teresa Rodríguez, another Progressio development worker with PROSA, says: 'People prefer to come here than go to hospitals for counselling, because here there is more confidentiality.'

There is also empathy, and the empowering nature of the PROSA approach – the ethos of self-help – is crucial. Julio explains: 'The relationship between doctor and patient is not equal. The patient does not have the right to decide about their own health. PROSA tries to empower people so that they have a say in the decisions about their health.'

PROSA soon realised that empowering people also meant standing up and fighting for their rights. PROSA president Jesus Culis Arias explains: 'For

about five years PLWHAs have been fighting for access to treatment. There used to be a law called "Contrasida" [against AIDS] and it didn't include the right to treatment. Self-help groups were fundamental in getting this right included in the law in 2004. It was a really big success of PLWHAs because it required a lot of lobbying of Congress, public action in front of hospitals, and other campaigning actions.'

Warmth

PROSA's great strength has always been its friendly, informal approach, still retaining the characteristics it had when it was a small group of people working out of one room. But since then the organisation has grown, and the demands upon it have grown too.

That's why Ana and Susana are working with PROSA on institutional strengthening. According to Susana, 'the most important challenge is how to improve and formalise the organisation's work without losing its essence.' Ana tells a story about a HIV and AIDS organisation founded by health personnel: 'When you compare them, one of the things people always say is that in PROSA you find warmth – people open their heart to you. At the other NGO, you find a cold place. You are treated very efficiently but you don't find that warmth.'

'That is what we don't want to lose. We want to be an effective organisation but we don't want to lose that warmth.'

Alastair Whitson is Progressio's senior editor.

*PROSA staff:
Fernando Polo
(administrator),
Susana Araujo,
Jesus Culis Arias,
Julio César Cruz
and Ana Teresa
Rodríguez.*



Graham Freer/Progressio



Mauricio Ushina

A woman with a 'No FTAA' flag in Ecuador in 2004 (ALCA = Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas)

Going against the flow

Several Latin American countries refused to be bullied at the Summit of the Americas in November into supporting free trade agreements, writes **Sergio Vergne**

THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in November 2005, brought together 33 presidents of the continent. Their explicit aims were: 'To create jobs to confront poverty and to strengthen democratic governance.'

At the summit, 26 of the 33 presidents wanted to renew the agreement on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The others, from Mercosur (the Southern Common Market), opposed the agreement. With the exception of Hugo Chávez of Venezuela – who wanted to bury the FTAA – their opposition cannot be

Consequences of the FTAA

The study carried out by the Centro de Economía Internacional in Argentina and the Instituto de Pesquisa Económica Aplicada del Brasil sought to estimate the impact that the eventual opening of the continental markets (as is proposed under the FTAA) would have on the foreign trade of each country.

According to the results, Argentina would lose a net US\$126 million a year in the global trade balance, broken down into \$111 million in new imports and \$15 million in exports. In particular, the trade balance with the United States would deteriorate to \$142 million. The imports to Argentina from the United States (a threat to the local market) would grow up to \$252 million. Argentina would also lose in exports to the Brazilian market by \$125 million a year. The increase of \$110 million in exports to the United States and the reduction of purchases from the rest of the world by \$76 million would not be enough to compensate for the loss.

Meanwhile, according to the simulation, the United States would enjoy a benefit of \$762 million a year in its trade relations with Brazil and Argentina. The latter would lose not only in quantity but in quality. All the new imports that would come from the United States, and three-quarters of the sales to Brazil that would be lost, would be made up of Manufactures of Industrial Origin – that is, goods with high added value for the manufacturer. In contrast, 77 per cent of the opportunities for new exports to the United States would consist of primary products and Manufactures of Agricultural Origin.

explained by their ideological position. Instead, it was based on a detailed analysis facing their countries if the agreement is implemented (see box).

According to this analysis, carried out by public and private institutions in Argentina and Brazil, the countries of the south would be clear losers from the agreement. The FTAA would disintegrate the regional market, affecting industrial development and employment levels – in other words, run precisely counter to the aims of the summit.

The main draft of the summit declaration had proposed to reiterate agreement with the FTAA and establish a day for its re-launch in April 2006. Instead, the members of Mercosur proposed that the text of the declaration should mention both positions and state explicitly that no agreement was reached. They argued that the FTAA should not be implemented unless this could be done in an equitable manner. For this to happen, they said, there would need to be effective access to markets, free from subsidies and distorted trade practices, and the needs and sensibilities of all the American countries should be taken into account.

Those 'down below'

The United States position in favour of the FTAA was very aggressive. During a press conference, Bush explained: 'I will tell the people, the leaders, and

everyone who wants to listen to me *down below* [italics added] that our markets are open, provided that you open your markets. In other words, we are going to open the markets.'

His agenda in Mar del Plata had been organised according to the countries with which the United States already has or is negotiating free trade agreements, such as the Central American countries and the Andean countries. Yet faced by the new resolve of the Mercosur countries, the United States found that the terms of the discussion were changing – and the results were not

what they wanted.

For example, the Argentinean minister of finance stressed that it was impossible to reach an agreement on trade without knowing the outcome of the World Trade Organisation meeting in Hong Kong, where the United States planned to discuss its policies on agricultural subsidies. And this is precisely one of the problems: the reluctance of the United States (and to a large extent Europe) to eliminate their protectionist policies, which do not allow Brazil, Argentina and other countries of Mercosur free access to their markets.

Indeed, all the papers considered for the summit declaration, even the most optimistic, pointed out the differences in size of the economies and in the level of development of the countries participating. The analysis for Mercosur went further. It showed that the FTAA would lead to a worsening of trade conditions for the southern countries: less added value for their goods, less employment, increased inequalities, and a decline in the quality of life.

The decision of the countries of Mercosur not to be swept along by the flow is a fundamental measure of self-defence. It is also a demonstration of the abandoning of the Washington Consensus (US-promoted neoliberal economic policies), which in the last two decades has wiped out what was left of the integrated society, created between the 1940s and 1970s, in these countries.

Sergio Alejandro Vergne is a Progressio development worker in Ecuador. He is from Argentina.

Summit of the people

Parallel to the Summit of the Americas, the third Summit of the People also took place in Mar del Plata. When it was described disparagingly by the mass media as the Anti-Summit, Nora Cortiñas of the Mothers of May responded: 'This is not the Anti-Summit but the real summit to change a world with so much inequality and injustice.'

The summit was attended by up to 40,000 people representing indigenous, women's, workers, student, environmental and human rights movements, from all nationalities of the continent. Notable participants included the Nobel Peace Prize winner Rodolfo Pérez Esquivel; the Bolivian leader, Evo Morales; the ex-footballer, Diego Maradona; the film director, Emir Kusturica; Latin American members of parliament; and even a president, Hugo Chávez.

The summit produced various documents and proposals with the aim of achieving a different world to the one constructed by capitalist globalisation. These culminated in a clear mutual position, supported by everyone who was present, on three areas covered by the official Summit of the Americas: no to the FTAA, no to militarisation, and no to the external debt.

SAY NO TO SUICIDE SEEDS

TERMINATOR TECHNOLOGY THREATENS FARMERS, THE ENVIRONMENT AND FOOD SECURITY WORLDWIDE

WHAT IS TERMINATOR TECHNOLOGY?

Terminator technology is the genetic modification of plants to make them produce sterile seeds. It means that farmers cannot save seeds to replant from one harvest to the next.

Terminator is being developed by multinational agribusiness companies to prevent farmers from saving seeds – and thus increase their sales.

But most small-scale farmers in developing countries cannot afford to buy seed each year. They depend on seeds they save themselves to plant for the next harvest.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

In 2000, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity decided that products incorporating Terminator technology should not be approved for field-testing or commercial use. Effectively, this imposed a moratorium on further development of these 'suicide seeds'.

This moratorium is now under attack from agribusinesses and allied governments. They are lobbying hard to get it overturned.

Public pressure is needed now to make sure they don't succeed.

Photo: SIU/Still Pictures

WHY IS IT WRONG?

Terminator undermines the traditional practice of saving seeds and could reduce the wide range of crops that is currently grown down to a handful of varieties. Terminator genes could spread to other crops by cross-fertilisation or by accidental mixing of seeds.

If agribusiness companies get the go-ahead for Terminator, they could introduce it into all their seeds, even the ones that are currently GM free. This will increase the proportion of GM crops grown and make it increasingly difficult to guarantee that food and crops are GM-free.

Terminator threatens to damage traditional farming methods and knowledge, lead to irreversible environmental damage, and undermine global food security (people's ability to grow or have access to food to eat).

TAKE ACTION NOW

Please write to your MP asking him or her to sign a parliamentary motion, EDM 1300, supporting a ban on Terminator. (Progressio, working with partner organisations in the UK Working Group on Terminator Technology, played a key role in persuading MPs to table EDM 1300.)

Please also urge your MP to do all they can to ensure that the UK government continues to support the existing moratorium on Terminator technology at a crucial UN meeting to discuss the Convention on Biological Diversity in March.

You can find out more by reading the leaflet included with this issue of Interact; visiting Progressio's environment website, www.eco-matters.org; or visiting the website of the international Ban Terminator campaign, www.banterminator.org

TAKE ACTION NOW



A bowl of maize – one of the staple crops of the Zambian people.

The natural way

Fr Peter Henriot explains why organic approaches to farming justify Zambia's decision to reject GM crops

MUTALE, a 40-year old Zambian peasant farmer, was standing in front of his two hectares of maize, smiling broadly. He had just finished explaining that despite poor rains, he was able to raise a good crop to feed his family and to sell a bit of surplus for some extra cash to meet household needs.

He looked so very different from the other farmers I had spoken to only a few days earlier. They were his neighbours, worked soil similar to his, and had experienced the same dry season. But they were not smiling! No good maize harvest for them.

The difference was that Mutale had planted his maize field using an organic agriculture approach, not relying on heavy doses of chemical fertiliser as did his neighbours. The organic approach – using cattle manure and decayed materials from nitrogen-rich plants like legumes – was both much less expensive and much more efficient.

During a drought season, it is important to keep as much moisture as possible close to the crops. But chemical fertilisers don't store this moisture like organic matter in the soil. The organic matter retains excess moisture and slowly releases it to the crop in a natural way.

Alternatives to GM

The smile on Mutale's face taught me an important reason for the wisdom of Zambia's rejection of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) coming into our country. There simply are plenty of alternatives to the GM approach being vigorously pushed by the United States.

The US government argues that global hunger can best be dealt with by introducing GM technologies that are supposed to increase agricultural yields. Yet high technology, associated with an industrial model of agriculture (huge investments, large plots of land, sophisticated mechanisation), characterises the GM approach. More than 80 per cent of Zambia's food is grown by small-scale farmers and they would face immense problems with the introduction of GM crops. Dependency on external inputs (most GM seed is controlled by US corporate giants) is just one of the difficulties.

Pro-GM advocates argue that their products can also offer inexpensive health remedies for people in poor countries. One example is a GM rice with a gene for making beta-carotene, a substance that the body can convert to vitamin A. But very large amounts of this modified rice would be necessary every day, and it would have to be

accompanied by adequate amounts of zinc, protein and fats – elements often lacking in the diets of poor people.

Fr Roland Lesseps, a Jesuit priest from the USA with a doctorate in plant biology, encourages farmers to plant the so-called 'vegetable tree' (moringa tree), whose leaves are rich in vitamin A as well as protein, vitamin C, iron and calcium. Besides providing a full range of nutrients, the leaves are delicious, especially when cooked in a traditional Zambian way with powdered groundnuts. Why promote GM crops when natural alternatives are cheaper and more readily available?

Ethical concerns

Those of us who have been involved in the debate in Zambia have also raised some religious and ethical concerns about the GM approach. Because we humans are fellow-creatures with the rest of creation – members of the earth community – we must show due respect for the integrity of creation.

Manipulation of the forces of nature through bio-technology is not a neutral or purely technical matter. It has its limits in terms of the overall effects on nature and must continually be subjected to ethical evaluation.

Helpful to that ethical evaluation are the principles and norms found in Catholic social teaching. These include, for example, the principles of the common good (all should benefit from advances in science), option for the poor (special concern should be shown for impact on the poor and vulnerable), subsidiarity (decisions should be made by those immediately affected), and solidarity (promotion of inclusive community and not exclusive isolation).

For the time being, Zambia continues to honour a pledge to keep out GMOs. It is finding that with the good agricultural practices of farmers like Mutale, the people can be fed and their health promoted, the environment can be protected, and God's good earth can be respected.

Fr Peter Henriot, a Jesuit priest and political scientist, is director of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection in Lusaka, Zambia. This article has been edited for length from the original. Reprinted with permission from Sojourners magazine (www.sojo.net).

THERE WAS SOMETHING VERY PROVIDENTIAL about the chance location of my apartment on the same street in Aden as Progressio development worker Joy Jakosalam-Balane. Just a week into my time here, I was already offering to provide English lessons for members of the 15 local NGOs that Progressio works with here. The idea was that these lessons would develop the NGOs' capacity to interact with non-Arabic-speaking partners and international organisations.

However, Joy, myself and Progressio's country representative in Yemen, Abdullah Al Syari, had reservations. The expectation of speaking in the language of the donor is one of the many injustices of aid and development work today. Moreover, Progressio's approach in Yemen is to focus on primary aspects of NGO organisation and vision rather than secondary skills such as language.

In the end, however, the NGOs were crying out for English tuition, and even the well-honed development principles of Joy and Abdullah could not turn down the help of a volunteer English teacher. Anyway, the art of making the most of the unplanned and the unexpected is one of the characteristic features of local NGOs in Yemen.

Values

Being a part of the Progressio programme has naturally made me aware of the organisation's values – its concern with human rights, local self-determination, gender equality, democracy and social progress. A similar set of life-affirming ideals is difficult to find in many organisations.

Many local NGOs in Yemen are confronted by massive and endemic problems in their target groups but are unable, because of lack of skills or affiliation to the state, to carry out effective advocacy on the structural issues at stake. Reflecting on the ways that Progressio can act as a catalyst to development in this kind of society, the greatest challenge for me is how the poor, the untouchables and the disadvantaged can be given a voice in the absence of robust mechanisms of civil society here in Aden.

Political groups, clubs, associations, support groups and businesses cannot form without making themselves amenable to government control. However, I am beginning to learn that democracy (*people-power*) has many

The art of the unexpected

Alex Ingram reflects on the meaning of development in a country like Yemen

cultural permutations. The history of a country has to be well understood in order to subsequently understand the shared symbols by which people negotiate the balance of individual and community.

Role of Islam

A visitor to Yemen cannot help but be struck by the role that Islam plays in the life of the people. In relation to development work, the religious duties of *tzakat* and *sadaqa* – charitable giving, and the pooling of costs among families and friends respectively – are widely practised. In the absence of government funding, many NGOs are able to carry out projects thanks to these donations.

The Qur'an exhorts people to support the poor and condemns the hoarding of wealth. The picture of a society without different shades of status and wealth is at the heart of Muslim scripture. It is a great shame that Islam often seems to be construed as a negative force in democratisation. In the case of Yemen it is rather that a centuries-old culture is still negotiating how democracy interacts

with its Islamic faith in the midst of the huge social and political upheavals that have occurred over the last century. Many Yemenis I speak to recognise that the interpretation of Islam prevailing here is cynical and oppressive at times, but there are no doubts that it can be a vital part of social development in the country.

Living and working in a strongly Muslim country has had added significance for me since Progressio adheres to a principle of participating in development with people of all faiths and no faith. It is an approach to development that is at pains to work within existing traditions, recognising that every locality is original and every development solution must also be original. Working with Progressio, I am always consoled to know that teamwork and skill-sharing is a process that is renewed in its application to each new situation.

Alex Ingram is from England. Joy Jakosalam-Balane is working on local NGO capacity-building in Aden, Yemen.



Expect the unexpected: boys on a wall in Sana'a, capital of Yemen.

Fernando Ruiz (centre), Fernando Guzmán (left) and children in the food garden of Pijal school, near Otavalo. CEPCU provides seeds, fences, plants to make hedges; the children do the work. 'The indigenous vision is not to be in competition but to share with others. In the past, people would give something to other families, then later receive something back that they did not have,' says Fernando Guzmán, the teacher. The garden is farmed organically and the children grow a variety of crops. 'The project is not just here in the school but in the children's homes, because the children are teaching the parents what they are learning,' says Fernando. As CEPCU president Roberto Conejo told us: 'If we work with children we are able to make more permanent change in people's lives.'



Children at the Centro Educativo Comunitario Intercultural Bilingue in the village of Pijal, five kilometres from Otavalo. The school has 32 pupils, aged 6 to 12 years, and one teacher: Fernando Guzmán. He is teaching them, in his own words, 'to take pride again in their own culture'. The children, who are all *indigenas*, are very open and engaging. They are constantly touching and hugging each other, their teacher, and even us. 'He is teaching them to be open and expressive, like other people in Latin America,' says Progressio development worker Fernando Ruiz. 'Because for indigenous people this openness is very difficult. Usually they don't touch other people in public. He is teaching them that they are just as much part of this country as anyone else: that they can be part of other people, not apart from them.'

Children outside a kindergarten. The woman who runs it works unpaid. Parents from the community, called *Angla*, leave their kids here when they go to work. Facing the kindergarten (not in picture) there is a huge, locked building: the community's brand new church. Built by the people at their own expense, at the insistence of their priest, it is open only one day a week. Meanwhile, the children make do with a basic, adobe-walled building less than a quarter of the size of the church.

Everything is alive

CEPUCU (Centro de Estudios Pluriculturales, www.cepcu.org.ec) was founded in 1992. Based in Otavalo, Ecuador, it works to protect the environment and promote indigenous culture through agro-ecological projects and environmental education. Roberto Conejo, president of CEPCU, told us:

'Years ago, organisations just bought and implemented the western vision of the world. CEPCU instead is working with a pluricultural vision. Our strategies for managing natural resources rely on our indigenous vision, not just the western vision.'

'Indigenous culture believes that the things in nature – mountains, trees, lakes – are people. People should not think they are apart from nature. Everything is alive. The people belong to nature and nature belongs to them.'

In October 2005, Progressio development worker Fernando Ruiz took us to visit a highlands natural resource management project, and a school that is part of CEPCU's environmental education programme. These images are from that visit. Words: Alastair Whitson. Pictures: Graham Freer.





Fernando Ruiz (right), Gonzalo Noquez (centre) and Alastair Whitson move a felled log from the dirt road leading through a eucalyptus plantation. On the drive to the paramo (high grassland), Fernando looks out of the car window, shaking his head. 'Eucalyptus, eucalyptus, eucalyptus,' he says. 'Where are our native trees? Where are our native plants?' CEPCU is working to reinstate native trees and crops. 'People have lost freedom, they have lost everything, because they don't have seeds any more. Every year they have to buy them,' he says. 'After the Spanish came, people were told to plant just one crop to sell. But now we are teaching people again that this is a land of biodiversity, and we must have biodiverse gardens again.'



A view of the paramo. The line just visible on the hillside (top left) is a firebreak. People used to keep animals on the paramo (above 3,000 metres). Animals only eat new grass, so people burnt the old grass so that new grass would grow. Now the Angla community only keep animals further down, and are protecting the upland areas with firebreaks, fences, and the planting of native plants (like the one pictured in the foreground). Rainwater runs off burnt land, but seeps into the grassland – and so filters down to the water table for people to use in the communities below. 'Now the water that rains here does not go down the hill but down into the earth, so during the dry season the water is there in the earth for the people,' says community leader Gonzalo Noquez. Fernando Ruiz explains how the communities are learning from each other. 'Once a fire started on the hillside and the community came up to quickly build firebreaks,' he says. 'The people on the other side of the valley saw them here working, and came and asked what they were doing. They explained and said, please, you don't have to burn your hills. Now other communities are following the example of this project.'



A view across the valley as we climb above the tree line. The big fields are part of a hacienda owned by a single landowner. The patchwork fields in the middle distance are small plots, each owned and farmed by one family. Above the tree line on the hill top is the paramo – the high grassland where it is too high to grow any crops. The paramo is community land.



Gonzalo Noquez, part of a group of young people from Angla concerned with protecting the eco-system. 'Coming back here to the paramo is like coming back to our home. Now coming here means we are the owners. The people are happy because this land is part of our life,' he says. As Fernando says: 'Now they know it is their land, their soul, their culture.'



Nick Sireau/Progressio

Faith in Africa: a woman singing in Uganda.

Lessons from abroad

Gerry Proctor returns from South Africa inspired by the African way of being church

TOUCHING SOME OF South Africa's recent wounds at the Hector Pietersen Museum in Soweto and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg brought home to me the extraordinary quality of the lives of African people. They are people who have suffered unspeakable atrocities at the hands of white European Christian colonialists. The South African's innate response to the violence and aggression of apartheid was to draw upon their ancestral cultures to find the moral strength, spiritual wisdom and human energy to

They sang and danced their way to freedom

resist and protest. They sang and danced their way to freedom.

In films of the Soweto uprisings, I watched throngs of non-violent black youths chanting songs of freedom and marching rhythmically in protest. The police responded by first opening fire on them, and then raining down blows upon those who tried to flee the scene

of panic and devastation. I was speechless and deeply disturbed by the painful contrast between the white oppressors and their violence and the black oppressed and their dignity. I felt my culture and religion profoundly critiqued by the experience.

Of course oppression takes many forms in Africa and its consequences are still being played out across the continent. Development agencies are among those westerners facing up to the legacy of a past that we have sadly had a hand in creating, while working alongside local people in constructing a future that builds upon and recognises the values that African societies and cultures possess. We are often the ones learning and being enriched by this enterprise.

During the Pastoral Ministry Course that I attended at the Lumko Institute in Johannesburg, Sr Ephigenia Gachiri IBVM, from Kenya, matter-of-factly told us how the first Catholic missionaries to preach the gospel message in her region insisted that her grandparents completely reject their former 'pagan' lives before being received as Christian converts. This had the effect of

alienating them from their past, their traditions, customs, rites and rituals, from their family and tribe.

There was a claimed superiority for the new religion and the civilisation that came with it. In many places the missionaries established Christian villages for the newly baptised and 'saved' Catholics, separating them from the surrounding multitude of 'lost souls'. Tragically, Christianity arrived in Africa imposing a western European and colonial model of church upon the continent.

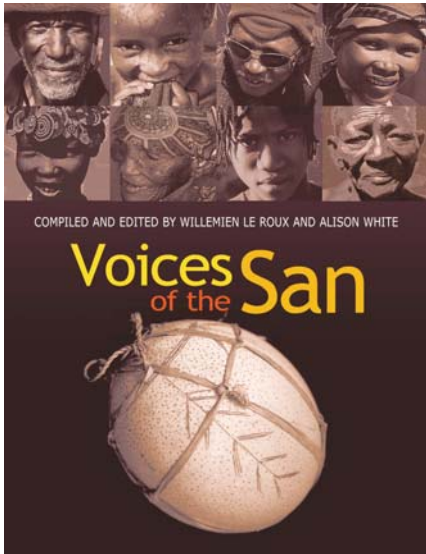
The Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference established Lumko during the opening years of the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s. It was conceived as a formation centre and think-tank. Over the next decades they reflected very carefully on the legacy of the colonial missionary endeavour and on the new insights of the recent Council in Rome as well as on the demands imposed by the harsh reality they were living through.

One of the conclusions that they came to was that the parish-based model of church implanted in their countries was unsuitable and unworkable. And so was born a formation programme for priests, religious and catechists introducing them to a new way of being church for Africa, through the creation of small communities.

In 1976, Bishop Patrick Kalilombe of Malawi described these 'basic units of the church' as 'those smaller communities where the ordinary life of the people takes place'. And so for the past 30 years Africa, along with Latin America and more recently Asia, has been developing a level of church at the grass-roots, in the local communities and neighbourhoods where people live their lives.

Here in Britain, one gets the impression that people look on open-mouthed as the parish system collapses and falls apart around us. Yet alternative models and choices are out there – and they are to be found where we seldom look for guidance or inspiration, among the poor.

Fr Gerry Proctor is an MPhil research student at Hope University, Liverpool, studying Basic Christian Communities.



Voices of the San

Compiled and edited by Willemien Le Roux and Alison White

THE INTERVIEWS recorded in *Voices of the San* provide a rich description of how the San – the nomadic peoples of southern Africa – view their own experiences and situation. The testimonies, collected under a wide-ranging oral history project, show the pride many of the elders take in their traditional culture.

The testimonies are presented alongside reproductions of San art and photos. They are also accompanied by a narrative that gives a context within which the interviews can be understood. It emphasises how it is only relatively recently that San groups have begun to share commonalities in their history, political experiences and cultural subjugation.

Some of the key themes identified by the editors as being shared and important in understanding the San's situation in southern Africa include: their history of alienation from the land by other groups and the undermining of their intimate relationship with their environment as hunter-gatherers; a common experience of political marginalisation and disempowerment; and a common undermining of their culture and language combined with overt discrimination, to the extent where members of San communities have themselves adopted strategies of assimilation with other peoples.

The book is clear, however, in refuting the frequent perception that the San have been passive in responding to the many challenges they have faced. Rather, they have a history of resistance. The editors are equally clear that we 'can understand the economic disadvantage and disempowered status

of many San people today as the result of having lost an often violent conflict against more powerful and ruthless invaders.'

In most cases this has led to a loss of access to land, and this is an important theme throughout the book. However, the book illustrates how marginalisation through legislative means has also played an important role. Forms of land tenure led to land being appropriated by others or fencing being erected which severely restricted the free movement of San people – a problem for those who were trying to maintain some element of hunting and gathering as part of their livelihood. The lack of political, social and economic power meant the San could not compete with other groups for access to land and resources.

A similar process occurred in the creation of national parks to 'conserve wildlife'. The creation of these parks invariably led to the removal of the San populating these areas. An interviewee in the book comments: 'We used to conserve nature around us, so that our food could always be close by. Therefore we did not scare the animals or take too many of them, so that we could have some for the coming period. Now the food is all gone, so whom should we conserve nature for?'

The education system has also acted to reinforce the low social and cultural status of the San. A high drop-out rate of San children, bullying and abuse have

been common in schools. One of the challenges that the book points to is for an educational system that acknowledges and listens to the needs of the San. As one San parent interviewed says: 'We as parents of these children are not asked about our needs, they do not teach the things that we as parents feel our children need. They should be taught in their own language, their own history, so that they can understand who they are. Today they do not obey our culture and they do not know their history. It is lost, just as our natural resources are lost.'

Voices of the San makes a major contribution to recovering and articulating San culture, and in so doing demonstrates that there is 'reason for hope'. In the words of the editors: 'Among some San groups a quest has begun – an attempt to capture some of the shreds of their history and awareness, and to preserve what is left of the original San culture and traditional knowledge. These groups also seek to own and control their intellectual and cultural property. This book forms part of this effort.'

Reviewed by Ron Norgard, former programme manager for Progressio/CIIR in southern Africa.

Voices of the San published by Kwela Books, ISBN 0 7957 0192 6, large format hardback, £25.

A key challenge of the oral history project recorded in *Voices of the San* is to find ways to feed back and share the experiences recorded so as to strengthen the consciousness of the San. As an interviewee in the book states: 'A good hunter always brings meat home.'

The authors and publishers have met this challenge by producing a second not-for-sale edition of the book. It has been distributed to the San communities and organisations involved in the oral history project. In the San edition, the parallel historical text is removed and replaced with additional quotes, ensuring that the San communities can share more of their first-hand experiences and that all the people who participated in the project have their name in print.

WORKING FOR A DEVELOPMENT AGENCY can be a humbling experience – no more so than when I was in Bangladesh following a terrible cyclone.

We approached a village called Kaligram by canoe. As we passed the banks on either side we could see the terrible devastation, the destroyed homes and crops, the families waiting for the arrival of the life-saving supplies.

We scrambled out of the canoe and climbed the bank where the elder of the village greeted us.

'Welcome,' he said, 'the feast is prepared.'

I turned to my colleague and asked what he could possibly mean. A cursory glance around confirmed that everything had been lost in the waters.

'But you've come,' said my colleague. 'There must be a feast.'

The villagers had collected together all that remained – a bowl of rice, a chicken, a handful of vegetables – to make the meal for their guest. I who had riches beyond their understanding shared their last pieces of food.

It is a lesson soon learnt by all those privileged to work in such situations that the 'poorest of the poor' can be the most generous people on earth. Some charities would almost have you believe that charitable 'giving' is a western concept created and owned by the rich. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Papal Encyclical of 1967, *Populorum Progressio*, quotes St Ambrose: 'You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.'

The encyclical, written nearly 40 years

The need for action

Progressio's acting executive director, **David Bedford**, writes about the inspiration behind the organisation's new name

ago, could have been written yesterday – it could have been written for the Make Poverty History campaign. It was Pope Paul VI in his encyclical, not Bob Geldof, who wrote: 'Countless millions are starving, countless families are destitute, countless men are steeped in ignorance; countless people need schools, hospitals and homes worthy of the name.... If only world leaders would listen to us, before it is too late.'

It was Pope Paul VI who claimed, in true Geldof style, that a blend of private and public action was needed to end world poverty: 'Each man must examine his conscience.... Is he prepared to support, at his own expense, projects and undertakings designed to help the needy? Is he prepared to pay higher taxes so that public authorities may expand their efforts in the work of development? Is he prepared to pay more for imported goods, so that the foreign producer may make a fairer profit?'

The Catholic Institute for International Relations has for many years carried out this teaching in practical action. It recognises that the fight against world poverty is a partnership: between individuals and states; between so-called 'rich' and so-called 'poor' people. It has responded to Pope Paul VI's call: 'No one is permitted to disregard the plight of his brothers living in dire poverty.... The Christian, moved by this sad state of affairs, should echo the words of Christ:

"I have compassion for the crowd".'

As CIIR now moves forward under its new name, and prepares to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the encyclical which has been its inspiration, the words of that encyclical seem to be ever more relevant:

'We must travel this road together, united in minds and hearts. It is necessary to remind everyone of the seriousness of this issue in all its dimensions, and to impress upon them the need for action. The moment for action has reached a critical juncture. Can countless innocent children be saved? Can countless destitute families obtain more human living conditions? Can world peace and human civilisation be preserved intact? Every individual and every nation must face up to this issue, for it is their problem.'

It seems to me that in sharing their last food with their guest, the villagers of Kaligram showed us the way.

David Bedford is Progressio's acting executive director. Christine Allen is on maternity leave.

interactnow

If you have any thoughts or suggestions on how Progressio should celebrate the 40th anniversary of *Populorum Progressio* in 2007, please let us know. Write to David Bedford at Progressio or e-mail davidb@progressio.org.uk

The earth belongs to everyone... Villagers work together to bring in a potato harvest in Peru.

