

interact

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

The option for the poor

A new beginning for the
Church in Latin America



Also in this issue:
Water in El Salvador
HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe
Qat chewing in Yemen



editorial

The option for the poor

The insight section of this issue of *Interact* examines the messages from the 5th General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean bishops held in Aparecida, Brazil, in May. The articles look in some detail at what it means to be an 'advocate of justice and defender of the poor'.

A concern for the poor and powerless is at the heart of Progressio's approach. We seek to empower people to tackle the poverty and injustice that they face. This can be seen in the work described elsewhere in this *Interact*: in Christopher Nyamandi's work with young people in Zimbabwe (see page 14), or Hans Joel's work with communities in El Salvador (page 13), or Francisco Hernandez's work with the environmental movement of Olancho in Honduras (page 6).

Progressio's approach is always grounded in what we 'see' of the world: the experience of our work in countries in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia; the views of our partners and the people we work with in those countries; and, as our environmental advocacy coordinator Sol Oyuela describes (page 12), our analysis of the issues that the people we work with face.

But ultimately, what gives us our direction is not just experience or analysis, but the values we bring to the work that we do. To turn the phrase around, this is what gives our work its value – its meaning and purpose. While poverty and injustice exist, our values will always require us to act.

Alastair Whitson

Cover picture: Women and children from Columbe Alto in Cotopaxi province, Ecuador. Photo: Caroline Pankhurst/Progressio

interact summer 2007

Contents

3 **first person:** seeing through a different lens

4 **news:** elections in East Timor

6 **update:** bulletins from the frontline

7 **agenda:** committed to peace and justice



insight: the option for the poor

8 **A new beginning**
Latin American bishops take new step in church's journey



10 **Declaration of intent**
The spirit of Medellín is alive and well

action

12 **Putting the poor first**
The challenges posed by climate change

viewpoint

13 **Clear water**
A community in El Salvador fights for its rights



14 **Helping hands**
Young people in Zimbabwe face up to HIV and AIDS

reportage

16 **Something to chew on**
The culture of qat chewing in Yemen



18 **interview:** Melody Pazan

19 **reflection:** water for life

20 **review:** visions of development

Published August 2007 by Progressio

Unit 3, Canonbury Yard
190a New North Road,
London N1 7BJ
tel +44 (0)20 7354 0883
fax +44 (0)20 7359 0017
e-mail enquiries@progressio.org.uk
website www.progressio.org.uk

Progressio Ireland

c/o CORI, Bloomfield Avenue
Off Morehampton Road
Donnybrook, Dublin 4, Ireland
tel +353 (0)1 6144966
e-mail progressio@eircom.net
Charity reg. in Ireland no. CHY 14451
Company reg. no. 385465

Editor Alastair Whitson

Executive Director Christine Allen
Design Twenty-Five Educational
Printing APG (ISO 14001 accreditation for international environmental standards).
Printed on REVIVE 100% chlorine free recycled paper.
Recycle this magazine!

Seeing through a different lens

A woman at a community meeting in East Timor in 2004. Vicky Bautista is now doing similar community capacity building work with Caritas Dili in East Timor.

PREPARING FOR A FIELD TRIP to three villages where we are working with the communities, myself and the Caritas Dili staff tried to identify indicators to measure a 'good community group'. Tetun language is really rather limited – everything is either *diak* (good) or *la diak* (not good). Fine! But what exactly is *grupo diak* (good group)?

We came up with various elements that make up a group or organisation, and which could be used in assessment, monitoring and evaluation: vision, objectives, plan, leadership, structure, resources, policies and procedures, financial control, and so on. But during the workshops I observed how difficult it was for the staff to come up with concrete and observable signs of a 'good group'. They could talk well in abstract terms about good leadership and good women's participation, but were back to *diak* and *la diak* when talking about what is a good group. It occurred to me that perhaps they hadn't seen concrete evidence in practice of what makes a good group, perhaps because their work in communities had so far not been directed at the detailed workings of community organisations.

At one of the villages, Turiscail, a community group (consisting of 13 members) was asking for funds to build a water tank for their vegetable garden. However, Caritas Dili could not fund the project, one reason being that the group

had previously been given funds for economic activities and providing them with cash for everything they ask for would foster dependency. Facilitating the group discussion therefore aimed to come up with alternatives that would help solve the problem while at the same time building the local people's capacity.

At some point the discussion got tense when the group leader threatened to stop working if their demand was not met. To what extent was he representing the sentiments of the group? That was hard to say as his outbursts were met with silence.

After further discussion, the group came up with a number of decisions. First, they were willing to work with us to analyse the situation and prepare a proposal. Second, since the issue involved the entire community, they were willing to bring in other community members instead of limiting it to the group members. This decision was particularly significant because I am told there are rifts among different sectors in that community.

Third, since water is an issue that the government ought to concern itself with, they were willing to network with the government in finding the solution to the problem. Finally, recognising that the water problem is linked to environmental degradation, they were willing to work on rehabilitating and protecting their mountains. To these decisions the leader seemed amenable – in the end.

After the meeting, we learned that the posts of secretary and treasurer of the group had been vacant for some time and the leader had been functioning essentially as a one-person show. The next day, after mass, a group member approached a Caritas Dili staff member to say she was not happy about the meeting because there was no transparency in the group. She was unhappy that the leader had been asking for more money when in fact there was no system to ensure control over the financial resources.

Equipped with new analytical/conceptual tools, the staff member easily recognised the weaknesses of the organisation, and is therefore now in a better position to help 'fix' what is amiss. He was also appreciative of the facilitation process – recognising that it is up to the people themselves to identify the issues, make decisions and take action.

In the end, the conceptual/analytical tools and the methods we introduce are like lenses we provide, so that the people we work with are able to see their work in a different light – one that will ultimately lead to new and enhanced programme work.

Vicky Bautista is a Progressio development worker in East Timor, working as a capacity building advisor with Caritas Dili. Vicky is from the Philippines.

Ecuadorian organisations speak up on constitutional change

ECUADOR IS CAUGHT UP in 'constituent assembly fever' – the new socialist president Rafael Correa's project to elect an assembly to rewrite the country's constitution, *writes Michelle Lowe.*

In April, 82 per cent of voters backed the idea in a referendum, initiating a scramble among prospective members of the constituent assembly to collect enough signatures to register for the elections. Civil society organisations are now entering into a period of campaigning and lobbying candidates on the new constitution.

Correa was inaugurated as President in January in a context of widespread mistrust and hostility towards the country's mainstream political parties. His election campaign promised a 'citizens' revolution'. The aim is to give the country a fresh start by rewriting the constitution to extend political participation and reduce the power of the country's political elite.

Networks of NGOs working on different themes including HIV and AIDS and the environment are now

composing proposals and challenges for candidates. Some fear constitutional change could actually be a step backwards from the existing constitution, drawn up in 1998, which on paper is very progressive, particularly regarding the collective rights of indigenous groups.

Ampam Karakas, a member of the Shuar indigenous group who works for indigenous people's rights, fears that the rights of indigenous communities could be at risk: 'I hope that the collective rights of indigenous communities which are recognised in the existing constitution are maintained and included in the new constitution. The hope is that the new constitution once approved will actually be respected and applied in full for more than the 10 years which the current constitution has lasted.'

Amira Herdoíza, executive director of La Corporación KIMIRINA, a Progressio Partner organisation, is uniting with other NGOs working on HIV and AIDS to lobby for the new constitution to contain a specific paragraph on HIV and AIDS.

'We would like the state to



Amira Herdoíza, executive director of La Corporación KIMIRINA.

assume responsibility for providing anti-retrovirals for all those who need them and a commitment to ensure that people living with HIV and AIDS are not dismissed from their jobs,' she said.

The electoral campaign will run from 14 August to 27 September, with the elections taking place on 30 September 2007. The assembly is due to begin work in mid-November. The draft of the new constitution will be submitted to a national referendum later in the year. Time will tell whether the new constitution will really lead to empowerment of the marginalised.

Michelle Lowe is a Progressio development worker, working on advocacy and communications in Ecuador and Peru.

From Terminator to Zombie

EUROPEAN TAXPAYERS are financing a research project called Transcontainer which is working to develop a new generation of Terminator seeds, *writes Sol Oyuela.*

Terminator seeds are seeds that are genetically modified so that they produce sterile seeds at harvest. Progressio, along with other NGOs, has expressed concerns about the risks that Terminator technology poses to the 1.4 billion poor farmers in the developing world, whose food



security depends on re-planting harvested seeds from year to year. Terminator also poses a threat to biodiversity and the environment, as the terminator gene may contaminate other plants.

At the 2006 UN Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) a ban on the field testing and commercialisation of Terminator technology was upheld. Despite the moratorium, private and public researchers are expanding and refining the development of this technology through the controversial £3.4 million Transcontainer project.

The people behind Transcontainer claim the research will help find a solution to the problem of genetic contamination of non-GM plants. But why are our taxes being spent on the development of a sophisticated technology that seeks to address

biotechnology companies' contamination problems?

Most importantly, our money is financing the development of a technology that will have catastrophic effects on the lives of poor farmers, who cannot afford or don't want to buy these types of GM seeds. One of the proposed new technologies – dubbed 'zombie seeds' – will force poor farmers to pay biotech companies for a chemical treatment that will bring seeds back from the dead.

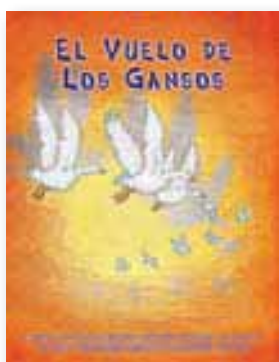
Progressio believes that this research project is a way to get round the UN ban on Terminator, and we are committed to do our utmost to support a strengthening of the ban on Terminator at the next CBD meeting in Berlin in May 2008.

Sol Oyuela is Progressio's environmental advocacy coordinator.

interactnow

Progressio will be formally launching its campaign, 'Say No to Terminator Seeds', on World Food Day on 16 October. If you are interested in helping in our efforts to give poor farmers a voice in choosing how they want to feed their families, please contact us at stopterminator@progressio.org.uk. You can also find out more about the campaign at www.seedsaver.org.uk

Book brings hope to Honduras



CIPRODEH, a Progressio partner organisation in Honduras, has published a book on HIV and AIDS prevention targeted at gay and lesbian organisations in the country.

The book, which has been distributed to all gay and lesbian organisations in Honduras, takes a

rights-based approach to educating people about HIV and AIDS. Progressio development worker Mónica Galeano Velasco, who worked with CIPRODEH to produce the book, said the aim is to tackle HIV 'through education and empowerment'. As well as providing basic information about HIV and AIDS, the book covers human rights, sexuality and gender, and advocacy skills, and provides guidance on preparing workshops on HIV and AIDS.

Described by Mónica as 'a simple book full of hope', *El vuelo de los gansos* takes the image of geese flying as its theme. 'To see geese flying inspires our lives because it teaches us that living together needs solidarity, the love



we give each other and the communication we establish with the people living around us,' she said.

'In Honduras we have, like the geese, started our own journey. We have learned that human safety needs collective participation, and that to enjoy the journey of discovery that is life, we must share and live together with the rest of the people.'

Timor-Leste still awaits a government

PARLIAMENTARY elections in Timor-Leste on 30 June 2007 have left no party with an absolute majority in the 65-seat Parliament with the squabbling parties disagreeing on who forms the next government. This means tension in the streets and no resolution of the country's problems, *writes Steve Kibble*.

Like the preceding presidential elections, the parliamentary elections were peaceful and deemed free and fair by international and domestic observers.

The former governing party Fretilin (Revolutionary Front for an Independent Timor-Leste) saw its majority reduced from 57 per cent in 2001 to 29 per cent following major internal violence, scandals on arms being handed out to its supporters, and perceptions of corruption and arrogance in some of its leaders. It wants to lead a grand coalition of all parties whilst former president José 'Xanana' Gusmao offers an alternative Coalition of non-Fretilin parties.

The violence that erupted last

year when 60,000 people were displaced was internal rather than, as previously, a reaction to the repressive and illegal Indonesian occupation which ended in 1999. Unresolved tensions arising from the occupation, such as impunity for the perpetrators of violence against the Timorese (despite a truth and reconciliation process), mean a divided and traumatised society.

The immediate challenge facing whatever new government of Timor-Leste, the poorest Asian nation, is likely to be food shortages affecting a fifth of the population by October as a result of a predicted 30 per cent fall in food production following drought.

Progressio will be working with its partners in Timor-Leste such as Luta Hamutak, Caritas Dili, the Catholic Church Commission for Justice and Peace, Rede Feto Haburas, the Human Rights Foundation and FONGTIL on their priorities for the new government. For its own part Progressio considers that the major issues for the new administration would appear to be:

- widening a public debate on how to use the largely unspent oil reserves in its Petroleum Reserve amid widespread poverty
- working out coherent pro-poor policies, creating economic opportunities for the marginalised (especially in the agricultural sector)
- working on coherent policies in its relations with its powerful neighbours: Australia on oil boundaries and division of revenues, and Indonesia on justice following its illegal 24-year occupation of Timor-Leste
- pursuing justice and reconciliation on violence both from the Indonesian occupation and the civil unrest in 2006
- undertaking security reform to create a functioning indigenous police and military
- dealing with youth groups' violence linked to massive youth unemployment, gender/domestic violence and ethnic division
- rehousing the remaining 30,000 internally displaced people
- installing a strong and independent judiciary.

Steve Kibble is Progressio's advocacy coordinator for Africa, Middle East and Asia.

Progressio development worker **Francisco Hernandez-Montoya** describes the issues currently facing the people of Olancho in Honduras

bulletins from the **FRONTLINE**

++ THE DILEMMA OF THE VANISHING WATER ++

IN HONDURAS, the government and state bodies such as the State Forest Administration emphatically deny any link between droughts, deforestation, and an increase in land used for farming by agribusinesses. This stance has helped the timber industry in Honduras (80 per cent of which is estimated to be illegal) to continue plundering the few forests the country has, and destroying the way of life of people in rural areas.

In La Muralla National Park in eastern Olancho, timber companies remove wood from the centre of the park without anyone preventing them from doing so. According to MAO, the Environmental Movement of Olancho, 26 of the 52 water currents that have their source in this park have dried up in the last five years, which coincides with the period during which timber merchants have been operating in the area. Seeking to protect the basins and bring order to activities in these territories, MAO is asking the government to bring in a land planning law in Honduras. +

++ BECAUSE LIFE IS DEFENDED WITH LIFE! ++

On 22 December 2006, two environmental leaders from MAO, Heraldo Zuñiga and Roger Ivan Cartagena, were murdered by police forces in the Guarizama area. The two young men, fathers, and MAO activists for many years, were shot from behind. It is presumed that the deaths of the two environmentalists were a form of intimidation. To date, seven environmentalists have been murdered in the country without anyone having been prosecuted for these crimes. +

++ BRINGING THE FORESTS BACK TO THE PEOPLE ++

TEGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS. A proposed new forestry law is being discussed in the country's parliament. The proposed law is a key tool in the fight against illegal logging and for community participation in forest management.

Several organisations within the Coalition for Environmental Justice have worked shoulder to shoulder with MPs on the committee overseeing the legislation to bring a stop to indiscriminate exploitation and ensure that Honduran forests are once again a common asset of the Honduran people.

The law is facing great opposition, especially from MPs who receive support from the timber sector. Nevertheless, if the law is passed the result will be no less than the transformation of the forestry sector - as part of which the current state forestry administration, a body with a long track record of corruption, will disappear. +

++ RESEARCH UNCOVERS CORRUPTION ++

SINCE 2005, Global Witness and the Environmental Research Agency, the latter contracted by the Washington-based Center for International Policy, have carried out fieldwork in Honduras on the issue of illegal logging. This research has uncovered strong and proven links between government officials and timber industrialists. This ranges from granting felling permits without the necessary requirements being fulfilled, to the permissiveness of government officials towards infringements of forestry law - something that happens routinely.

Despite the evidence, the Honduran authorities have been reluctant to act and have remained silent on the issue. In the last 30 years, these illegal actions have allowed the deforestation of more than half of the country's forests, changes in microclimate have been caused, and the quality of life of more than two million people who live in wooded areas of the country has been affected. These people, in the best of cases, now merely 'survive'.

The timber industry in Honduras is similar to mining, in that only a few become rich through it, while communities remain in misery. After more than 50 years, there has not been one single example in Honduras of a community to which the timber industry has brought well-being or even material progress. +

++ THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT OF OLANCHO (MAO) ++

MAO BELIEVES that in Honduras, ownership of natural resources should be returned to the Honduran people. However, MAO is not against the sustainable, sensible and beneficial use of these resources. Our vision is of a forestry sector free from corruption, where communities can decide on the appropriate use of resources, based on the premises of responsibility, auditing and protection of natural resources. We call for community certification of the forests and the reclamation of more than five million hectares plundered over the last 30 years by so-called timber industrialists. +

Francisco Hernandez-Montoya is a Progressio development worker working with the Movimiento Ambientalista de Olancho (MAO).

++ THE GOVERNMENT, IN SERVING THE INTERESTS OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR, CRUSHES ITS OWN PEOPLE ++

SALAMÁ, HONDURAS. Today is another day in the life of Don Ovidio (name changed for security reasons), but it could be more important than he realises, because today Salamá's Municipal Land Plan (POT, to use the Spanish acronym) is being presented. There is still, however, a big problem. Don Ovidio doesn't know or doesn't understand what it is about!

The same can be said for most of the region's 20,000 people. This is mainly due to the use of disinformation as a tool to undermine democracy, ignore the rights of the people, and demobilise civil society organisations so that a certain few may take advantage.

Such an approach is very common in Latin America but is employed with particular cruelty in Honduras. MAO is calling on the Honduran government and the World Bank's Forest and Rural Productivity Project - those responsible for the aforementioned POT - to rectify their actions and develop a proposal that benefits and respects the human rights of the inhabitants of Salamá. +



Francisco Hernandez-Montoya

The problems of today challenge us to see the world through the eyes of the poor, writes **Christine Allen**



It is here in the grassroots where the work is done and also where the change is experienced. Power may be held at the top, decisions made in layers above, but daily life is in how individuals live their lives and communities interact and engage.

For Progressio, that's why – as well as doing advocacy rooted in our values and vision of a just world marked by full human development – we work with development workers. These are people inserted with communities and organisations who work with respect to offer support and guidance, and help people to find their own solutions to their problems. *Interact* offers some of these stories, but they are just snapshots from the wide range of our work.

In her article 'A new beginning' (page 8), María Rosa Lorbés writes: 'Sincere self-criticism is always a good first step towards finding fresh motivation to continue the journey.' How true this is, and how important the *livesimply* project can be in helping all of us to reflect on our work, our understanding of the world and our relationships with our brothers and sisters globally. Whilst we are inspired by values and teaching throughout history, we are called to see our world now and to reflect on the challenges of today to find a new way of living – simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor.

I hope that you will be interested to find out more and meet Maria Rosa when she speaks at our Annual General Meeting in December.

Christine Allen is Progressio's executive director.

Our commitment to peace and justice

AS WE CELEBRATE the 40th anniversary of the Pope's letter *Populorum Progressio* through the *livesimply* project, we are also reminded how things have changed in 40 years and how much our awareness of issues has grown.

The core of the document was concerned with full human development and covered issues as forward thinking as trade, international relations, and models of assistance which are just as relevant today as they were when written. However there are some notable gaps – the concern for the environment, patterns of economic and social changes brought about by globalisation and the movement of peoples, relations across faiths and the changed role and expectations of women.

Some of these issues were looked at in the recent meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean bishops. The raft of issues facing the region are shared by many other parts of the world, so the words of the bishops and their commitment merit reflection by all.

Despite the changes in contexts, it is good to see some fundamental truths that were central to Vatican II being reaffirmed. The support for the 'preferential option for the poor' is critical in this. Looking at the media headlines, you could be forgiven for not realising that the church has, at its core, the gospel commitments to peace and justice. This means a concern for the poor and powerless in particular.

For us at Progressio, this concept is at the core of our values and central to our work. We are an organisation concerned about poverty, but it's more than that – more than just reaching targets or delivering basic needs. The concept of the preferential option for the poor goes beyond a mechanistic approach to tackling poverty. It's about how you see

the world, whose perspective you have, and where you identify the power. It means making choices that will make a difference to the lives of those in poverty and recognising that people in poverty need to make choices too, to regain control over their lives, to engage with society and to experience the dignity central to human beings.

The reaffirmation of the see–judge–act methodology is also very welcome, especially with the 'see' being first. We have to look at the world, to see the reality and pain and signs of hope, before we make any analysis or judgement. Otherwise we run the risk of imposing pre-conceived ideas. It's a simple methodology but one that is very powerful. Many Christian activists or those involved in Justice and Peace work will know this (or the pastoral cycle as it is also known) as it forms the bedrock of their activity and reflections.

For the church and the formation of its people, the recognition of the importance of communities of the grassroots has never been more needed.



Going to church in Baucau, Timor-Leste: church recognition of grassroots communities is key to the formation of the church's people.



Graham Freer/Progressio

The church of San Jeronimo in Cusco, Peru.

from the assembly to the people of God and to all men and women of goodwill in Latin America, the bishops commit to 'maintaining our preferential and evangelical option for the poor with renewed vigour'. In this way, the Latin American and Caribbean church, which represents 43 per cent of the world's Catholics, returns to

'The Church is called upon to be 'the advocate of justice and defender of the poor'

the roots of the gospel and reaffirms itself on its path, while responding with creativity and vitality to the challenges of the present.

Defender of the poor

Benedict XVI established guidelines in his inaugural speech, when he affirmed that the Church is called upon to be 'the advocate of justice and defender of the poor' in the face of 'intolerable social and economic inequalities', which 'are an obvious disgrace'. So that there is no doubt over the essential and fundamental nature of this option for a Christian, the bishops – inspired by the Pope's speech – affirm that 'the preferential option is implicit in the simple faith of Christ... This option is born of our faith in Jesus Christ, the God made man, who made himself our brother (cf. Hebrews 2:11-12).'

Another reaffirmation of the path taken by the Latin American church is given in the decision by the bishops who met at Aparecida to return to the see-judge-act method used in Puebla (1979) and Medellín (1968). They write: 'Many voices from all over the continent offered contributions and suggestions, affirming that

A NEW BEGINNING

María Rosa Lorbés, director of the Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas in Peru, welcomes a reaffirmation by Latin American bishops of the 'preferential option for the poor'

THE 5TH GENERAL CONFERENCE of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate saw itself as a new step in the church's journey, according to the final document of the conference held in May in Aparecida, Brazil. (The document, approved by the bishops, has not yet been ratified by the

Pope, but changes, if any, will almost certainly be minor.) In its reaffirmation of 'the path of faithfulness, renewal and evangelisation of the Latin American church in service of its people,' the bishops saw the conference as providing both continuity and a new beginning.

In their official message

this method has helped to live our vocation and mission more intensely in the church, it has enriched theological and pastoral work, and in general it has motivated us to assume our responsibilities in the face of the particular context of our continent.'

In the same way, the document's appraisal of the base ecclesial communities (grassroots Christian communities, known elsewhere in Latin America simply as 'Christian communities') is significant: 'In the ecclesial experience of Latin America and the Caribbean, the base ecclesial communities have often acted as schools that train followers and missionaries of the Lord. The generous devotion of so many of their members, who have even spilt their blood, is proof of this... Deeply-rooted in the heart of the world, [the base ecclesial communities] are privileged spaces for the community experience of faith, sources of fraternity and solidarity, an alternative to the current society founded on selfishness and on ruthless competition.'

Renewed focus

But the message that came from Aparecida is not just about the reaffirmation of a path. It also places a new theological and pastoral emphasis on issues such as the appreciation of indigenous and afro-american cultures and the explicit commitment made by the church to defend their rights. It includes a pastoral concern for protection of the environment, the challenge of ecumenism and of inter-religious dialogue, and the urgent call to 'listen to the often silenced cry of women who are subjected to many forms of exclusion, and to violence in all its forms and at all stages of their lives. Amongst them, women who are poor, indigenous or of African descent have suffered a double marginalisation. There

Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas

The Bartolomé de Las Casas Institute is a non profit organisation founded in 1974 by the theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez and a group of professional Catholics who wanted to contribute to the process of integral freedom and human development in Peru from the Christian perspective of a preferential option for the poor.

Integral freedom implies that people work to strengthen democracy and encourage citizen participation from the perspective of justice and solidarity which recognises the diversity which exists in the country and the promotion of consensus. This concept of development also implies a concept of real freedom which enables people to overcome the inhumane poverty in which the majority of Peruvian people live.

This process presupposes that poor people actively participate in society, that they are not excluded or treated as objects but recognised and considered as subjects with human dignity, aspirations and the capacity to actively participate.

Charlotte Smith, a Progressio development worker, is currently supporting the Institute with its international communications work.

For more information on the institute, see www.bcasas.org.pe

is a pressing need for all women to be able to participate fully in ecclesial, family, cultural, social and economic life, creating spaces and structures that favour a greater degree of inclusion.'

This concern is characterised by the phrase 'the faces of the poor'. The bishops state: 'Globalisation has caused the emergence of a greater number of poor in our countries. With special attention and in continuity with the previous General Conferences, we fix our gaze on the faces of the newly excluded: migrants, victims of violence, displaced people and refugees, victims of people trafficking and kidnappings, missing people, those ill with HIV and chronic illnesses, people addicted to drugs, elderly people, children who are victims of prostitution, pornography and violence or child labour, abused women, victims of violence, exclusion and of trafficking for sexual exploitation, people with different abilities, large groups of unemployed people, those excluded by technological illiteracy, people who live on the streets of major cities, indigenous people and people of African descent, farmers without land and miners.'

New challenge

As soon as we have the official

version of this document, it will be very important to read it, study it, and try to bring it to life in our personal, community and ecclesiastic daily life. The first thing is to let ourselves be questioned by Him in depth, and to ask ourselves, in a climate of spiritual reflection, how faithful we are to the voice of the Lord, how attentive we are to the new signs of the times and to what extent we live in solidarity with the poor.

Perhaps, as a first step, it would be good to read the paragraph in which the bishops seriously examine the ecclesial

'[Christian communities are] sources of fraternity and solidarity, an alternative to the current society founded on selfishness and on ruthless competition'

conscience and lament 'our weak experiences of the preferential option for the poor'. For both people and institutions, sincere self-criticism is always a good first step towards finding fresh motivation to continue the journey.

This is an edited translation of the leading article from the June 2007 edition of Signos (Signs), published by Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas, Lima, Peru.

DECLARATION OF INTENT

Francis Chamberlain, s.j., considers what the Bishop's Conference at Aparecida means for the Latin American Church

I WRITE THESE REFLECTIONS a few weeks after the end of the 5th General Conference of bishops in Aparecida, Brazil, which I attended as an adviser on the outside to some Peruvian bishops.

For me, the conference was an important reaffirmation, as well as a new beginning, of the Latin American Church's post Vatican II identity, an identity first vigorously affirmed in Medellín in 1968. It represents a new beginning because it responds to important changes within Latin America in recent decades: the impact of globalisation, the continuing and even growing disparities between wealthy sectors benefiting from the new economic reality and the poverty and exclusion of millions, and the threat of ecological devastation and its consequences especially for the poor due to unfettered economic exploitation. The Aparecida document tackles all of these and other challenges, and on the whole it comes off, I believe, with high marks.

Pope's benchmark

The Inaugural Address of Benedict XVI, which served as a benchmark for the work of the conference, started from the Pope's affirmation that 'the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the christological faith in the God who became poor for us in order to enrich us with His poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8-9).' This is an explicit confirmation of the fundamental thesis grounding both experience and theological reflection in Latin America during the past 40 years. God's love extends to all persons, and because of this, His love is most especially directed to the poor. The preferential option for the poor excludes no one and is thus a declaration of the universality of God's love. Benedict's words were also an implicit rejection of the idea that such an option, which is not optional for followers of Jesus, is not based on sociological or ideological premises. Its ground is faith in Jesus.

Although the phrase just cited does not come at the beginning of the address, the themes touched on in Benedict's talk to the bishops can be, and I think should be, understood in the light of the preferential option. These themes include:

Human development: 'In the effort to know the message of Christ and to make it the guide for one's life, it must be remembered that evangelisation has always been linked to human development and authentic Christian liberation.'

Populorum Progressio: '[Populorum Progressio] makes clear that authentic development has to be integral, that is, oriented to the whole development of each and every person ... and it invites everyone to overcome those grave social inequalities and enormous differences in the access to material goods.'

Globalisation: 'Although certain aspects [of globalisation] represent an achievement of the great human family ... nevertheless it also carries the risk of vast monopolies and the conversion of economic gain as the supreme value ... As in all areas of human activity, globalisation must be governed by ethics.'

Social structures: 'Just structures are ... an

Caroline Pankhurst/Progressio



Cultivating the highlands in Cotopaxi province, Ecuador: campesinos throughout Latin America rely on natural resources for their livelihoods.

indispensable condition for a just society, but they do not arise or function without the moral consent of society regarding fundamental values and the necessity of living out these values with their necessary renunciations, even of personal benefit.'

Latin American roots

The Pope touches of course on other themes, but the statements above demonstrate that Benedict put a very Latin American flavour on his talk. None of the topics mentioned are new in theological reflection and pastoral practice in this part of the Catholic world. But that is precisely the point: Benedict in effect put his seal of approval on a way of reflecting and living the Gospel that has its roots in Medellín and the succeeding Episcopal conferences during these last 40 years. In doing so, Benedict was letting the bishops know that the ball was in their court, and on their terms.

For the bishops, the first order of business was the question of methodology. The Medellín and Puebla documents were structured around the methodology of see-judge-act. Santo Domingo in 1992 overturned that method and put judging, that is theological reflection, before the assessment (seeing) of concrete reality. It was said then, falsely I believe, that Christian reflection and acting cannot be grounded on mere sociological considerations. The fallacy in this way of thinking is based on the idea that 'seeing' reality for a Christian is only a sociological task. From a truly Christian perspective, the effort to 'see' is always done in the light of the Gospel.

Before the conference the great majority of national Episcopal conferences requested that the methodology of see-judge-act be reinstated. The decision on the structure of the document

was therefore a crucial decision by the bishops, not in any way a declaration of independence from Rome, but rather an affirmation of Latin American Catholic identity.

Defending nature

Among the major themes coming out of Aparecida, that will hopefully serve the Church and Latin American society in the coming years, was ecology. The South American continent is one of the richest areas of biodiversity in the world. The Amazon rain forest produces close to 30 per cent of the planet's oxygen. The continent has immense resources in water, minerals, timber, oil and gas. All of these resources are in danger of being destroyed by indiscriminate and unfettered economic exploitation. The conference forcefully expressed its concern over the growing devastation and contamination of the natural wealth of the continent, especially for those *campesino* and native populations whose source of livelihood is curtailed and even eliminated by the destruction and contamination of the natural environment of the region.

The struggle for the defense of the natural world is thus a new way of living the preferential option for the poor. The Aparecida document puts it this way: 'The natural resources of Latin America suffer today an irrational exploitation, which leaves [in its path] a march of destruction and even death throughout our region. The present economic model must assume an enormous responsibility. It privileges the excessive search for wealth, over and above the lives of individuals and peoples and the care of the natural environment. The devastation of our forests and its biodiversity by selfish and depredatory practices implies a moral responsibility of those who so act. It puts in danger the lives of millions of persons

and, especially, the habitat of *campesinos* and Indians.'

Facing down poverty

The Aparecida document states that the present style of globalisation has produced 'new faces of the poor'. Globalisation is not something that benefits all people, but only a relatively select few. The document proposes that the Church join the struggle for a new kind of globalisation, what the bishops call 'the globalisation of solidarity'. Such global solidarity demands working for the common good: 'Work for the common global good must promote a just regulation of the world's economy, financial movements, and commerce. It is urgent that external debt be cancelled to make investment in the social sector viable. Regulations must be put in place to prevent and control capital speculation. Justice in commerce must be promoted along with the progressive lowering of protectionist barriers by the powerful. Just prices for the raw materials produced by poor countries are urgently needed. There must be norms created for attracting and regulating foreign investment and other services.'

The Aparecida document is good news for Latin America and its Church. It is not a perfect document: for example, the place of women in the Church and in society is considered in the document, but one gets the feeling that what was said was simply not enough. But at least the bishops took the ball that Benedict threw them and played their own game. One of the priest delegates at the end of the conference put it this way: 'The spirit of Medellín is alive!' It is a spirit that is alive and well and open to the new challenges of our day.

Francis Chamberlain is a member of the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus.

Putting the poor first

Progressio's environmental advocacy coordinator, **Sol Oyuela**, outlines the challenges posed by climate change

CLIMATE CHANGE is finally making a belated appearance at the top of the political agenda, but it doesn't concern only politicians: most of us are making efforts to change our lifestyles in response to climate change. To people in the North, this usually means saving energy (turning off lights and appliances, using energy saving bulbs, switching to a green energy provider) and polluting less (driving less, using a train instead of a plane, reducing, reusing and recycling our waste).

But have you ever stopped to think what climate change means to the world's poor? Last May, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published a report that concluded that the most devastating effects of climate change will be felt by those with the least resources to adapt – the 1.4 billion poor throughout the developing world.

This finding shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. The livelihoods of the world's poor, especially in rural areas, are strongly linked to a reliance on the natural environment. The rural poor's basic needs are met by natural resources. These provide them with food, energy, water, housing, good health, and a means to employment and income generation.

Links to poverty

Progressio believes that responses to the challenges of climate change need to recognise the mutually reinforcing relationship between poverty and the environment.

Poor people stress that as the quality of the physical environment declines (infertile soil, deforestation, pasture degradation and decreasing fish stocks) their livelihood opportunities become more limited as their ability to generate an income is constrained. This makes them more vulnerable to future shocks.

But environmental degradation is not only a cause of poverty; it's also a consequence. The rural poor cannot but continue to rely on natural resources, even if this means over-exploiting the already few resources that surround them. In some cases, this means working for wealthy members of their community in activities that contribute to environmental degradation (such as mineral extraction and logging).

The mutually reinforcing relationship between poverty and environmental problems requires solutions that address both aspects. For Progressio, this means

People gaining control over the resources that determine their lives is key to overcoming poverty

supporting the rational and local management of natural resources to improve the lives of the poor. This includes promoting sustainable cultivation practices and resource management techniques, whilst improving productivity, income and living conditions in small farming communities throughout the developing world.

For example, in Ecuador Progressio supports the work of a local environmental NGO called CEA (Coordinadora Ecuatoriana de Agroecología). CEA promotes agroecology, building on traditional knowledge and the use of local resources to develop farming systems that are environmentally sustainable and that guarantee the food security of rural communities.

To Progressio, finding sustainable solutions to environmental and poverty problems means including the poor in the decisions on managing natural resources that are so crucial for their lives. AMUNSE

(Association of Municipalities of Nueva Segovia), one of our local partners in Nicaragua, works in areas of extreme rural poverty where the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources is causing rapid environmental degradation. The project has been addressing the weakness of local government institutions and the lack of participation of the poor (especially women) in natural resource management, planning mechanisms and local policy.

Overcoming obstacles

These initiatives, like others that Progressio supports, aim to enhance the resilience of local people in the face of climatic changes, whilst promoting their own skills and knowledge about their social and ecological context. They also take into consideration the needs, aspirations and circumstances of poor farmers, by involving them in decision-making over environmental resources. We believe that the possibility of people gaining control over the resources that determine their lives is key to overcoming poverty.

We also believe that it is crucial to bring the voices of those most vulnerable to environmental degradation to global policy debates. Our international advocacy work on the environment aims to make this a reality. Whilst the climate change agenda has only recently become prominent in the North, poor communities in developing countries have been struggling with its effects for some time. The international community has a lot to learn from the strategies and techniques that poor communities have developed over the years to respond to natural climate variability. We are committed to exploring and understanding what adaptation to climate change means at the grassroots level, and promoting the scaling up of those successful experiences.

Today northern countries are at last facing up to the problem. However, the challenge now lies in incorporating developing countries into these processes. Given that their people are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, it is their needs and demands which need to be at the forefront of global policy processes. Progressio's programmes and advocacy work are committed to making this happen.

Sol Oyuela is Progressio's environmental advocacy coordinator.

IN THE FAR SOUTH-EAST of the small, crowded country of El Salvador lies Lake Olomega. On first impressions, the setting seems idyllic as the lake sits nestled between steep hills overlooked by volcanoes. Yet this lake is both a blessing and a curse to the communities who live on its shores.

'The day the fish die out, we die out,' says Josefa Elisabeth Avila, treasurer of the committee which represents all the lakeside communities, and outreach worker with Progressio partner organisation FUMA. The group has come together to decide on their needs, plans and priorities for the coming year.

Hans Joel, Progressio's development worker with FUMA, stands on the sidelines of the meeting. He has worked with these community representatives by training them in leadership, risk management, advocacy and project management so that they can effectively lobby the government to address some of the main problems they are facing.

Rural communities generally feel neglected by the government, according to Carmen Medina, Progressio's country representative for El Salvador. The government, she says, is not interested in rural areas, except for the coffee plantations because they are owned by wealthy people.

Pollution

In order to reduce pollution of the lake from animal faeces, the communities lobbied the government to adopt a new law forbidding people from letting their cattle go near the lake. However, the law is not being enforced. Some people suspect that the mayor does not want to enforce it because he has cattle himself. So, the people are now asking for environmental police to be posted to the lake so that they can enforce this law.

One of the biggest priorities for the committee is securing access to clean drinking water. The lake and surrounding groundwater sources – which the communities use for drinking water – is heavily polluted: by fertiliser run-off from the hills where the communities cultivate land for food, by animal and human faeces, and by arsenic and other minerals which occur naturally due to the volcanic geology of the area. The communities have to get their drinking water from hand-dug wells which due to their shallow depth are heavily polluted. As a result many people are sick and even dying from diarrhoea and arsenic

Clear water

A community in El Salvador is standing up for its right to clean water, writes Joanne Green

poisoning which causes kidney failure. Recently 25 people have died.

The communities' leaders therefore developed a proposal for a new deep well which they took to the government ministry. They worked with the local mayor's office to develop the proposal and lobby the government. They were successful and the new well has been mechanically dug to a depth of 80 metres. After they dug it the water was tested and it was perfect quality. However, the government did not install pipes to deliver water to their homes. 'We are not using the water yet, it's like we have the gas but not the car. We know the water from the old wells is polluted but we still have to drink it,' one of the leaders commented.

Progress

Progress has been made on many aspects of the communities lives: for example, FUMA has also supported the communities with building composting latrines which has lowered the incidence of diarrhoea. But there is still a long way to go, and although the people have

achieved success in their lobbying efforts, they still face challenges in making sure change and new projects are fully implemented.

Yet one lasting positive impact that Hans and FUMA have left is a strong confidence on the part of the community leaders that they have the skills and ability to make a difference to their own lives. At the committee meeting, one of the community leaders, Toribio Mejía Granado, recalled that before Fuma's training: 'I was so shy that I thought if I have to say anything in front of an audience, I will cry! But now I can get in front of any audience and I'm not even afraid of the government and can even feel confident enough to speak to the Minister. In fact, recently there was a political rally nearby and I went up to the El Salvadorian President and asked him for help with our projects! We want to thank FUMA for teaching us how to stand up and express our needs.'

Joanne Green is Progressio's advocacy manager.



Joanne Green/Progressio



Joanne Green/Progressio



Nick Sireau/Progressio

Top left: Josefa Elisabeth Avila; above: Hans Joel; left: Toribio Mejía Granado.

Young people in Zimbabwe are helping their communities face the challenges of HIV and AIDS, writes Progressio development worker **Christopher Nyamandi**

Helping hands

IN MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, young people find it hard to get involved in HIV and AIDS initiatives due to socio-cultural, economic and political challenges. In Zimbabwe, the government has addressed this problem by introducing coherent curricula on the pandemic for school children. This has introduced the HIV and AIDS agenda to children in school. The challenge now is to maintain the momentum with out of school youths, who are often grappling with the harsh economic context of high unemployment, hyperinflation and general social decay.

Progressio partner organisation Batsirai has responded by setting up an innovative youth programme that aims to enable young people to themselves be the agents of behavioural change, through training in peer education. Batsirai – which literally translated means ‘a helping hand’ – believes that working with these youths presents a window of hope for an HIV-free generation. Capturing them with information and behaviour change tools is critical

because, with high unemployment, out of school youths are often idle and thus vulnerable to peer pressure experimentation.

Youth friendly

Batsirai’s approach involves setting up ‘youth friendly corners’ at health centres (such as clinics and hospitals), schools and other community centres. The youths carry out HIV and AIDS activities through arts, sports and other campaigns. One example is the youth friendly corner at Alaska, a former mining suburb in Chinhoyi municipality where the majority of the residents are now unemployed following closure of the mine.

The Alaska Youth Friendly Corner was started in 2001 and currently has a membership of more than 25 out-of-school youths, of whom 10 are young women. The primary aim was to carry out HIV and AIDS campaigns among youths using community based structures such as churches, clubs/societies and other community groups. The message



Progressio development worker Christopher Nyamandi.

revolved around fighting stigma and discrimination, positive living, self-help and general information sharing. At the time young people (especially boys) were not involved in caring for people living with HIV and AIDS, so there was no connection in their minds between infection and its consequences. As the impact of the pandemic continued unabated, this gap could only be closed by involving young people in care work.

The attitude of adults is sometimes to want to protect young people, thus underestimating their potential and preventing them from reaching out to others and contributing to their communities. The ‘Young People We Care’ concept was therefore introduced to encourage and enable young people to participate in caring for families infected or affected by HIV and AIDS. This concept, used in conjunction with other participatory methodologies such as Peer Education Training and the Stepping Stones Methodology, aims to encourage youths to support children, their peers and adults who are living in communities and are infected or affected by AIDS.



Young men at the poultry project.

Community care

After the training, youths in Alaska became more involved in community activities such as road maintenance and repair, visiting home-based care clients, counselling children (especially orphans) and helping people with chronic illness with household chores such as fetching water and firewood. To date the youth group has visited 203 households and offered support and assistance to them. They have participated in seven funerals (usually Zimbabwean funerals are accompanied by all-night vigils and are attended by adults) and have repaired 500 metres of gravel road surface that is used by the public.

In addition to these care activities the group started recreational games and arts. They are involved in drama and poetry and they have used these as a tool for communicating AIDS information. Their group is now registered as a performing arts group with the National Arts Council, meaning they can perform for a fee at any designated place. The group has since shot a video on child abuse and written over 12 plays that they perform at schools, churches, and other public places. The group uses music during all their activities: in fact music seems to be a part of their daily life. They keep guests, group members and community leaders entertained through music and dance every time they meet. Their music revolves around social life in present day Zimbabwe and gives emphasis to the fight against HIV and AIDS.

Building livelihoods

With support from Batsirai, the group has also started two income generating activities: a poultry project and a vegetable garden. After receiving 100 chicks and poultry mash for the first cycle of the poultry project, they managed to raise and sell the chickens to start again for the second and third cycle. They have through repetitive cycles sold more than 225 chickens, and donated others to households with chronically ill patients. The vegetable garden, where carrots, cabbage and sweet potatoes are grown, also aims to serve the community at large. It is expected to provide income to the group to motivate the peer educators and also to push forward their humanitarian assistance to clients under home based care.

Growing up

HIV has resulted in unusually high levels of orphans and vulnerable children. At Chikonohono Primary School in Chinhoyi, a teacher who did work experience with Batsirai during his studies has responded by setting up 'The Helping Hand Project'. Working with 38 pupils from a grade 4 class and with support from Batsirai, the school resuscitated a dormant agricultural garden. The project's aims included generating an income to pay school fees and buying school items for the most needy orphans, teaching and discussing HIV and AIDS-related life skills, and developing the children's capacity for self help while strengthening social cohesion within the school.

The first harvest, of peas and carrots, generated Z\$24,000 in sales – a respectable sum at the time, considering that no fertilisers were used and the land is quite small. From this income, the club bought 28 exercise books and paid school fees for one orphan. In addition some of the money was used to buy seeds and fertiliser; Batsirai also contributed seeds and fertiliser. The teacher plans to inter-crop maize and beans so as to maintain or enhance the fertility of the soil. This is expected to boost income at the next harvest.

The project struggles with water shortages and thefts, but the school is in the process of engaging with the community to make people understand the value of the garden to children in need. For their part, the children have learnt that through their own efforts they can make a difference in the lives of their colleagues. They have found that through group discussions they are free to discuss their problems with their peers, and they are learning new life skills that will stand them in good stead for the future.

Christopher Nyamandi



Elvis Ngaura with some of his chickens.

Raphael Grey, a former member of the group who is now employed in Botswana, said: 'Being a member of this youth group helped me gain confidence. Now I can think critically and logically. I can express myself well and analyse situations to come up with rational and well thought out decisions for my personal life and my family. The information I gained helped me think about protecting myself and my family from HIV. Now I am happily married with two children and would not hesitate to recommend that parents send their children to the youths group.'

Some members have also used the skills acquired from the Youth Corner to develop their own livelihoods. A good example is Elvis Ngaura, 19 years old, who has started his own poultry project.

He says: 'Being a member of the group has given me an entrepreneurship spirit... The skills I have learnt are not only relevant for the group but I have assimilated them into my personal life.'

The success of this group is evident. Members feel more secure and exude a beam of confidence. The songs they sing, the plays they perform, their speeches, the poetry and any other activity speak of one thing: HOPE. A hope that through resilience, determination and self-reliance the youths can make a difference in the face of HIV and AIDS.

Christopher Nyamandi is a Progressio development worker with Batsirai. He is based in Chinhoyi, 112 km west of Harare.

Chewing qat is part of the culture in Yemen – but it doesn't come without a price

Words and pictures: David Tanner

something to chew on



A typical rural village sits atop a hill in Yemen on the outskirts of the capital Sana'a. The barren landscape is typical of much of rural Yemen, where water is a precious commodity. Available fresh water per person per year is only 220 cubic metres – well below the internationally recognised 'scarcity level' of 1,000 cubic metres per person per year. Experts working on water have predicted that the capital Sana'a could run dry as early as 2015. To address the problem, governmental and non-governmental organisations across Yemen are undertaking a variety of programmes aimed at enabling communities to take control of their water resources, conserve and ration water in a more equitable manner, and gain access to improved water sources – typically helping to lower the workload of women and girls, the traditional drawers of water. Progressio-Yemen is currently researching the possibilities for Progressio development workers to work on issues around water in Yemen.

Qat fields often occupy the best agricultural land – an oasis of green in an otherwise barren landscape. These fields are dotted with watchtowers, from where armed men guard the valuable qat bushes day and night. Qat – which has been grown, traded and chewed in Yemen for centuries and has a social function much like alcohol (which is banned in Yemen) – is now mostly cultivated on good fertile lands. For healthy growth and a good crop, qat requires a significant amount of regular watering – a problem in such a water scarce country. A more recent problem associated with the use of qat is the application of pesticides to the plant which are then absorbed by the qat plant and subsequently by the qat chewers themselves.



A local youth bundles qat for sale from his family stall. Traditionally most Yemeni men will buy their bundle of qat during the lunchtime hours in preparation for an afternoon chewing session. Qat is a major part of Yemeni society economically as well as socially. The financial transactions involved in qat production and its sale – land, water, pesticides, fertilisers, picking, transport, bundling and sale – account for an estimated 16 per cent of the national economy and 22 per cent of the total workforce. Qat gradually loses potency from the moment it is picked, so the network of growers, transporters and sellers is highly organised to ensure that freshly picked qat is always available for sale by lunchtime in all cities, towns and villages across Yemen.

An afternoon qat chewing session in the mountain village of Raymah. All over the country, Yemeni men gather in the early afternoon to chew qat together and discuss everything and anything from politics, history and religion to local gossip and rumour. Qat chewing sessions are exclusively male affairs: chewing qat is traditionally a male preserve, and chewing by women is frowned upon. Because important matters are discussed and decided at qat chewing sessions, the tradition is a significant way in which women in Yemen are excluded from participating in debate and decision-making.



Nick Sireau/Progressio



A money changer with a 'pouch' of chewed qat leaves collected in his cheek over a long afternoon's chewing. Yemenis tend not to swallow or spit out the chewed qat but slowly collect it in one cheek (Somalis, who also chew qat, tend mostly to swallow the chewed leaves). Qat leaves contain a very low level of an amphetamine-like chemical which is absorbed into the bloodstream when chewed. If enough is chewed and for long enough, it can lead to a feeling of clarity and heightened perception, and a mild sense of euphoria. Chewers tend to become more voluble, and the conversation tends to become more free-flowing, the longer the chewing session goes on. Qat reduces tiredness and prolonged chewing can lead to insomnia – indeed, it is often chewed by long distance lorry drivers to keep them awake. Qat is not believed to be addictive and has few long-term medical side effects, but heavy use over a long period can in rare cases lead to psychological problems – although the use of qat is certainly much less damaging than tobacco or alcohol, for example.

A range of locally grown vegetables on sale at a shop in the capital, Sana'a. One of the problems associated with the production of qat is that fertile land and water – both extremely valuable and scarce resources in Yemen – are given over to qat production rather than for the production of vegetables, fruits and grains. Additionally, as qat is relatively expensive, it means that although its production is highly profitable for those lucky enough to grow it, the average man buying qat uses a significant proportion of the family income for its purchase. This can result in a lack of funds for family needs such as children's school fees, clothing or even food: studies have revealed a direct link in some families between child malnutrition and parental use of qat.



A small bush festooned with plastic bags thrown away by qat chewers. Another problem associated with qat is the environmental pollution caused by the thousands and thousands of plastic bags that are used to carry and sell qat and are not disposed of properly. Roadsides, trees and bushes around qat selling and chewing areas are typically strewn with plastic bags, which, as they are non-biodegradable, last for hundreds of years. Rubbish collection and disposal outside the main cities is limited, and litter is a frequent eyesore – and a growing health risk – by roadsides and in villages and rural areas.



Belisario Nieto/Progressio

Melody Pazan overcomes challenges with a smile.

Moving forward

Melody Pazan, a student and women's activist, talks about the struggles that she and other Ecuadorian women face

I'M THE CURRENT PRESIDENT of the University Women's Association here at Cuenca State University, in Ecuador. The association aims to help female students respond to the problems women face in society. Drop-out rates at the university are much higher for female than male students, and this is down to discrimination, a lack of resources, a lack of support for women. Our aim is to change this.

For the past two years, we have helped GAMMA [a Progressio partner organisation] bring its exhibition on sexism in advertising to the university. The first time, it was a new issue for the students. Some of them understood what it was about, and some didn't. Some were a bit shocked by it. The next year, though, people were more interested, and joined in to vote for the

'Women are marginalised in lots of ways: because of discrimination, because of poverty, because of neglect...'

best and worst adverts [see *Interact*, spring 2007]. I think people have now grasped what it is about, and how sexism works in advertising and the media.

When I was younger, I didn't even think about what gender was. It wasn't something that was even mentioned at school. I only started to think about these issues at university, through my involvement with the women's organisations. Women are marginalised in lots of ways: because of discrimination, because of poverty, because of neglect... I can even see an example of this in my profession. I'm studying medicine, and at the moment I'm on a psychiatry rotation, in a psychiatry surgery. And it's mostly women who come for appointments, because of violence, because of suicide attempts, because of discrimination, because of the frustrations that women face.

When I see this it gives me the motivation to continue the fight, to continue working with women, to continue supporting women, even

promoting ambitious projects in the university. The women's association is pushing for a university nursery, as lack of childcare is a big reason for female students dropping out. I'm a mother, I'm divorced, I'm studying for my degree practically full-time, so I know the obstacles that women students have to overcome.

For women with children, if you don't have the support of your parents or your family, there is no opportunity to move forward. Even among my classmates, there are women who say 'I'm pregnant, I'm going to quit university'. We should say to them 'no', because the women who drop out end up getting low-paid jobs and locking themselves into a state of poverty. We know that men are the ones who wash their hands when it comes down to it, at least here in Ecuador. That's my situation too: I don't receive any financial help from my daughter's father, I have to pay my university fees, I'm studying and working as well.

I guess for the rest of my life there will always be difficulties, but one way or another I will work them out. Women are capable, and there have been many examples, and mine is just one such case, isn't it?

In five years I see myself doing the same, working for women, in the political field. I really like politics, issues to do with countries, struggles for... not just women, but people. I think I'm going to stay within this same field.

From my experience, I will be saying to my daughter, always move forward. Accept life's difficulties but never let adversities bring you down. And trust your family, trust people. Many times when we encounter problems, when everything is black, everything is dark, there are friends around you who are ready to lend a hand to help you.

The thing that has always motivated me and has made me feel good about things is to think about my daughter. When you're a mother, you need to stay calm and look at the solution. I know that if I don't do my part, I will just pass my problems onto my daughter. So I have to be the best I can, for her.

Melody Pazan was interviewed by Belisario Nieto, Progressio's programme coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean.

THERE WAS WATER before the beginning of humanity. It was vapour and when it was condensed it turned itself into drops of water. The life of micro-organisms began in the water as did the living beings that in time came to live on the land.

During our existence as human beings we have established a deep and permanent relationship with water. It begins before we are born, as we grow in the womb. Water facilitates the neurological process by which the brain produces a thought. Our bodies are made up of a high proportion of water. It is essential to the physiological processes of our digestive and circulatory systems.

We belong to water because it gives us life; but water does not belong to us, it is free. It flows wherever it finds a bed to follow. It is both deep and superficial at the same time: it is within the bowels of the earth, and it also gushes out to the surface as a spring. It is immaterial

People worldwide are denied the human right to enjoy a decent life by the lack of water or the contamination of the supplies they have

but also mouldable, becoming the shape we want to give it when we contain it in a bottle or vessel.

It flows past the same places over and over again, but the water that runs past is never the same, it is always new. We can see through it and yet it has hidden depths. It is peaceful and it brings us peace: it is enough to contemplate its immensity and at the same time to listen to the sound of its voice to take away the sadness from the heart. We can compare its purity with the love human beings are able to give.

Water has relaxing properties and it can even relieve stress: to feel water sliding down the skin or to be submerged in it is a delightful experience that can produce pleasant sensations of peace, calm and happiness.

Yet, even though water has an important meaning for human life, we have rejected its generosity. Our relationship is seriously damaged and the main cause of this serious damage is the human wish to have control over it, as

Water for life

Take care of water as the water takes care of you, writes Mónica Galeano Velasco

well as to possess and to limit it.

We used to find a lot of pure water but now the little we still have is contaminated. It does not flow as it used to do and occasionally, when it is not expected, it bursts with all its power, flooding cities, forests and fields.

People worldwide are denied the human right to enjoy a decent life by the lack of water or the contamination of the supplies they have. But while many are suffering the lack of the water they need, others are fighting between them to have control over it. They have forgotten that it does not belong to anybody but is a natural resource of the planet and a life resource too.

It is time for us to appreciate the relationship we have with water and overcome the perception that it is an inexhaustible resource. Global warming and its consequences are showing us the

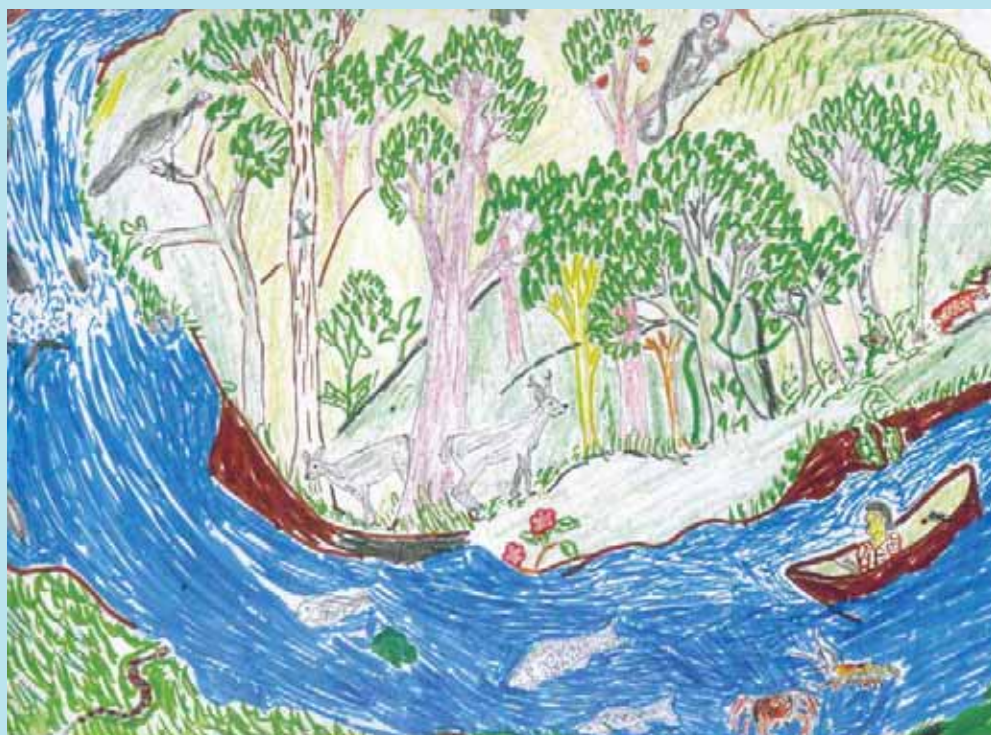
opposite. We will run out of water unless we take the responsibility to protect, to preserve and to respect the natural resources we still have.

To restore the relationship between water and the human being is a personal

We belong to water because it gives us life; but water does not belong to us

choice. It is also an act of deep solidarity and love to Mother Nature, in order to achieve balance and harmony in our temporary and quick passage over the earth.

Mónica Galeano Velasco is a Progreso development worker with Fundacion Arcoiris in Honduras, working on human rights and advocacy on HIV and AIDS.



A drawing by Lili Vanesa Membreño, a Grade 8 student in Culmi, Olancho, Honduras.

Visions of development

Marigold Best reviews a new book that looks at the development role of faith and inter-faith movements

'RELIGION IS LIKE A COW. It kicks, but it also gives milk,' said the Hindu mystic Ramakrishna.

Development theorists and agencies have tended to shun the religious cow as retrograde and divisive, but recently there have been attempts to identify and revalue the milch cow. One such was the World Faiths Development Dialogue set up in 1998 with the sponsorship of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey and the then President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn.

Wendy Tyndale was the first coordinator of the WFDD, and as the editor of *Visions of development: Faith-based initiatives* (Ashgate, 2006) has produced an inspiring book featuring a selection of the many different faith and inter-faith movements and organisations she came to know in that role. Each is described by one of its leaders and then 'case-studied' by Tyndale. 'Each in their own way,' she says, 'they are wrestling with the question of what the most truly human way of living might be in the context of our age.'

This may involve a radical change in the way God is understood and worshipped. The germinal idea of India's Swadhyaya movement, inspired by the Bhagavad Gita, is 'to develop an awareness of an in-dwelling God – the divine presence in every human being ... Devotion is not an introverted activity [but] a social force.' Worship has to be channelled 'through constructive work towards collective good'.

The Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka is based on Buddhist concepts, updated to fit the needs and concerns of villages today. Sarvodaya means 'awakening' (spiritual, moral, cultural, social, economic and political) which the movement believes can overcome 'the psychological impotence gripping the rural poor' and, by 'tapping their innermost beliefs and values', awaken them to their personal and collective power.

Both Swadhyaya and Sarvodaya, by bringing out the best in every individual member of the community regardless of background, enable people to transform all aspects of life, including the natural environment, by their own efforts. These are not small idealistic daydreams. Swadhyaya has drawn in more than 20 million people in 100,000 villages and Sarvodaya is working in about 15,000 villages. It has also set up a Peace Centre for Peoples of All Nations and is training young Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists in conflict resolution and building 'trust and understanding through programmes on health and education'. Such inclusiveness is an important characteristic of all the initiatives studied. It means openness to people of all religions and castes and full participation for women.

But the inclusiveness of the milch cow can be a red rag to the kicking cow, as shown by the fascinating story of the struggles of the fish workers of Kerala, a state with a sizeable Christian population. In the southern tip almost all the fisherfolk are Latin Catholics and in the 1960s the local bishop and some progressive clergy, inspired by Vatican II, started to support the fishermen who were trying to hold on to their livelihood in the face of the arrival of destructive mechanised trawlers.

This certainly produced a new view of the meaning of Christianity 'as a living faith concerned not only with spiritual matters but also with justice and peace in this world'. The progressives helped the fish workers to start trade unions, which in 1982 came together as a federation; and insisted that Muslims and Hindus should be included. The inclusive organisation has flourished and brought about important improvements for the fishing communities, 'inspired by an all-embracing spirituality: an empowering energy whose source, they say, is not confined to any one spiritual tradition.'

The book also takes us to Cameroon, Brazil, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Chile to see how different faiths, in very different situations, produce that empowering energy. 'In all the stories we see how important the melding of spirituality and common sense is for people who believe that development is about human flourishing in all its dimensions,' writes Tyndale.

She does not expect any of these movements 'to come up with a blueprint for alternative development plans for the world, but they can and do provide signposts to direct us towards a different way of ordering life based on different values and a different quality of relationships among human beings and between them and their natural environment.' How greatly we all need that! The only shame with this invaluable book is that, at £45, its message may be priced out of the reach of many who would benefit from reading it.

Marigold Best is the co-author with Pamela Hussey of several Progressio/CIIR publications, most recently the Comment A question of commitment. Marigold is a former Latin America Programme Coordinator for Quaker Peace & Service.

