

grassroots development

JOURNAL of the INTER-AMERICAN FOUNDATION

Volume 7, Number 2 1983

ALBERT HIRSCHMAN'S
PRINCIPLE OF
CONSERVATION AND
MUTATION
OF SOCIAL ENERGY

WHAT TO MAKE
OF BOLIVIAN
COOPERATIVES
BY JUDITH TENDLER

SIGHT, BLINDNESS,
AND VISION
IN JAMAICA

ORAL HISTORIES
OF GHETTO ACTRESSES



Blind craftsman in Kingston, Jamaica

Grassroots Development is published twice a year in English and Spanish by the Inter-American Foundation. The journal reports how the poor in Latin America and the Caribbean organize and work to improve their lives. Its purpose is to explore how development assistance can more effectively contribute to self-help efforts.

Articles in *Grassroots Development* draw primarily on the experience of the Inter-American Foundation and the groups that it assists. However, submissions by persons outside the foundation are encouraged. Prospective contributors should write for "Instructions to Authors."

Unless otherwise noted, material published in *Grassroots Development* may be freely reproduced. Source acknowledgement and a copy of any reproduction are requested.

To receive the journal, write to:

Grassroots Development
Inter-American Foundation
1515 Wilson Boulevard
Rosslyn, VA 22209

Editor Sheldon Annis
Production assistant Elizabeth G. Pagano

Cover photo Mitchell Denburg
Editorial assistance Ron Weber
Design Robert Borja

grassroots development

JOURNAL OF THE INTER-AMERICAN FOUNDATION

Volume 7, number 2

Contents

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Principle of Conservation and Mutation of Social Energy | 3 | The principle explains how past failures motivate new and successful collaborative endeavors at the grassroots. | Albert O. Hirschman |
| Vision and Blindness in Jamaica | 11 | The blind in Jamaica face unusual hardship. Yet within themselves and their support for each other are unusual resources. | Sheldon Annis |
| What to Think About Cooperatives: A Guide from Bolivia | 19 | A comparative study of four peasant associations that questions traditional assumptions about rural cooperatives. | Judith Tandler, with Kevin Healy and Carol Michaels O'Laughlin |
| Fieldclips: Argentina, Uruguay, Honduras | 39 | Community organizations observed: wool-raising in the Argentine outback . . . small businesses and a village's survival in Uruguay . . . the Garifuna of the northern Honduran coast. | Anne Ternes, Cynthia Ferrin, and Mac Chapin |
| Women's Theater in Jamaica | 44 | Kingston ghetto women who were unemployed streetsweepers are now successful actresses. They talk about their lives, their work, and their theater group. | The Sistren Theatre Collective |
| Research Reports | 53 | Summaries of recently completed research on private development organizations in rural Chile . . . seasonal migration among the Aymara in Peru . . . <i>caciques</i> and land reform in Bolivia . . . bread, jobs, and culture in Ecuador. | |



Woodcut: Robert Borja

The principle of conservation and mutation of social energy

ALBERT O. HIRSCHMAN

In early 1983, being on sabbatical leave from the Institute for Advanced Study, I spent 14 weeks in six Latin American countries—the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay—visiting “grassroots development” projects that had obtained financial support from the Inter-American Foundation. My wife accompanied me, except in Chile and Uruguay, and helped a great deal through participation in the discussions and note-taking (hence the “we” in the following narrative). In each country the representatives of the foundation introduced us to the community people participating in the projects, but then left us quite free to develop the conversation and to arrange further contacts. Throughout, my purpose was not to “evaluate” the foundation or its projects, but more generally to learn something about development processes at the grassroots. The following pages are taken from a larger essay I am writing in this spirit.

—A.O.H.

Most of the experiences we learned about on our visits to grassroots development projects in six Latin American countries involved some sort of collective endeavors by poor people to “better their condition,” to use an expression often found in *The Wealth of Nations*. In the tradition of Adam Smith, this activity generally has been perceived as taking place primarily at the individual level. Perhaps for this reason, the conditions under which action for economic advance (or against economic decline) is undertaken as a group activity have not been closely studied. To bring some order into this diffuse field, I shall make a basic distinction: in many cases collective action is provoked by some common, usually adverse experience to which a group of people is subjected; in others, cooperative action emerges without any such prior shock from the outside.

People can be aggressed either by the hostile forces of nature or by some, often even more hostile, forces of State and society. We came across a large number of such aggressions that led to the development of solidarity and, eventually, to joint or cooperative action. While it is worthwhile to look at the varieties of such reactive cooperation in some detail (as is done in another portion of my manuscript) it is no great mystery why people who are jointly and newly oppressed by acts either of nature or of their “fellow men” should develop a solidary spirit that leads to cooperative efforts. After all, they are only conforming, if in collective form, to the French adage:

*Cet animal est très méchant.
Quand on l’attaque il se défend.*

*(This animal is very mean.
When it’s attacked it will hit back.)*

... when we looked into the life histories of the people principally involved, we found that most of them had participated previously in other, generally more "radical," experiences of collective action.

The more difficult problem is therefore to understand collective efforts at grassroots development when no immediately antecedent aggression is present. It is probably not possible to account exhaustively for these more complex situations. However, a large number of them shared one striking characteristic: when we looked into the life histories of the people principally involved, we found that most of them had participated previously in other, generally more "radical" experiences of collective action. It is as though their earlier aspiration for social change, their bent for collective action, had not really left them, even though the movements in which they had participated may have aborted, petered out—or perhaps ended successfully. Later on, this "social energy" becomes active again but likely in some very different form. It may therefore be quite difficult to notice that we are in the presence of a special kind of sequence, that it is a *renewal* of energy rather than a wholly new outbreak. For the sake of brevity, I shall refer to this phenomenon as the Principle of Conservation and Mutation of Social Energy.

I am of course aware that the principle does not necessarily hold at all times or in all places; it may even be strictly tied to the particular time and place of my formulation. Here I am reminded—half in contrast and half in parallel—of the last verse of an old song celebrating the failed German peasant war of the 16th century:

*Geschlagen ziehen wir nach haus.
Unsere Enkel fechten's besser aus.*

*(Vanquished we are returning home.
Our grandchildren will take up
our fight with better luck.)*

The difference of our principle from this text is, first of all, that the present Latin American generation is not waiting for their grandchildren: they seem perfectly able to resume a "fight" (that is, to join in some collective movement) several times in the same lifetime. In part this may be due to what has been called the acceleration of history. But it has perhaps more to do with the second and more important difference between the Latin American and the German situation: the Latin Americans are not taking up the same "fight" again; the next time around, they involve themselves in a very different cause.

Some Colombian examples

The most massive evidence for the principle comes from Colombia and perhaps the best illustrative story is that of the fishermen's cooperative at the small settlement of Cristo Rey on the country's Caribbean Coast. From Montería, the hot interior capital of the Department of Córdoba, we drove along rich and sparsely cultivated haciendas to the coast. There

... the Latin Americans are not taking up the same "fight" again; the next time around, they involve themselves in a very different cause.

we met with fishermen in a round, well-ventilated, open shed with a thatched roof. Being of European background, we took for granted that we were dealing with a people that had been fishermen for generations. But we soon learned that, like the rest of the villagers, the coop members had grown up as agriculturalists, each tending a small plot of his own and working on nearby haciendas as day-laborers.

How did they turn into fishermen? It turned out to be a remarkable story. In 1975, a group of peasants from the village invaded a piece of land that had been idle for a long time, with the idea of working it collectively. They undertook this action toward the end of a period of fairly widespread peasant unrest and land invasions, particularly in the flatlands near Colombia's Atlantic coast. This period of peasant activism followed the more vigorous application of the land reform law of 1961 in the late 1960's under President Carlos Lleras Restrepo and the simultaneous establishment of a peasant union (ANUC = Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos) that was conceived by Lleras as a way for peasants to participate more actively in the reform. Soon enough this union became independent from government tutelage and developed considerable momentum and following. By 1975, however, the political situation had changed substantially: the agrarian reform had been brought to a halt, and ANUC had lost strength as a result of internal divisions. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Cristo Rey peasants were ejected by police from the land they had sought to cultivate.

But this is not the end of the story. For the next few years the peasants kept in touch, wondering what next might be done jointly. At one point, looking out onto the Caribbean and noticing some fishing boats in the distance, they said to each other: "As long as we cannot take the land, why not take the sea?" So the 22 peasants who were closest to each other as a result of joint action (and no doubt other ties) decided to build two boats and set out to sea. Then they mobilized various kinds of assistance, from courses in cooperativism given at Montería by Acción Unida (an evangelical social action group), to credit from the *Caja Agraria* (the agricultural credit bank), and accounting courses from SENA (the wealthy and always helpful national vocational training agency). A major step forward was the acquisition of outboard motors—financed by an IAF grant—that permitted the crews to venture much farther out to sea and significantly increase production.

The coop has been a financial success. After some time it was able to expand its activities by setting up a consumer store that also housed freezers for the catch. The coop recently bought a sizable piece of land close to the sea where their meeting hall, offices, consumer store, and other activities are to be concentrated. (A fish restaurant and small hotel are in the planning stage!) Another project, currently under consideration with the IAF, is to expand their present "fleet" from one to eight boats. Most movingly, the coop members, true to their original vocation as agri-

*... they said to each other:
"As long as we cannot take
the land, why not take the
sea?"*

... having thus dispelled mutual distrust, forged a community, and—perhaps most important—created a vision of change, they were now ready for joint endeavors that required much greater sophistication and persistence.

culturalists, now think of *renting* some land from a nearby landowner and cultivating it collectively. As a cooperative with a “legal personality” (*personería jurídica*) and some pledgeable assets, they will be treated with the respect that is usually denied the single, virtually landless farmer. Thus the dream they were pursuing in 1975 may yet come true—after a long detour and “with different means!”

The story is edifying, but could it have happened without that first step, the failed attempt to seize the land? The coop members certainly perceived a connection between their first collective action and its failure, on the one hand, and the fishing cooperative and its success, on the other.

The link between these two so dissimilar parts of the story can be interpreted at different levels. From one perspective, one may argue that the takeover of land is a daring act with revolutionary potential, whereas, in comparison, the “taking” of the sea through cooperatively operated fishing boats seems a tame entrepreneurial initiative. From this point of view, the taking of the land looms as far more arduous and demanding than the taking of (or to) the sea. One might then interpret the sequence from attempted land takeover to fishing cooperative as a renunciation of former goals, an acceptance of the existing order, and a settling down within it.

Yet, a good argument can be made for the opposite conclusion. The most obvious, simple, elementary collective action for minifundista peasants surrounded by partially idle latifundios is to seize as a group some of the idle land by a one-time act. The formation of a fishing cooperative requires, in comparison, a complex process of working out rules and procedures and of acquiring new knowledge and collaborative habits. From this perspective the takeover of land seems rather simplistic, while setting out to sea looks far more complex, and in its own way, more hazardous.

There is some truth in both conceptions, and both help explain what happened. Once the historic moment when land reform was a real possibility in northern Colombia had passed, people obviously resigned themselves and looked in other, less daunting directions. But the experience of the attempted land takeover was a real stepping stone to the fishing cooperative in the usual sense of stepping *up* rather than down. Having cooperated in the takeover of land, the Cristo Rey peasants had practiced cooperation at the most rudimentary level; having thus dispelled mutual distrust, forged a community, and—perhaps most important—created a *vision of change*, they were now ready for joint endeavors that required much greater sophistication and persistence.

This sort of dynamic can account for the numerous other cases where early participation in public action of one kind leads later to involvements in collective endeavors of a very different nature. In Colombia’s Cauca Valley we had long sessions with two groups of peasant leaders that orga-

nize cooperatives and other kinds of community efforts throughout the valley. They are known as *Muchachos de Buga*—the “Buga boys”—and the *Lideres de Tuluá*—the “leaders from Tuluá.”

The *Lideres de Tuluá* are men in their 50’s and 60’s who are now primarily concerned—when they don’t work their own farms—with building up a network of consumer and producer cooperatives. These cooperatives now have a central warehouse in Tuluá, the geographical center of the valley. Seeing the gleaming warehouse and its offices full of shiny furniture, one would never suspect it is run by poor peasants who have been actively involved with the successive experiments in social change and reform in Colombia during the past 25 years. They all started with the *Acción Comunal* (community action programs) which mobilized people in the smaller towns and villages for cooperative construction of urgent public works in the early 1960’s, and later participated in efforts at more active implementation of land reform in the late 1960’s, and early 1970’s.

The story of the *Muchachos de Buga* is a bit different. This group of about 10 younger men—now in their early 30’s—was selected in their late teens to attend an experimental educational program at Buga (Department of Valle), which was called the *Academia Mayor Campesina*. The program’s founder and director was a strong-minded Jesuit priest who set out to form peasant leaders able to help improve the communities to which they were expected to return upon graduation. The *Muchachos*—a group of 10 to 12 graduates—were so fired by their educational experience and the then favorable prospects for substantial changes in Colombia’s agrarian structure, that they decided to stay together as a group and to work actively for change, not only in their own communities, but wherever they might be helpful. They participated, during the early 1970’s, in a few land invasions that were largely unsuccessful.

By the end of the decade the group had changed; now they looked out for other kinds of opportunities to “better the condition” of the people in Colombia’s villages. They became, in fact, a private group of extension agents. There was, however, a difference: they imparted not only improved agricultural techniques, but also advice on how to form cooperatives and other community organizations, how to lobby for needed public improvements, how to use the courts, and so on. They were hired by various local groups doing “social promotion” but have maintained their own organization. In this endeavor, they were aided by a grant from the IAF which enabled them to acquire a dairy farm near Buga as an income-producing asset for the group. For the time being, however, the farm functions mainly as a temporary haven for any *Muchacho* who is out of work. The possibility of staying at the farm for a limited period strengthens the independence of any individual *Muchacho* working as an “extension agent”: he knows that he does not need to fear unduly the consequences of speaking out (of using “voice”) in his job, since quitting or being fired (deciding or having to “exit”) is an eventuality of last resort

Seeing the gleaming warehouse and its offices full of shiny furniture, one would never suspect it is run by poor peasants who have been actively involved with the successive experiments in social change and reform in Colombia during the past 25 years.

... highly damaging tendency of Latin Americans to categorize most of their experiences in social and political reform—or for that matter in economic development—as utter failures. This failure complex, or fracasomania, may itself lead to real failures ...

that is not too costly.*

The consistency with which our Principle of Conservation and Mutation of Social Energy could be observed in Colombia borders on the monotonous. How could I expect to find it in operation once again when visiting a hammock-weavers' cooperative in Morroa, in the Atlantic coast Department of Sucre? The cooperative was composed entirely, well almost entirely, of women weavers who had set up their enterprise with some guidance from the Bogotá-based Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions (*Museo de Artes y Tradiciones Populares*). The Museum is a remarkably effective organization that is providing various types of assistance to the practitioners of traditional handicrafts in the country without forcing craftsmen into mass production. On the contrary, the organization is attempting to revitalize the genuine traditions of individual workmanship.

We visited the almost completed locale of the cooperative on the much-traveled Medellín-Cartagena highway. In part a gift of the Inter-American Foundation, this locale was soon to house the cooperative's offices as well as a sales outlet. There we were introduced to many members of the coop, and all of its leaders were waiting for us. They were all women and active weavers except for the president, a highly verbal *man* in his early 40's who was, somewhat incongruously, the chief person to speak for the group. It was explained to us that a man was needed to deal with the authorities and banks in this somewhat backward Colombian department; perhaps also, he owed his position to the fact that many of these women weavers had recently been swindled by one of their own companions who had talked them into some fraudulent "cooperative" arrangement.

However that may be, my curiosity about the motivation of this man was aroused. I engaged him in a one-to-one conversation as we walked from the highway to the village where we were to view the handsome looms of some of the coop members. Within the first three minutes of our conversation, he told me that in the early 1970's he had actively participated in some of the land seizures in the department and that, ever since that heady, if largely unsuccessful, experience, he had wanted to involve himself again in "doing something for the community!"

Extensions of the principle

There is not much point in multiplying the illustrations. Other instances of our principle-in-operation could be cited: from the leadership of the *pueblo joven*, "El Rescate," in Lima, to the recent revival of some agricultural cooperatives in the Llanquihue province of southern Chile. But perhaps it is of greater interest to connect the principle briefly with some other aspects of social change.

First of all, I must relate it to an old point of mine. I have often complained about the excessive and, I have come to think, highly damaging

*I am referring to my book *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970).

tendency of Latin Americans to categorize most of their experiences in social and political reform—or for that matter in economic development—as utter failures. This failure complex, or *fracasomania*, may itself lead to real failures, or so it has seemed to me. It can now be seen that—not surprisingly—the Principle of Conservation and Mutation of Social Energy fits right into my campaign against the failure complex. As long as the operation of the principle is not perceived, it will seem as though a social movement that has not achieved its preordained objective, such as the movement for agrarian reform in Colombia, is an unqualified failure. But this judgment must be altered, at least in part, once it is realized that the social energies that were aroused in the course of that movement did not pass from the scene even though the movement itself did. These energies remained, as it were, in *storage* for a while, but were available to fuel later, perhaps very different, movements. In a real sense, the original movement must therefore be credited with whatever advances or successes were achieved by those subsequent movements: no longer can it be considered a total failure.

I now pass to another elaboration of our topic. In discussing the story of the fishing cooperative of Cristo Rey, I remarked that the cooperative could only come into being through the sense of comradeship and community, the dispelling of isolation and mutual distrust (almost in the sense of original sin), that resulted from the common action taken many years before. An interesting parallel situation came to our attention later on, in Bogotá, talking with the director of an organization that is supplying financial assistance to worker-managed enterprises. Among them are some firms, primarily in clothing and footwear, that are staffed and managed predominantly or exclusively by women. These firms invariably originate, so we were told, in some *other* common activity where the women have gotten to know and like each other. Most frequently, the women met in courses given by SENA, the vocational training agency of the Colombian government. Upon graduating from the course they decided to try to create an enterprise of their own rather than look for work as employees of existing firms.

The sequence involved here is not too dissimilar from the ones discussed earlier. The common experience of the land invasion at Cristo Rey, which led to other, more complex forms of cooperation, is replaced here by the common experience of taking a course together and getting to know and trust each other. Obviously the ties formed in this fashion are likely to be less strong than in the Cristo Rey case, but the experience apparently can fulfill the basic function of bringing like-minded people together in a joint endeavor. As an economist I had expected that the need to mobilize a minimal amount of capital would be at the root of at least some of the cooperative, worker-managed enterprises. It turned out that a more fundamental need is, once again, some experience dispelling isolation and mutual distrust.

ALBERT O. HIRSCHMAN is professor of social science at the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton. His recent books include *Shifting Involvements: Private Interests and Public Action*; *Trespassing: Economics to Politics and Beyond*; and *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*. He is also the author of *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*; *A Bias for Hope: Essays on Development and Latin America*; *The Strategy of Economic Development*; *Journeys Toward Progress: Studies of Economic Policy-Making in Latin America*; *Development Projects Observed*; and *National Power and the Structure of International Trade*. This article will be a chapter of a longer essay he is preparing on his observations of nearly 50 projects assisted by the Inter-American Foundation in Latin America and the Caribbean.

NARROW WAY GOSPEL
LINE

SOUTH PARADE KINGSTON



PEACE BE STILL

ME

Blindness and vision in Jamaica

SHELDON ANNIS

Joanne Callahan was born blind into a working class family in Brooklyn, New York. Her father died when she was nine, and her mother single-handedly raised four daughters.

"Being blind and being from a working class family made me want to succeed," she says. "I always wanted that badly. I don't think I have exceptional ability, but I do have exceptional drive. When I was very young, I set my mind on going to Harvard, and I did."

Callahan went through Harvard (cum laude) on scholarship, and then, Stanford graduate school. Today she is a Congressional liaison for a U.S. government agency. Because of recent technological innovations that assist the blind—and because she can afford them—she makes surprisingly few concessions to her disability.

She generally carries with her a 10-pound VersaBraille wordprocessor/microcomputer. With it, she can enter the equivalent of 400 pages of braille information on a single C-60 cassette. She can organize, file, recall, edit, and index her material. Through a standard serial connector and telephone lines, she can plug into a variety of computer terminals, hardcopy printers, braille embossers, and external data banks.

At home and in her office Miss Callahan reads with an Optacon, a 4-pound scanner that is about the size of a small purse. Through advanced electronics, the Optacon converts printed-letter images into enlarged, vibrating, tactile shapes that can be read with one finger. She has access to virtually anything printed—including foreign languages and mathematical symbols—without its having previously been converted to braille. She reads the daily newspaper, technical

articles, Spanish novels, and office memoranda. She can cook with recipes from the back of soup cans, look up numbers in the telephone book, review her monthly bank statement, and even read computer screens.

At her office she works with a powerful computer system that is connected to her high-speed braille printer. She can call up information that is in her office data bank—and anything that can be brought to her terminal through a telephone modem. The reports and letters that she writes are printed out simultaneously in braille for her records and in typescript for her colleagues.

And finally, she is mobile. She owns a brawny black Labrador seeing-eye dog, Elmer, who leads and protects her. She uses cabs and public transportation, coming and going as she pleases.

Much of the electronic technology that Joanne Callahan uses has become available only in the last year or two. Her total investment, including the seeing-eye dog, is about \$30,000. Fortunately, her employer has shared some costs.

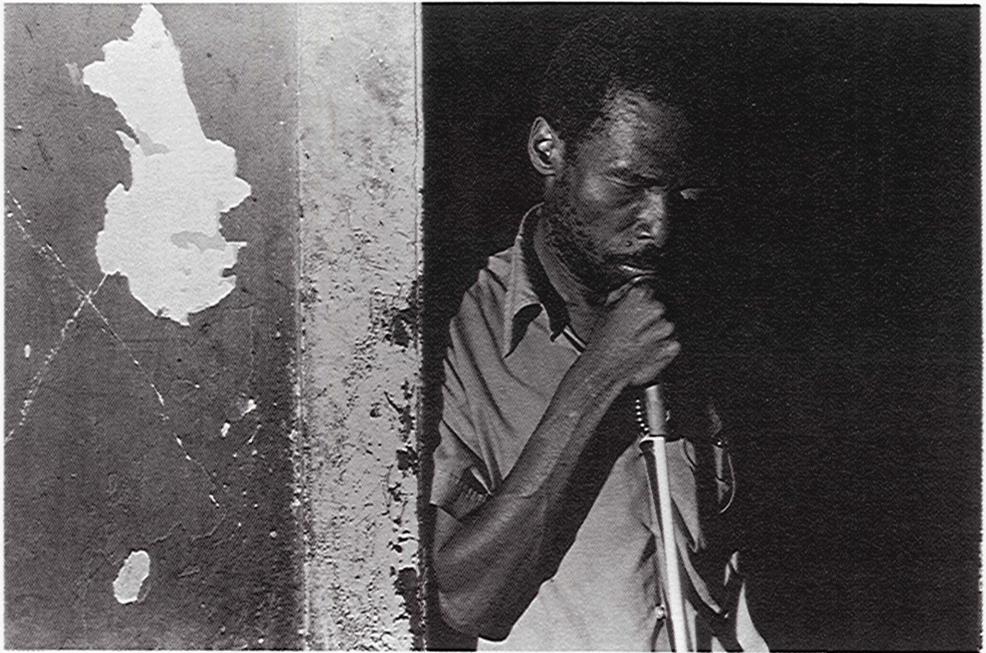
She is still blind, certainly; yet advanced technology—coupled with her own drive—has enabled her to put her Harvard and Stanford training to practical use. As a result, she is more than economically independent; she is highly competitive in a job market that requires person-to-person interaction and sophisticated skills in information processing.

"Honestly," she says, I don't know too much about the 'world of the blind.' I'm independent. Socially and professionally I operate in the world of the sighted."

By world standards, Jamaica is not a very poor country. Jamaicans do not suffer from the kinds of preventable, water- and sanitation-related blindness that are endemic elsewhere. There is no trachoma, for example, a disease that afflicts millions of people in the Middle East, South Asia, and parts of North and sub-Saharan Africa. One does not find villages stricken with onchocerciasis—river blindness—as in Malawi, where fully a third of the adult male population may be blind and disabled.

Nevertheless, measured by a standard of VersaBrailles and Optacons, the situation of the blind in Jamaica is grim indeed. First, modern medical technologies that can alleviate or arrest blindness are not generally available. Glaucoma, a buildup of pressure inside the eye that eventually destroys the optic nerve, is responsible for nearly 40 percent of adult blindness in Jamaica. It is neither preventable nor reversible, but with drug treatment, it can be controlled. The drug (usually imported) can cost about (US)\$40 per month for full treatment, placing it well beyond the means of nearly all blind Jamaicans. Ministry of Health supplies are erratic, especially in rural areas. Thus, every day glaucoma worsens among people who cannot afford, cannot obtain, or are not properly instructed in the use of a drug that might control it.

Cataracts, which account for about a third of adult Jamaican blindness, usually can be removed in a 15-minute operation. Depending on severity, partial sight can be restored through glasses or more sophisticated cornea transplants. For those who cannot afford commercial medical rates—again, virtually all of the blind—there is a two-to three-year waiting list for cataract removal, and scant possibility for sight-restorative, post-cataract surgery. Many cataract sufferers do not realize that



Mitchell Denburg

their blindness is potentially reversible.

Second, there is scant institutional assistance for the blind or for integrating them into society. Vision problems are rarely detected before they become severe; thus untreated child blindness leads into adult blindness, and poor childhood vision leads to lost learning. Opportunities for using braille are severely restricted. The School for the Blind has only a few hundred students. Even among those who know braille, there is little braille material, so few concrete employment opportunities open up as a result.

Not surprisingly, only about a dozen or so people—less than one-tenth of one percent of the 14,000 blind people in Jamaica—have studied in a university. So there are few people in professional or advocacy positions who can articulate the needs and interests of the blind.

Lacking education or training, the blind are poorly equipped to compete for jobs in a society with nearly 30 percent unemployment among the able-bodied. Ninety-eight percent of the blind do not have regular jobs. Of the two percent who are employed, 90 percent of them earn less than the Jamaican minimum wage.

The technology of seeing-eye dogs is considered culturally and economically impractical. Wilbert Williams, a physical therapist who studied at the Royal National Institute for the Blind, brought a seeing-eye dog home from England. He relates, "First, the buses wouldn't allow it. They are too crowded, the aisles are too narrow, and passengers were afraid. The dog was trained for English sidewalks at least four-feet wide. He couldn't adjust to the street vendors and the crowds. And the expense and problems of keeping the dog healthy—three-fourths of a pound of meat a day, eggs, milk, vitamins, and booster shots. It didn't work out."

Even to have a white cane—and to know how to use it well—is to be among the privileged blind. Those people who have heard of such marvels as the Optacon tend to judge its cost against the number of blind people who could be taught to use a white cane.

In short, whereas advanced technology has helped to equalize opportunity for Joanne Callahan, in Jamaica blindness translates into limited mobility, illiteracy, social isolation, and joblessness. If Optacons and seeing-eye dogs are not immediate answers for Jamaica, what then? Are there supports—human, institutional, and technological—that can reduce inequality? And if technology and institutions do not now serve the blind, how can the blind serve themselves?

Bunny McGregor is 41 years old. Many years ago, when he still had one good eye, he used to be a sign painter. But in 1974 he contracted glaucoma, and his sight deteriorated. "Now I just catch a glimpse," he says.

Like most blind adults in Kingston, Bunny McGregor lives in a rented room. He is alone, at the end of a long, dark, L-shaped corridor.

"Careful of the hole in the floor," he says, walking forward down the hall.

"I can't see it," I answer, feeling a

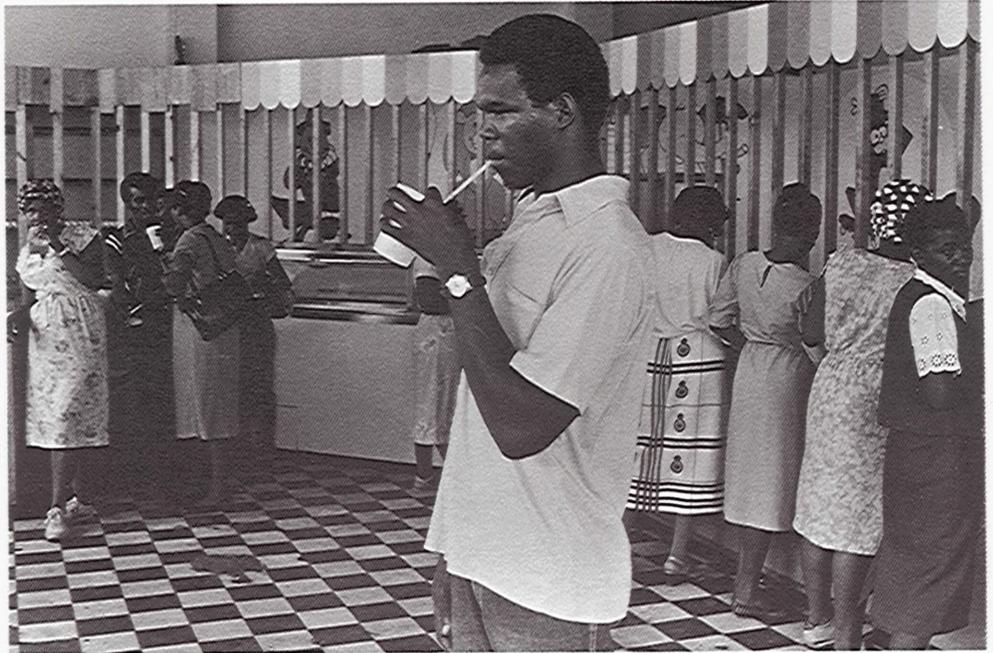
little foolish.

His room contains a narrow bed, a weathered armoire, and a straight-backed wooden chair. At one end of the bed is a neat pile of clean clothes; at the other is a messy pile of dirty clothes. His cane leans next to the door; his glaucoma medicine and toothbrush are within reach on a narrow shelf.

In one corner is a small, portable kerosene stove with a pot, plate, and utensils resting on it. In the other is a small stack of braille books, mostly portions of the New Testament. A frayed, socketless electric cord dangles from the ceiling. Just below the ceiling, open slats allow air and sunlight to enter. Bunny, of course, does not see the cheesecake magazine clippings and ribald cartoons that a previous tenant left glued to the wall.

Since 1979 Bunny has earned money by making belts and pillows in this room. He also buys soap and peanuts wholesale, repackages them, and sells them on the street. "The belts would sell, but now the cord is too expensive. A ball of cord costs \$22. I can't get the buckles anymore (since they are imported), so there is no more money in that."

Last year Bunny borrowed \$168 (about US\$100) from a revolving loan fund of the Jamaican Society for the Blind. The fund was set up with a \$15,000 Inter-American Foundation



Mitchell Denburg

grant. His loan went to buy materials to make pillows. He had three payments to make, of which he was able to make two, repaying about \$100. But in early January, business dropped off. "I owed other money: for my food, for my clothes, for the soap I was selling. People were rushing me for the money, and nobody was buying anything.

"My little girl—she 12 years old—she been starting to keep bad company. She want to join the Girl Guides. She need her uniforms, you know, and other things. So what to do? I need to keep her off the street. I give her the money, so she could become a Girl Guide."

But now—though it is only about \$60—he is in default on his loan to the society. The society is not unsympathetic, but he will probably not qualify for another loan. Hundreds of people are on the waiting list who have not had access to even \$168 of capital.

Bunny McGregor feels he cannot work, beg, or sell; and it seems to him, he owes money to everyone. "Mon," he says, "I have run out."

"They call me Traveler," says Warren Johnson. "I know every corner of the city; I never get lost. I go to parties, to church, to buy and sell. Sometimes I just move around; I'm the kind of person that got to be active."

Warren is tall—about six feet, two inches. As he taps forward—edging through a crush of pedestrians, darting children, vehicles, and street vendors—he occasionally jostles people or hits his head on an overhang.

"Sometimes I bump someone selling on the sidewalk, and they react, 'Why you don't stay home? Someone should carry you where you go!'

"I have to stop and tell them. I say, 'Hey, will you come and clothe me?'

Will you feed me? Will you shelter me? I have to go my way too. I can't stay home just so I be out of your way."

The problem with blind people, he says, is not that they can't get around but "they're scared."

"Scared," I ask, "that they'll get lost or hurt?"

"No, mon, they scared how they look. You feel embarrassed, scared by what people will say.

"You see, I step off a curb and into a puddle of water. I can feel the dirty water soaking into my shoes. I'm standing there, feeling people are looking at me, thinking I look like a big fool. It's terrible. But I say, 'So what, it's not my problem what they think,' and I go on my way."

Warren Johnson is 23. He is bright and painfully restless. It is easier to imagine him like Joanne Callahan—in college, studying with his classmates—than spending hours, as he actually does, in front of a family television set that he cannot see.

"Last year I was sitting at home, and I have an idea in my head. I can't get no work, but I have the idea that I can raise chickens. I talk to Mr. Logan at the society and he liked it, so I got a loan."

Warren's brother-in-law helped build the cages. First, Warren bought a feeder, then the 250 chicks which he raised and sold in about seven weeks. Then he bought a second batch.

"One morning my sister came in and

told me, 'Your chickens, they all dead.'

"I couldn't believe it! I went out and feel inside the cage, and I find each chicken dead. The rats had gotten in. I just couldn't believe it.

"The lights—the utility—it went out that night. So the rats got bold and chew through the mesh. I took the chickens, dug a hole, and bury them with my hands. So I'm losing.

"Now the landlord come and he tells me not to do that more. The neighbors say the chickens smell bad and attracting flies. Their word against mine."

"What are you going to do?" I ask.

"Maybe I sell biscuits or cigarettes, or things for kids in front of the house. I went to a training center and learned a little woodwork. But I was only there for eight months, so I didn't reach far enough to go on my own. Maybe I'll learn a craft, like making baskets."

"Isn't there a way to get rid of the flies and control the odor from the chickens," I suggest.

"Yes, I think so. I will have to go and find out. This only happened two weeks ago. Yes, I will have to go and solve this thing."

Dennis Haynes was a blind child with three sighted brothers and sisters. His parents, rural people near Mandeville, believed he would be a lifelong burden and were only too willing to

Dennis Haynes

send him to Kingston to the Salvation Army School for the Blind.

Today, at 34, Dennis Haynes is fired up, successful. He produces gospel tapes and records under his own imprint, Insight Gospel. He is founder and leader of a singing group and he owns a record stand, Narrow Way Gospel Line. To finance his small business, he qualified for two commercial bank loans and then a third, low-interest loan from the Society for the Blind. Gospel, he says, is a steady business, even during a recession. Though always pressed, he has managed to meet his total monthly payments of \$240, month after month.

"My goal in life is to meet and interview Stevie (Wonder)," he says. "He's been my inspiration. He takes on challenges, and he comes out winning. His music is good; he is popular; he's got an organization. What I like about him is that he is in business as well as singing. That's my desire, too, to do it total: live it, play it, earn from it."

Dennis' talk is of the future: hopes for tours, recordings, concerts, business expansion. He is enthusiastic about a forthcoming tour to California. "We will play churches, schools, concert halls. We should make enough money to buy our own equipment," he predicts.

I am surprised. "You mean you don't already own your own equipment?"

"No, mon, we don't have any. It all got stolen. We've been renting equipment for three years, saving our money to replace what got stolen."

"Someone here stole your equipment?"

"But not here, in Canada. We were doing a TV thing in Toronto. They said we could leave our equipment in a van while we were there. When we came out, only my sax and our piano was left."

He raises and waves a hand to say:



Poof!...gone.

"The police recovered one piece, but we couldn't stay to go to court and work it out. No money, no time to do that. That was a total loss: \$9,000—everything we had."

But Haynes is a survivor. "I look back at what happened in Canada, and I just have to say: I can't let it happen again. We've learned if you play for other people, they earn. Now we set up our own concerts. We find a location, pay for it, print announcements, advertise, rent a hall. You've always got to be thinking, finding a way to do a little better."

If you let it, he says, blindness becomes a psychological rather than a physical problem. "We are at the lowest scale of the ladder. People don't accept you. They expect you to be dependent. You have to show them that that's not so. I need a wealth of knowledge—about games, about football—to mix with people. My message is: I'm normal, you don't have to take care of me.

"I eat, sleep, and wear music. I'm

not as good in my music as I could be. I can't practice as I should. But I'm sure of my path; I'm achieving. I've been able to do what I didn't think I could."

He speaks with satisfaction of a two-day-a-week job at a private preparatory school teaching sighted children to read and write music.

"I keep them close to me, around my desk. I can hear when one is making a mistake, who is fidgeting or not paying attention. 'Wake up,' I tell them. 'Pay attention.'

'How you know? How you know?' they say."

He chuckles. "I can just tell."

"I didn't go to college; I didn't study teaching. I was afraid of this; I didn't know that I can do it. But I can."

Gloria Davis tells a different kind of success story.

Miss Davis is now 48 years old. She was born in St. Mary, Mark's district and came to Kingston when she was

very young. Although she learned to read a little, she never developed a special job skill. She never married and has no children. For most of her adult life, she worked as a domestic.

In 1974, she realized she was going blind.

"And then one morning I got up and I couldn't see. 'Oh, Lord,' I said, 'Why me? What did I do?'"

"It's not pretty. I weep day; I weep night. My sight went altogether; I couldn't see not a thing. I couldn't work; I had to be led around."

At the time of her blindness, Miss Davis rented a small room in the house of one of her "church sisters," Phyllis McCouthy (Sister Mac). "It was Sister Mac that helped me make it through."

"We sit together, we pray together," recalls Sister Mac. "She was so discouraged. I felt so sorry for her. We helped her. And the church helped her. We tried to tell her that life is worth

living, that there is a tomorrow."

Gloria Davis was buttressed, but she did not immediately become independent. Unlike Warren Johnson, she was afraid to travel alone on buses and to get jostled in the public markets. When she had to shop or visit the doctor, she traveled with someone, usually one of the younger children of the family. She helped around the house as best she could, but she could not assume major responsibility for cooking and house-keeping. To earn spending money she set up a stand—a kind of wire-mesh stall with shelves on it—in front of the house. There, she began selling soap, peanuts, dried milk, and matches. Still, she is five months behind on her \$10 a month rent, and her sales alone are insufficient to sustain her.

Through the Society for the Blind, Miss Davis was put on a waiting list for cataract removal. The prospect of an operation terrified her, but she and

Sister Mac prayed and fasted, and she went through with it. It was successful; and now, with thick glasses, her sight is partially restored. After a nine-year ordeal with total blindness, she says, "I know true joy."

Her story was gladdening, yet it bothered me. Thinking of the expense and years of caring as I walked out, I asked Sister Mac, "But why did you do all that? Isn't it hard enough to take care of your own family?"

"Why?" she said, looking at me, not fully comprehending the question. "Because I love her. I just do it because I love her. That's all."

Albert Johnson lives in a harsher world than do Sisters Gloria and Mac. Downtown Kingston, by everyone's account, is rough, on the edge, violent.

To ask for the "blind mon, Albert Johnson," is to be asked a lot of questions: "What you want to see him for?"

I am answering that to the satisfaction of Edward Dawson, a burly man whose address is the same as the blind man's but who is noncommittal regarding his whereabouts.

"I'm pure Bandoolu," he says.

"Bandoolu?" I say politely.

"It means I'm a pirate, mon. I rob; I cheat; I hustle. Mess with me, I'll kill you. See this scar"—he pulls at the neck of his t-shirt—"this is where my lady throw acid on me while I sleep."

I smile...a little—not very much—for as we speak, I realize that Dawson keeps one eye on me and an eye on a man in the street who is waving a knife and shouting at us.

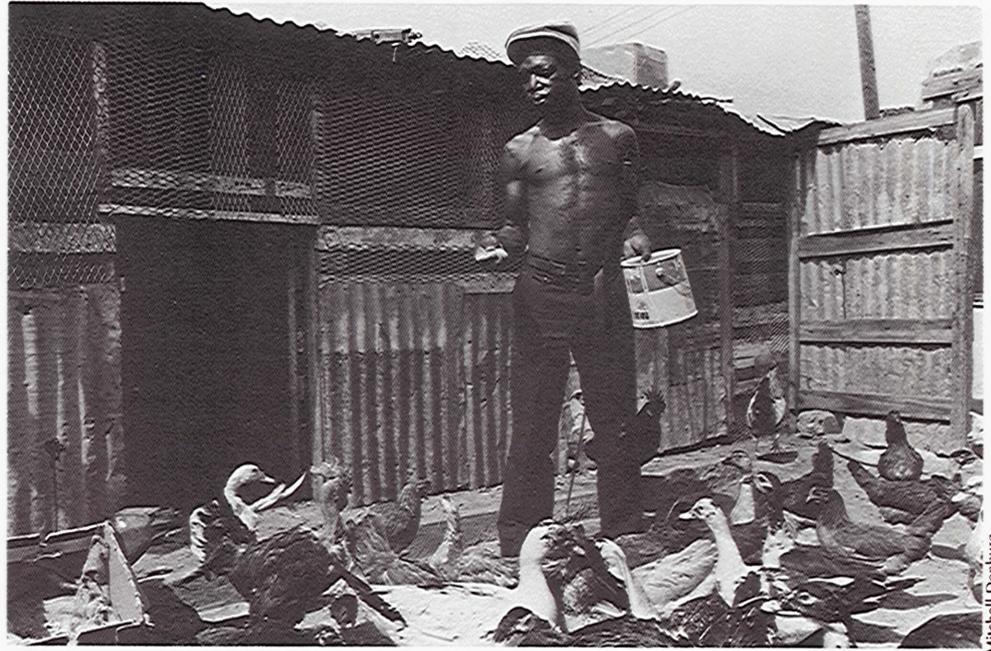
Finally Dawson produces Albert Johnson and tells this story for him: When he was 19, Johnson got in a fight and was scarred and blinded. Now he scrapes by, a little of this, a little of that.

A few months ago, the society

Gloria Davis and Sister Mac



Albert Johnson



Edward Dawson



helped him with a loan to set up a chicken coop. He raised the chickens and took them to market for sale. And what luck—someone offered him US dollars, about a thousand dollars.

Johnson sold the chickens; the dollars turned out to be counterfeit.

"When it happen, it really tore me up what they do to that blind mon. We give him a place. Maybe we help him out, you know?"

Dawson has a very short fuse. Interview over. I suspect that someone else in Kingston—someone with a supply of counterfeit US dollars—is also thinking about Edward Dawson.

Russell Morgan is a "bus preacher." That means his congregation is the bus-riding public. He gets on, say, a Number 2 at Tilda's Crossing, and shouts the gospel until the end of the line.

Cupping his hand like a megaphone, he shouts over the din of the motor. His hoarse voice rises and falls. A few passengers say "amen," a few look irritated, and most ignore him. Many passengers take the tracts that he passes out at the last stop; a very few, occasionally, make offerings.

With help from Dennis Haynes, a small loan from the Society for the Blind, support from his church, and in collaboration with his wife Beverly, Brother Morgan recently produced a musical LP, "First Trumpet." Once or twice a week, he sells the album from door to door or takes it to gospel record shops around town. He has about 28 albums left from his most recent pressing of 100 albums.

It is not much of a living. Yet he has almost paid off his loan, and when he does, he will almost certainly try a new loan and a new album.

Brother Morgan is an articulate man, passionate in his belief. He answers questions clearly and patiently; though he is far more interested in *my* spiritual well-being than *his* economic history.

He is serious, engaged. His is a life of service.

Arvel Grant, executive director of the Jamaican Society for the Blind, is one of the dozen or so college-educated blind people in Jamaica. Amiable and quick-witted, he moves about with seeming effortless. He laughs easily and often, yet his manner leaves no doubt...he is the kind of man who, if punched, will punch back.

"In the last election I waited in line a half hour to vote. I took someone with me. When I got to the front of the line,

the lady said, 'You must vote alone. That's the law.'

"I said, 'I wish to take this person behind the screen to help me. I'll sign a paper that it's OK. I need her help so that I can vote.'

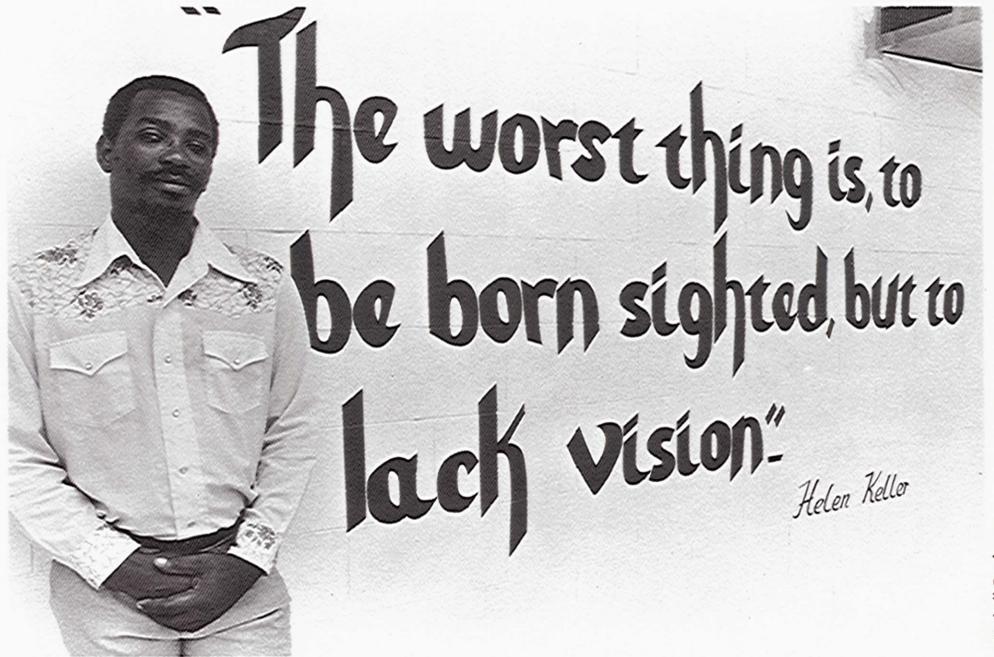
"But she said, 'No, the law says one person at a time in the voting booth. No one can go in with you.'

"I raised a fuss. 'Look,' I said, 'I need to vote, and I'll fight about it! You'll have to drag me away from here. I have a right to vote!' Finally, rather than go through all that, they let me in."

That, in a nutshell, is the distinction between being blind and what Grant calls the "problem of blindness." To be blind, to not see, is bad enough. But it is another matter altogether to lose rights that have—or should have—nothing to do with seeing: the right to vote, to move about, to have jobs, to have sexual and family life, to become educated.

"A sighted child in our schools needs pencil and paper. But a blind child—to have the same opportunity—needs more. He may need a Perkins braille and audio aids. If that's what it takes to give him equal opportunity, then that's what we try to get. If we need special provisions to vote, then let's get them. The aim of the society is to do *anything* that will strengthen the capacity of the blind to gain equal op-

Arvel Grant



Mitchell Denburg

portunity and to be independent."

The Jamaica Society for the Blind—originally, the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind—has been in existence for about 30 years. It was founded as a benevolent organization, in the British welfare tradition. "It was run like a country club," says Arvel Grant, in his blunt way. "The lords and ladies got together as a social event and sent Christmas trees once a year. It was well-intentioned, but it did not begin to address the problem of blindness—that people were spending 30 years in the back of the house without ever coming out."

In the early 1970's, a group of young blind people—many of them, like Grant, graduates of the Salvation Army School for the Blind—began meeting together and agitating for a voice in the organization. Such were the times that the statutes of the society stipulated specifically that not more than one of the 14 board members could be blind.

Says Derrick Palmer, one of the original activists, "We said, look, these are upper class people. They want nothing to do with us. We were aggressive, and we wanted change. So in 1975 we set up our own organization, the Progressive Blind Association.

"We got the blind together and drew up a national plan for the government. We put on dances, parties. We had monthly meetings—anything to get people to associate, to integrate.

"Then we said, look, we don't even have a permanent place to meet. We don't have any money. Why set up a new association? So we started to participate in the society again.

"Night after night we met—about 30 or 40 people. For the blind it was something new and exciting. Every meeting was packed. We wrote articles and brought our cause into the media. Even if people didn't want to know, we told them.

"Finally, we got a third of our people on the board. Our advantage was that we *always* attended meetings. We always showed up. Many of the old board members resigned in frustration or protest; and then, in 1978, I was elected the first blind chairman.

"We had been talking to Steve Vetter (then IAF representative for Jamaica) for a couple of years. When we established ourselves in control, IAF came through with its grant for US\$15,000. And then all of a sudden we weren't just agitators—which is all we really knew how to do—we were administrators."

What are the society's activities today? "Anything," says Arvel Grant, "that will enable people to take greater control of their own lives." In various stages of evolution and success, that *anything* now includes four kinds of activities: those dealing with sight (an eye rehabilitation program, an ophthalmology clinic, a national blind registration program, drug distribution for glaucoma, eye-testing in the schools); those dealing with adjustment to blindness (white-cane training, a national braille literacy program, a braille and audio library, a reading club, job counseling, training in typing, the revolving loan fund, a craft cooperative, a food and welfare program); those dealing with the sighted (family counseling, weekly educational radio pro-

grams, lobbying and pressuring for services); and recreational and social activities (hikes, beach outings, camping trips, a musical program, Saturday morning debates). Through these activities members are encouraged to get to know and rely on each other.

With never more than two or three full-time paid staff members, the society would appear to be stretched thin. But Grant and Palmer do not agree. The strength of the organization, as they see it, is a reservoir of people with time and extraordinary commitment to a cause. "We understand each other's needs," says Grant, "and we don't get tired of each other's company. There is an unlimited willingness among the blind to give and to help each other."

"Yet if we tell you that we have begun to address a significant portion of the blind," says Derrick Palmer, "we would be lying. Look, we may be able to help distribute glaucoma medicine to 2,000-3,000 people. But are we dealing with them in a meaningful way? No. There are maybe a thousand people we deal with here—a fourteenth of the blind population. We are not scratching the surface of their need or their potential."

The blind people to whom I talked may be an elite group. They are not only members of the Society for the Blind, but they are people who have concretely benefited from its revolving



Mitchell Denburg

loan fund. Perhaps they are not very representative of the 13,000 or so blind people who have had no contact with the society. Most of those people, I suppose, are homebound and do not find themselves talking to strangers. Most cannot read braille, even if they could afford or obtain braille books. Unlike Bunny McGregor, most haven't received *any* loan. Probably they don't have the restless, youthful energy of Warren Johnson; or the musical ability and business acumen of Dennis Haynes. Possibly they don't have the religious faith of Russell Morgan, or the loving adopted family of Gloria Davis, or a bandoolu friend like Albert Johnson. I am certain that very few will threaten fist fights at voting booths, as did Arvel Grant. Yet, I wondered, probably each has his own story; and each, within, has his or her own kind of strength and resources to survive.

In truth, the revolving loan fund established by a \$15,000 IAF grant can

hardly be said to have rewritten the script for anyone's life. So far, the revolving fund has assisted about 19 projects, 27 people. The loans have helped, but they have not made 27 people economically self-sufficient. Several loans were made with the intention of buying and reselling goods that were scarce in 1980-1981 but then became either abundant or unaffordable in 1982-83. Some of the society's loans may have been unrealistically small; perhaps larger loans to fewer people would have made more economic sense in the long run. With \$160, Bunny McGregor could not really have started a small business; he was only able to get slightly deeper in debt. All things considered, he was probably right in choosing to invest his last capital in a Girl Guide uniform for his 12-year-old daughter.

People like Arvel Grant and Derrick Palmer understand numbers *and* the logic of investing in Girl Guide uniforms. They see people in terms of

their value rather than their cost. They are aware but unimpressed that the hardware to make one person, Joanne Callahan, economically independent in the United States costs twice the entire IAF grant to the society. To that, Grant smiles and responds dryly, "Then I suppose we should have asked for more."

In the meantime, he seems more concerned by the immediate problem of Warren Johnson and his neighbors' objections to flies and chicken odor. "On Monday we will pick him up and see about this thing with the neighbors," he says. "We will talk to them; we will talk to the landlord. We'll change all that."

SHELDON ANNIS is program officer in research and evaluation at the foundation and is editor of this journal.

What to think about cooperatives: A guide from Bolivia

JUDITH TENDLER
in collaboration with
KEVIN HEALY and CAROL MICHAELS O'LAUGHLIN

I visited four peasant cooperative associations in Bolivia and came away perplexed. On the one hand, the four groups—which are described below—were decidedly successful in certain ways. On

the other hand, they lacked some of the basic qualities considered vital to this kind of success. In fact, they had various traits and problems that we usually associate with failure. My puzzlement over this strange combination of success and inadequacy, and my struggle to reconcile the two sides of the picture I saw, were the inspiration for most of what is written here. The most obvious achievement of the Bolivian groups is that they still exist, almost 10 years after their creation. Though they have not yet suffered the ending of outside A word, first, about the nature of the success I witnessed, before describing the seeming mismatch between donor funding, their survival and active life are something of a record, when compared to many other endeavors to organize rural cooperatives in Latin America. A second category of achievements of the Bolivian groups is the benefits they provided to peasant-farmer members and, in many cases, nonmembers: (1) better prices, greater reliability, and honest weights resulting from cooperative purchasing and marketing of their crops, using coop-owned trucks; (2) better prices, honest measures and weights, and unadulterated products available at

coop stores supplying consumer staples and agricultural inputs (the price differential tended to diminish after awhile, in marketing as well as retailing, whether because coop prices drifted back toward prevailing prices or because private merchants adjusted their prices downward to meet the coop competition); (3) savings in transport and other expenditures for farmers who previously had to travel some distance to buy consumer staples and inputs, and now could buy them nearby; (4) transport savings to producers resulting from the establishment of coop processing facilities (rice mills, cacao-processing plant) where before there were none; (5) availability of credit to those who previously had no access to banks; and (6) new opportunities for employment and apprenticeship in coop service operations, of which agroprocessing created the most jobs.

In addition to these benefits, two of the coop associations provided benefits to whole communities through community infrastructure projects undertaken in their early years—schools, potable water, irrigation, and road grading. Another association initiated a campaign to combat cacao blight, which could have a significant impact on grower incomes. And the agricultural equipment-rental service of one association allowed peasant farmers to make the move from shifting to stable agriculture, and from rice-growing to cane-growing, with corresponding in-

creases in income. Many of the benefits named here were reaped by nonmembers as well as members.

These direct benefits of coop activity tended to diminish as the groups struggled with the problems of running a business. Perhaps more enduring than the direct benefits were some less tangible results. In each region, the coop association represented one of the few institutions voicing the economic interests of peasant farmers. As organized groups, with one or another successful business venture to show for themselves, the associations were able to (1) make effective claims on public-sector goods and services available previously only to larger farmers (official lines of subsidized credit, agricultural research and extension services, favorable tariff treatment for imported equipment, etc.); (2) gain entry to private-sector industry associations (of rice millers, rice cooperatives, grape growers, grape distilleries) from which the coop associations gained valuable information about prices and marketing, and in which they could wield some influence on the side of peasant interests; and (3) set an example of how banks and public-sector agencies could relate to peasant groups, creating some confidence in these powerful institutions about the possibility of working with such groups and giving both sides experience with what such a relationship could be like. Again, these benefits were available to members and nonmembers alike.

Viewed against this picture of benefits, the inadequacies of the coop associations are striking. The most impres-



Wilhelm Kenning

sive inadequacy was in the area of management and administration. Prices charged for merchandise and services were sometimes too low to cover costs; credit collection was casual; inventory and sales records were often not kept; coop leaders were frequently the largest borrowers from coop credit funds; and acts of malfeasance were common.

The second surprising inadequacy of the coop associations had to do with membership growth. Membership seemed to stop growing at an early stage, even when the associations were expanding their services and income-earning activities. Each association had an average of 20 member coops with 17 members apiece, for a total of only 350 members. At most, coop membership reached only 25 percent of the families in a community and a much smaller share of the population of the area served by the association of coops. Given that each association group had received roughly US\$350,000 from the Inter-American Foundation, the small size of membership could be taken to mean an average investment of US\$1,000 per member family, in addition to significant investment in the form of member and other donor contributions, and IAF staff expenditures. Measured against the low-cost model of development assistance aspired to by the IAF, these costs would appear to be disappointingly high—an appearance that turns out to be modified significantly when we take nonmember benefits into account.

The final shortcoming of the four Bolivian groups had to do with leadership. Leadership and management positions usually rotated among the same

few persons, who were from among the better-off members of the community. Though entrenched and better-off leaders are not necessarily incompatible with success, they are usually thought of as leading to trouble—misappropriation of coop goods and services, programs that benefit only a select few, and the corrupt behavior that flourishes in an environment where there are no “democratic” pressures to be accountable.

It is obvious why the first inadequacy I list, weak management, would be cause for surprise. We are used to seeing this problem singled out, after all, as the cause of coop failure. It is not so obvious why we are bothered when coops have small and declining memberships, little participation, and entrenched leaderships. What does this matter, if they succeed in generating some significant benefits? The problem, of course, lies partly in our vision of coops as participatory and democratic. If they turn out to do some good, it is hard for us to believe that they are low on participation. In reaction to this contradiction, we tend to see more participation and less control by entrenched leaders than actually exist or, more skeptically, we suspect that significant benefits for the poor have really not been achieved. Also when we find that coops lack our favorite qualities, we tend to prescribe or fund remedies for catching up—more training in cooperativism, more rotation of leadership, more drives to expand membership.

Coops with entrenched leaderships, small and declining memberships, and weak participation also cause us concern because of the faith that we, as

donors, have placed in them. We see coop groups like the Bolivian ones as more desirable and genuine approaches to the alleviation of rural poverty than many programs of the public sector—particularly in countries with weak and hierarchical institutions serving the countryside, or with repressive regimes that are unsympathetic to a more proportional distribution of public-sector goods and services. If the membership of even the successful peasant federations is so paltry after so many years of our support, then how can we maintain our faith in these groups as a hopeful alternative to the deficient public sector?

Finally, we are uncomfortable about an entrenched and better-off leadership because we think it leads to an elite-biased distribution of coop benefits. This kind of distribution, after all, is what has disappointed us so many times about the programs of the public sector. If coops are to have an impact on the rural poor, in other words, we expect to see them larger and growing, more democratic and participatory, and with a leadership that rotates more vigorously and reaches more broadly into the community.

My search for ways to see the inadequacies of the Bolivian groups as more in harmony with their achievements led to four kinds of explanations: (1) the inadequacies turned out to be not as problematic as they are usually thought to be—or, resolving the problems was not always a prerequisite for doing well; (2) some of the problems were the side effects of *improvements* in management; (3) some of the inadequacies were more troublesome when they occurred in combination with certain crops, social structures, and tasks; and (4) certain tasks were distinctly more vulnerable to management inadequacies than others. All this is not to say that the shortcomings of the Bolivian

The cast of characters

Of the four groups visited, El Ceibo and Bella Vista are located in the same region. The Alto Beni is a subtropical region where the government carried out large colonization projects in the 1950's and 1960's, after which the public sector virtually withdrew and vigorous spontaneous migration followed. Cacao, coffee, bananas, rice, and corn are the principal crops; cacao, introduced by the colonization project, is the only export crop produced by any of the groups studied (coffee is marketed only domestically).

El Ceibo (Central Regional de Cooperativas "El Ceibo," Ltda.), a 350-member association of 18 coops located in the cacao-producing area of the Alto Beni, was founded in 1976 by four small village groups that banded together to market cacao. Ceibo now buys 60 percent of the cacao marketed in the Alto Beni and, with its own 10-ton truck, markets it in La Paz, an eight-hour truckride away. On the backhaul from La Paz, Ceibo brings consumer staples that it wholesales to the small consumer stores of its member coops. Ceibo also operates a cacao-processing plant (a second drying plant is about to be completed), where it ferments and dries about 40 percent of the cacao it buys (it purchases the rest home-dried); it has a small chocolate factory in La Paz, which absorbs less than one percent of the cacao marketed. Ceibo is now embarking upon an agricultural extension program to combat cacao blight, which has decimated much of the cacao plantings in the area.

Of the four groups, Ceibo has taken on the smallest number of activities, concentrating almost exclusively on cacao marketing. It is the only one of the groups without a credit program, and the only one without a retail consumer store operation; it is also the only one to have succeeded at a wholesale store operation. Partly because it attempted less, Ceibo seems to be the most successful of the groups—in terms of its finances and its impact on the region. IAF support for Ceibo, starting in late 1980 and amounting to US\$200,000, was for (1) operating capital to purchase cacao, (2) construction of a second drying plant, (3) purchase of a second truck, (4) cooperative education, and (5) the salary of an administrator for the cacao-processing operation.

Bella Vista (Cooperativa de Ahorro y Crédito "Bella Vista," Ltda.), situated in the higher coffee-producing zone adjacent to El Ceibo, started in 1969 as a savings and loan cooperative that was closely guided by a Franciscan priest. Receiving outside funding in the late 1970's, Bella Vista expanded into the marketing of coffee and rice, acquired a small rice mill, opened a large

consumer store, and continued its savings and loan operations. With about 200 members dispersed throughout the area, Bella Vista is the only one of the four groups that is a large single coop; the others are associations of small affiliated coops based in communities of less than 100 families. Partly because of the geographic dispersion of Bella Vista's membership, it was the most precarious of the four groups; it also experienced a major loss of capital and in community confidence because of political repression resulting from its role in organizing a strike of the Alto Beni's farmers against increased trucking rates and other policies of the military government. IAF support for Bella Vista, starting in 1978, amounted to US\$185,000, and was used for (1) the purchase of a 14-ton truck, (2) operating capital for marketing, (3) operating capital for a consumer store, (4) a fund to promote eradication of coffee rust (a plan that did not materialize), and (5) cooperative education.

CCAM (Central de Cooperativas Agropecuarias Mineros, Ltda.), an association of 12 member coops with a total of 309 members, is located in the eastern lowland region of Santa Cruz, a center of Bolivian agricultural growth during the last 20 years. Growth was stimulated by heavy government investments in colonization, transport and power infrastructure, agroprocessing, and credit and other subsidized inputs for commercial agriculture. CCAM's members produce mainly rice and corn, with a better-off minority growing sugar cane and occasionally vegetables. Founded in 1972 and assisted for many years by a Maryknoll priest, CCAM was the most highly capitalized of the groups, mainly as a result of various donations for equipment. The association started out with rice marketing, and then acquired (1) a large rice mill and, later, storage and drying equipment, (2) an agricultural equipment-rental service (including a bulldozer and motorgraders used for opening and maintaining access roads, as well as land clearing), (3) trucks for a transport service, (4) a wholesale and retail consumer goods operation, (5) an equipment-repair shop, and (6) a credit fund for production loans. Of these activities, the rice mill is the most profitable.

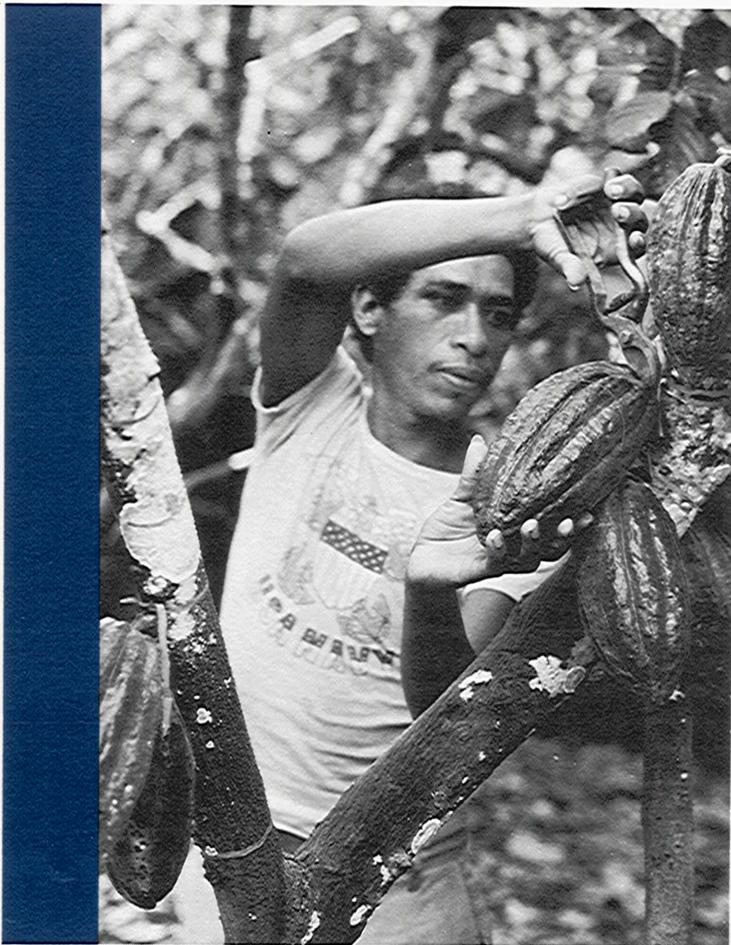
Recently, CCAM became the only one of the four groups to receive funding from a large donor (US\$500,000), the Inter-American Development Bank. CCAM was also the only group to secure short-term production credit from a local private bank for lending to its members, which it succeeded in repaying. (From the same bank it also obtained operating-capital credit for its rice mill.) IAF support to CCAM, starting in 1974 with US\$45,000, amounted to \$206,000,

which was used for (1) operating capital for the consumer-store operation, (2) grain storage and drying facilities for the rice mill (still to be completed), (3) a revolving-credit fund for production loans to members, and (4) the replacement of pontoon bridges washed out by floods.

COINCA (Cooperativa Integral Campesina), a 400-member association comprised of 20 coops in the southernmost department of Bolivia (Tarija), was founded in 1975 by a Jesuit social action agency, Acción Cultural Loyola (ACLO)—the only one of the four groups to have been created by an intermediary or "facilitator" organization. Tarija is a highland valley area of much older settlement than the Alto Beni and Santa Cruz, and suffers acutely from the twin problems of minifundization and soil erosion. Tarija's peasants produce potatoes and corn; the better-off grow wine grapes, citrus, and vegetables—mostly on plots of no more than a few hectares, in comparison to the 12- and 13-hectare average plots in, respectively, the Alto Beni and Santa Cruz. Tarija's peasant farmers are unique in their long use of chemical fertilizer (on their potato crop), which made it possible for fertilizer supply to be one of the mainstays of COINCA's activities.

COINCA operates a revolving loan fund for production credit to members (severely decapitalized through inflation, low interest rates, and delinquency), an agricultural-input supply operation, and a small winery (its most profitable operation), along with a technical assistance and credit program for grape growers, who are a better-off 30 percent of members. COINCA succeeded in obtaining government credit and assistance for a poultry-raising project for member coops, the outcome of which is still in doubt, and is the only group to have sponsored some collective production projects, many of which have not done well. Partly because of the philosophy of its founder organization, ACLO, COINCA tried to undertake more activities than any of the other groups, which perhaps contributed to its being less successful than El Ceibo and CCAM.

IAF support for COINCA, starting in 1976, has amounted to US\$415,000 and was used for (1) a credit fund for production loans, (2) operating capital for a consumer-store operation, (3) construction of a headquarters and store building in the capital city of Tarija, (4) purchase of a vehicle, (5) administrative salaries (COINCA was the only group with a paid, outside professional manager, agronomist, and accountant), and (6) an education program. (The winery operation was funded by a German volunteer agency.)



El Ciebo, Alto Beni. Coop member harvesting cacao.

groups are not to be taken seriously. Rather, the causal link between problems and failure—and between “pre-requisites” and success—turned out to be looser than we are used to thinking it to be.

Spillover and arrested growth

After almost 10 years of life and several years of IAF support, the Bolivian farmer associations were not only small, but they did not seem to display much impulse to grow. By 1982, moreover, all three of the associations had informally expressed a desire to stop growing at about 400 members. Why this arrest in membership growth, especially in the cases where coop income-earning activities were expanding at a steady pace?

People did not join the Bolivian coops, or ended up leaving them, for various reasons: (1) coop work obligations were burdensome; (2) hopes for patronage refunds were not fulfilled; (3) episodes of corrupt and incompetent leadership caused disillusionment;

(4) it was not always in the interests of leaders and members for membership to grow; (5) the agricultural-production services provided by these associations were largely irrelevant to people with little land or none at all; (6) people did not have to join in order to reap some of the most important benefits of coop action—the so-called “free-rider problem;” and (7) certain improvements in management caused membership to be less attractive or actually led to the cutting off of membership growth. The last two reasons are the most important and the least obvious, so I give them special attention here.

All the Bolivian groups engaged in agroprocessing, marketing, and consumer stores. Each of these activities served nonmembers as well as members, meaning that benefits reached far beyond the 350 member families. It was not benevolence that caused the coops to allow their benefits to “spill over” to those who did not join—but, rather, the simple economics of their task: to achieve the volume of business

required for the economic operation of a rice mill, a store, or a 14-ton truck, these small coops and their associations needed a larger number of buyers and sellers than the membership provided. Economies of scale, in other words, “forced” the groups to allow some of their benefits to be enjoyed by nonmembers.

In addition to economies of scale, three other “structural” traits of certain coop tasks caused them to spill benefits to nonmembers: (1) for activities that provided public goods (roads and road maintenance, potable water, schools), limitation of use to members or any other particular group in the community was not feasible or customary; (2) for some activities, members could not realize full benefits unless nonmembers participated too (control of contagious crop and livestock diseases); and (3) in some cases, innovations had a propensity to spread by themselves (agricultural practices that can be easily copied by observing neighbors, seeds and other inputs that are commonly traded among neighbors, and improved pasture grasses and other plants that spread like weeds). In all these cases, small and nongrowing memberships would not necessarily be a cause for concern, since the activities engaged in assured the spillover of benefits.

The “spillover” activities of the coop associations contrasted sharply with other activities like credit to individuals, collective production projects, and paid jobs in coop enterprises. These goods and services were not ruled by economies of scale, were usually in scarce supply, and hence were available to members only. Though this exclusive access was good for attracting new members—since it handsomely rewarded those who joined—it did nothing to help spread benefits the way the spillover activities did.

The free riders. Spillover may be good for reaching large numbers, but it is bad for the growth of members and their capital contributions. People won't want to contribute to a coop, that is, if they can get the benefits without joining. Cooperativism, like labor unionism, is quite familiar with this "free-rider problem" and has laid down some basic rules for avoiding it. One such rule, a basic tenet of Rochdale cooperativism, is that purchasing and marketing operations should provide benefits to consumers *only* in the form of profit distributions or patronage refunds (which can be limited to members)—and not in the form of better prices (from which all buyers will benefit, member and nonmember alike). In this way, the coop can take advantage of the nonmember's contribution to business volume and economies of scale without having to provide him a reward through better prices.

Why wouldn't the Bolivian groups have tried to cut down on spillovers and reduce their adverse impact on membership? First, the income-earning activities of these groups did not generate enough profits to distribute—a not unusual outcome; when profits did materialize, they were often commandeered to cover losses in other coop activities or to capitalize expansions. Second, and also common, the Bolivian groups found it hard to charge prices that covered their costs if those prices were as high as prevailing prices—and even if they returned any profits to member-patrons at the end of the year. To adhere to prevailing prices, they felt, was to behave exactly like the "exploitative" middleman whom they were supposed to replace—and hence would stand them in bad stead with the community. In this sense, the Bolivian associations were behaving *contrary* to what one might expect of a

small group with a better-off, entrenched leadership: they were setting prices with a social conscience. (Sometimes, unfortunately, these "socially conscious" prices did not cover costs.) Patronage refunds and prevailing prices, in sum, do not always represent realistic policy choices for rural groups like the Bolivian ones, even though they may be the best way to attract members and keep away the free riders.*

Success and dependence. Small membership is bad for coops because it translates into very little self-generated capital, which is supposed to form the basis of cooperative independence.* Like many coops assisted by outside donors, the Bolivian groups enjoyed the luxury of not being dependent on member capital for their growth. Good performance in their ventures earned them outside donations for projects far beyond what they could have raised through increased capital contributions from members. That the groups were financially dependent as a result was not really a concern for them, or for their coop promoters. Indeed, they saw their "dependence" on outside donations as allowing them to be *independent* of the public sector of their own countries.

In order to gain a different perspective on the financial dependence of the Bolivian groups, it is helpful to remember that the model of an independent agricultural coop, financed out of capital contributions from members, is more descriptive of North American historical experience than of current Latin American reality. In North Amer-

*Most coops tended to pay and charge prices that were closer to the prevailing ones as time went on—in order to meet their unexpectedly higher costs or because prevailing prices of private operators had come down in response to coop competition.

ica, rural coops were formed mainly by medium and large farmers with the capacity to make significant capital contributions, whereas in Bolivia and many other Latin American countries, farmers of these means often constitute only a better-off few. In Latin America, in other words, the financially independent coop may be an unrealizable goal—if we expect these organizations to draw their members from among the poor.

The acid test of the strength of donor-funded coops occurs, of course, when outside funding stops. None of the Bolivian groups had reached that point, even though some are almost 10 years old. Critics of the groups argue that they would be "nothing" without their outside funds and patrons, while supporters argue that self-sustaining success requires many years of outside support. Though the Bolivian groups might indeed have collapsed or severely contracted if their outside funding had been withdrawn, it is impossible to know what strength and resources they would mobilize if this state of affairs were actually upon them. Until the acid test takes place, moreover, these "financially dependent" groups end up providing some important services to the peasant economy over a long period—as well as building skills among the peasantry and the strength to deal with a powerful, nonpeasant world. The success of many such groups, finally, is often crowned with their "adoption" by the local public sector—at least in terms of financial support—so the acid test never takes place. Some of the concern about financial dependence, therefore, may be pointless.

*In addition, the Bolivian coops were not too demanding of existing members to pay in their capital subscriptions and dues.

COINCA, Tarija. Slaughtering chickens in cooperative poultry project.



Good management versus growth. In addition to the spillover dynamic, there was another good thing about the arrest in growth of the Bolivian groups. Some of the loss of membership and discouragement of potential members was a result of certain attempts by the coop associations to improve management. CCAM and COINCA, for example, placed a moratorium on accepting new groups after the associations' third or fourth year of existence. They did this in trying to reduce the losses arising from delinquency in credit and store operations—two activities particularly vulnerable to management inadequacy, for reasons discussed later. The associations had themselves contributed to these problems by being casual about delinquency, accounting, and the charging of interest. But they now wanted to reform their ways, after witnessing the erosion of capital caused by their laxness.

Growing memberships made it difficult for the Bolivian groups to work on these problems.* Because each new coop usually wanted a store and access to credit, the only way for the associations to start reducing their credit-caused problems was to refuse to accept new member groups or, at least, to not vigorously promote them. Also, some would-be members and even old members lost interest in membership upon learning that credit would no longer be so "easy." From the coop's point of view, of course, this loss represented a desirable process of self-selection, whereby would-be delinquent borrowers were discouraged from joining.

Given the credit problems of the Bolivian groups, characteristic of most

*The management problems attendant upon membership growth were nowhere as great for activities like processing and marketing, as discussed below.

coop credit and store operations, it is not surprising that El Ceibo was the only one of the four groups currently showing an interest in expanding its membership: it was the only group without a credit program, and the only one to operate its store system under a unique barter relationship, accepting cacao in exchange for merchandise. These differences meant that membership expansion was not as troublesome for El Ceibo as it was for the other groups.

CCAM and COINCA took a vigorous approach to the problem of store credit by "de-linking" store expansion from the creation of new coops. They centralized their store operations in one place under their direct control; and they severed the wholesale relationship with affiliated stores or exercised greater control over the stores' prices, profit margins, and management practices. In that these latter improvements involved less "local control" of the affiliated store, they made the member coop look more like a buying and selling outpost of the association—at least with respect to the store activity—than like an independent and democratic community body. The marketing operations of El Ceibo also resembled this more centralized, less "democratic" way—with member coops seeming more like "buying

agents" for the association than genuinely participatory community bodies. Though the cooperative as buying agent may not jibe with our image of cooperativism, it may nevertheless be consistent with achieving a broader reach for otherwise limited coop benefits.

It is not new to say, as I have here, that the growth of high-spillover activities like marketing and stores can be choked off by the need to create a new cooperative every time the association wants to expand its service into a new community. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the coop movement in the United States experienced considerable controversy over the question of "federated" versus "centralized" coop associations. Proponents of the federated, "bottom-up" form saw it as the only way to achieve truly democratic organizations. Proponents of the centralized, more "top-down," associations pointed to the difficulties of creating numerous, capable local organizations and of thereby achieving the volume of business necessary to obtain significant bulk discounts. Many of the more centralized associations, like the Grange, commonly sold through field agents or local entities, and sometimes even private merchants. This was the only way to achieve scale economies, they felt, without having their efforts

unduly constrained by the slow process of creating myriad affiliated organizations from scratch.

The Bolivian associations might also be able to expand their services with greater facility, and benefit more people, if they resorted to this more "centralized" approach in some activities—training persons who reside in unserved communities, for example, as paid field agents for marketing. And the centralized coop association, though perhaps more "top-down" than the federated ideal, still represents a highly decentralized and local institution in comparison to the public sector and its "local" agencies. It is this

comparison to the state, in turn, that is behind the argument of many coop supporters in favor of coops as a "better" approach to improving the conditions of peasant farmers.

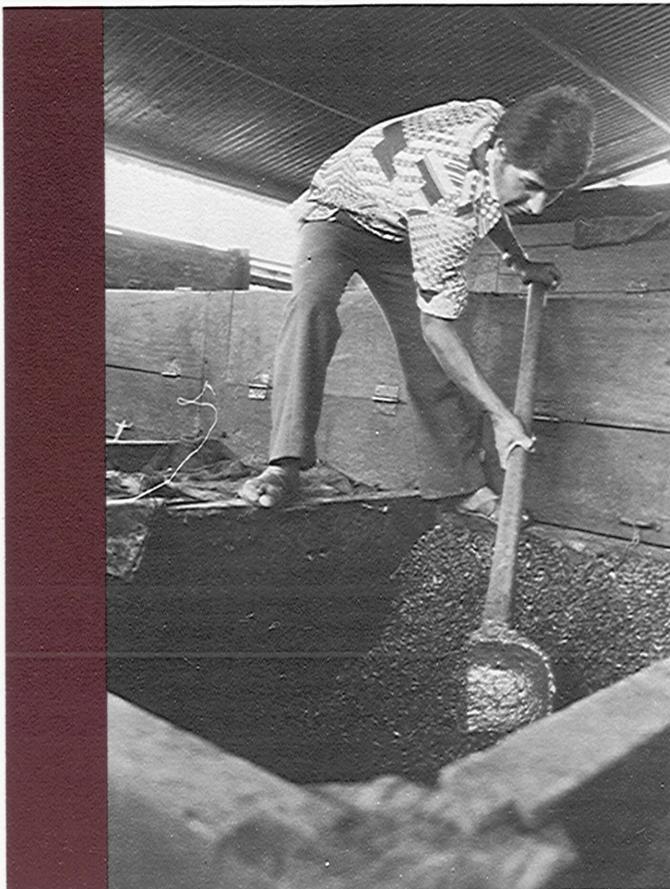
Barter is another way to reduce the management problems of store operations, as illustrated by El Ceibo's combination of consumer merchandising with the purchasing of cacao. Barter, of course, is also the time-honored practice of many private merchants in rural areas, who sell consumer staples on credit and receive payment in harvested products. In the hands of private merchants, the barter relationship is considered by many to be exploita-

tive of the peasant. A more drastic approach than barter to problems of store credit is to ban credit completely and sell only for cash—as dictated by the principles of Rochdale cooperativism. Though the Rochdale approach makes excellent management sense, the barter model of El Ceibo and the "exploitative" rural middleman may be preferable on distributional grounds: rural stores are often the only places where the poorest community members ever get access to credit and, therefore, are their lifeline to consumer necessities during hard times. Here is another case, then, where the pursuit of good management and healthy cooperativism is at odds with social equity—and where donors, therefore, should pay special attention to finding ways to preserve the more equitable results.

To sum up, arrested growth of coop membership need not always be a cause for concern. It may sometimes be a welcome sign of improved management—as long as benefits spill beyond members, and the growth of coop activities is not tightly linked to the formation of new coops. When growth is arrested by activities that are particularly vulnerable to management problems—namely, stores and credit funds—donors might consider shifting their funding to other activities that are less demanding of socially difficult behavior, more compelling of management skills, less vulnerable to management inadequacies, or less linked to membership growth. In the following section, I will discuss some of the activities that possess these qualities.

The structure of tasks, society, and the economy

Entrenched and better-off leaders, living off coop spoils, have been the bane of cooperative history—both North and Latin American. The princi-



Wilhelm Kenning

El Ciebo, Alto Beni. Emptying boxes of fermented cacao to load it into natural driers.

ples of Rochdale cooperativism are designed to prevent this: coop officials must be elected by the membership, new elections must be held yearly, and elected officials cannot hold paid positions in the cooperative. The leaders of the Bolivian coops and their associations looked exactly like what these principles were meant to avoid: they were the better-off members of the community, the same few were re-elected year in and year out, and they or their relatives held the few paid positions in the organization. If other groups with leadership like this came to unfortunate ends, how were the Bolivian groups able to do better?

We have already identified two reasons why entrenched leaders are not necessarily a problem. First, if one views the member coop as a local buying and selling outpost for the coop association, then an entrenched person in charge is not necessarily so bad, and may even have some advantages. Second, some activities like marketing, processing, and stores force coops to spill their benefits widely. For these activities, therefore, the reach of a coop's benefits will be in some ways beyond the self-interested control of the entrenched leaders. But why would an entrenched leader choose the spillover activities in the first place, if he and his cronies were only looking after their own interests? This is where a strong influence will be played by social, agronomic, and economic conditions—in conjunction with the nature of the coop's task.

Fragmentation and leadership. The role played by the social environment is the most obvious. Three of the four Bolivian groups were comprised of member coops based in small hamlets of 20 to 100 families. (The fourth, Bella Vista, was a large coop with no affiliates.) Each association was headed by leaders

who had risen through these member coops and continued to live in their home communities; even those few leaders who were exceptions to this pattern maintained strong ties to their communities, continuing to cultivate and live there part time. Like the other members of their small communities, these leaders were farmers—not the merchants, traders, teachers, and shop-owners who are often found at the head of coops in rural towns.

Though the leaders of the Bolivian groups were definitely from among the better-off members of their communities, they shared as farmers the same economic interests as their poorer farming neighbors—the desire for better crop prices, lower transport costs, access to production credit, and consumer staples and agricultural inputs at lower prices. This contrasts with the merchant and trader leaders of coops with headquarters in larger rural towns. As businessmen, they would be not at all happy to see their coop charging prices lower than their own for consumer staples, or offering higher prices to growers, or introducing low-cost credit. The pursuit of self-interest by this latter kind of coop leadership has, in various instances, most certainly conflicted with the interests of farmer members.

That an entrenched and better-off leadership is less of a problem if it is based in small and dispersed communities, where mostly growers live, takes us back to the problem of membership growth: putting together and running an association of 350 members will be more difficult if 20 different coops in 20 different communities must first be created, than if everybody can be put together in one central town. Thus the success of the Bolivian associations at avoiding a non-farmer leadership was partly at the cost of a much more difficult organizational task.

Crops and their social character. The agricultural economy of each coop environment will contribute to determining whether leaders define their interests as consistent with those of the community. Of the four groups, El Ceibo seemed to exhibit the most socially concerned behavior and generated the greatest amount of spillover, even though its leadership was as entrenched as that of the other groups. At CCAM, in contrast, one heard criticisms of "elite dominance" and "rich peasants looking only after themselves;" the leadership had motorbikes or pickup trucks, and second houses in the busy cantonal capital where association headquarters was located. Why El Ceibo did better than CCAM at being egalitarian is revealed by the strikingly different socio-economic structures of the two areas.

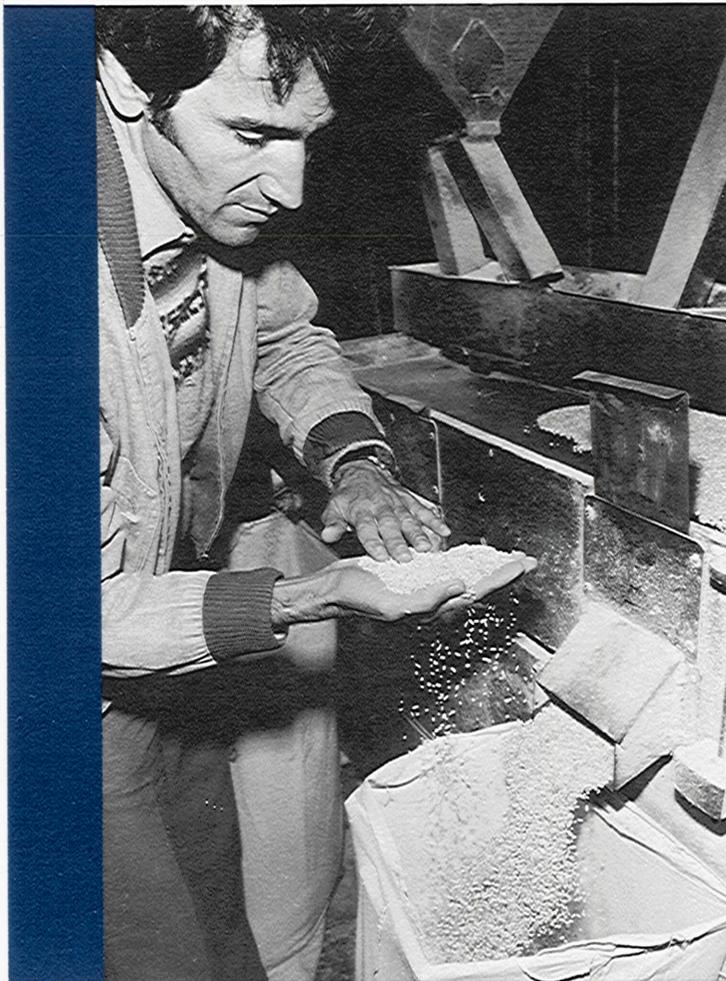
Unlike the Alto Beni, home of El Ceibo, CCAM's Santa Cruz exhibited a strong socio-economic differentiation on the basis of crop. In Santa Cruz, poor peasant farmers grew rice and were usually situated far from roads. The better-off farmers, in contrast, grew sugar cane and had good access to roads. Rice was grown under the shifting slash-and-burn system, requiring the eventual abandonment of one's land and the perpetual moves to new areas of virgin forest on the nearby frontier.* Sugar cane was competitive

*Under ideal conditions of population density, slash-and-burn systems are self-perpetuating and do not require abandonment because of soil regeneration during long fallow periods. But population densities in Santa Cruz, as in other rapidly growing frontier areas, are beyond the "carrying capacities" of the land, causing fallow periods to be too short and leading to eventual deterioration of soil quality. In Santa Cruz, the problem is exacerbated by a second growth of weed-grass ("barbecho") that makes subsequent crop cultivation impossible under the slash-and-burn system.

only when grown on land cleared of tree stumps, and with the use of mechanized land-clearing and land-preparation techniques. Cane also needed to be near good transport because of its perishability, once harvested, and the low value of cane in relation to its volume. The differences between sugar and rice meant that the only way for a peasant to improve his income markedly in Santa Cruz was to have well-located land, access to machinery for land clearing and preparation, and credit to hire labor. Even getting this far, a peasant still could not market his cane without buying a quota at the local mill, which generally was not interested in selling quotas to small farmers.

In the Alto Beni, there was no such differentiation by crop. Everybody could plant the high-value crop (cacao) from the start, no matter what his location or means. Though cacao was also perishable, it had the advantage over sugar cane of being amenable to home-processing, if one did not have ready access to transport. (Most Ceibo members sold their cacao home-processed.) As a perennial crop, of course, cacao requires more capital to establish than annual crops like rice—leading one to expect economic differentiation between better-off growers of cacao and the poorer growers of annual crops. But cacao, known as a small-farmer crop, was considerably less demanding of capital than sugar cane and was perfectly competitive without mechanization. And most growers in the Alto Beni had access to the capital for starting cacao—in the past, through government credits provided by the colonization projects, and later through assistance to new settlers from their established relatives.

Finally, the remoteness of the Alto Beni from its consumer markets and the resulting difficulty of transport



Wilhelm Kenning

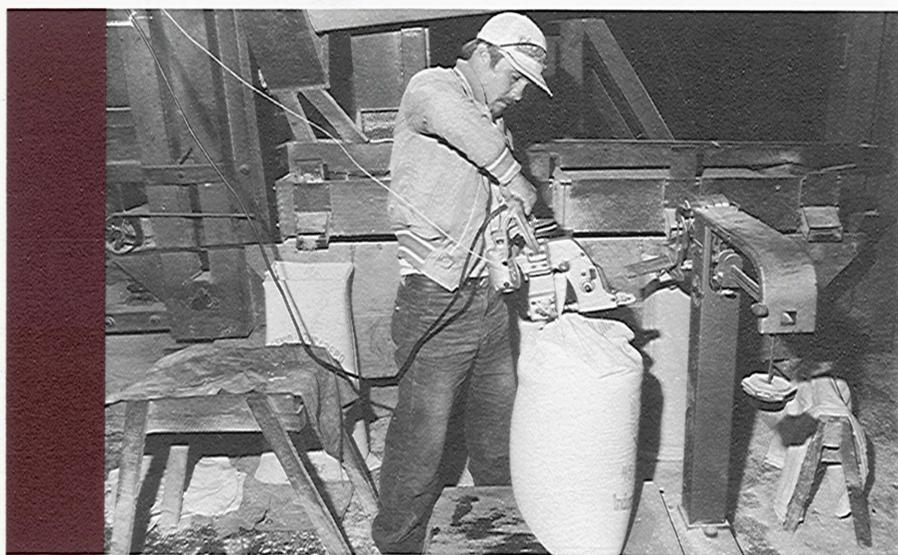
CCAM, Santa Cruz. Checking quality of freshly hulled rice.

made marketing the most important problem. The marketing problem was a great equalizer, since it afflicted better-off and poor farmers alike. The gains that farmers dreamed of had to do with reducing their transport costs and increasing their selling prices for cacao—and not with shifting to higher-value, more capital-intensive crops. (Likewise, farmers expressed little concern about gaining access to credit.) In comparison to sugar cane in Santa Cruz, then, cacao's characteristics made for less of a social and economic gap between better-off and poorer farmers in the Alto Beni. Correspondingly, there was no differentiation by crop between the El Ceibo leadership and its rank-and-file. This was in contrast to the distinct differentiation at CCAM between the cane-growing leadership and the rice-growing rank-and-file, not to mention the rice-growing non-members.

The cane-growing interests of CCAM's leadership led to coop activities that, coincidentally, had an inher-

ently low spillover potential. A peasant farmer wanting to shift from rice to cane—as all rice-growing peasants in Santa Cruz who accumulated a little capital wanted to do—could be helped by four types of coop activities: (1) agricultural equipment services (cane was competitive only on land cleared of trees by bulldozers and ploughed by tractor); (2) credit to hire labor (of the three regions, agricultural wages were the highest in Santa Cruz); (3) transport on which one could be absolutely reliant (because of cane's perishability); and (4) access to a cane mill (cane growers could not sell cane without buying a quota from the mill). CCAM's activities were concentrated in precisely these four areas: it was the only one of the three groups that ran an agricultural equipment-rental service, obtained credit at a private local bank for lending to members, and had a fleet of its own trucks, which were used mainly for cane transport. (CCAM also used a large amount of donated capital to purchase a cane quota.) None of these

CCAM, Santa Cruz. Closing and weighing sacks of hulled rice.



Wilhelm Kenning

activities had the forced spillover potential that processing, marketing, and stores do.

Because the agro-economic environment of the Alto Beni defined an "equalizing" crop and activity (cacao and its marketing) as the most urgent need of farmers, El Ceibo was automatically drawn to a high-spillover activity that brought benefits to better-off leaders, poorer members, and poorer nonmembers alike. In Santa Cruz, in contrast, CCAM was drawn to the low-spillover activities of credit, agricultural equipment services, and transport dedicated to a minority of peasant farmers—as dictated by the region's high labor costs, the possibility of improving peasant incomes by changing crops, and the need for mechanization to bring about and sustain that change. CCAM's entrenched and better-off leadership also contributed to make things work out this way, of course, but certainly not without the help of these structural conditions.

Remarkably, this same set of structural conditions worked in exactly the opposite direction in the case of

CCAM's rice mill, despite the association's cane-grower leadership. While the difficulty of cane-milling excluded that activity as a way for the leadership to pursue its own interests, rice-milling presented itself as a much easier venture. Since the cane growers also grew rice, rice-milling was not an unlikely next step for them to take in the cooperative venture. Though the rice mill would also benefit the poorer rank-and-file and nonmembers—and hence might not have been as desirable to the cane-growing leadership as the more focused equipment-rental, transport, and credit services—the mill also turned out to yield more profit and fewer problems than these other services. To sum up, four "structural" factors in CCAM's environment combined to draw the association into successful rice-milling—a high-spillover, and "equalizing" activity: (1) the impracticality of going into cane-milling, (2) the widespread cultivation in Santa Cruz of a crop (rice) for which the processing task was particularly easy, (3) the centrality of this crop to poorer-farmer income, in addition to its being cultivated

by the better-off cane-growers, and (4) the fact that agroprocessing was an easier task than the credit, transport, and equipment operations taken on by CCAM.

Another example of the interaction of the agricultural environment with social impacts comes from El Ceibo. In the Alto Beni, cacao disease became so serious in the late 1970's that it reduced yields by more than half over a period of only four or five years. Eradication of cacao disease therefore came to be an urgent concern of Alto Beni farmers; knowledge of eradication techniques, and the ability to apply them, represented a conspicuous way to increase grower income. Campaigns against contagious crop diseases, of course, have high spillover effects because everyone has to participate in order for anyone to be protected. In addition, demonstrations of the new technique (mainly radical pruning) are like a public good—anyone can attend, or can copy from his neighbor. Like the Alto Beni's marketing problem, then, cacao disease was a great equalizer. It attacked large and small producers alike and required participation by small producers in order for the crops of better-off producers to be free of disease. And because a contagious crop disease was such a pressing problem in the Alto Beni, El Ceibo was drawn into an activity with inherently high spillover benefits.

Fertilizer supply is another example of how the agricultural economy of a region and the economics of a particular task combine to determine the benefit distribution of an association's activities. Of the four groups, COINCA was the most involved in agricultural input supply, particularly fertilizer. Fertilizer supply was the centerpiece of its early success; in the beginning, it had sold fertilizer at half the prevailing price and, even when that differential

CCAM, Santa Cruz. Silos for processing and storing rice.



disappeared, it still marketed a product with the rare reputation of being unadulterated and honestly weighed.

When coops supply fertilizer, there is a good potential for spillover benefits because significant discounts can be obtained on large wholesale purchases. The coop, as in the case of COINCA, will want to sell to as large a number of users as possible. (Fertilizer supply is also an easier management task in comparison to the supply of consumer staples, as discussed later.) In addition, Tarija is one of the rare places in Bolivia where peasants have been using chemical fertilizer for quite some time on a traditional crop—potatoes. Fertilizer was not used at all in the Alto Beni or in Santa Cruz, even for the cane grown by upwardly mobile peasants. In these areas, there were almost no crops with a yield response as high as for potatoes; and the abundance of land, in contrast to Tarija, made it cheaper to exhaust land and move on to new land than to invest in returning nutrients to the soil. Even though fertilizer was used widely for potatoes in Tarija, moreover, it was not used in wine grapes, Tarija's "upwardly mobile" crop. Like rice in Santa Cruz, finally, Tarija's potatoes are grown as a cash crop by better-off as well as poorer peasants. This means

that any improvement in the price, quality, and availability of fertilizer would be in the interest of the better-off coop leadership as well as the poorer farmers.

The socio-economic environment of Tarija dictated that COINCA go into fertilizer supply and that this activity could have a broad social impact. The CCAM case was different: the socio-economic environment produced a leadership that was distinguished from the rest of the membership by the crop it produced, and by coop activities that tended to increase the distance between leaders and poorer farmers. Rice-milling was the significant exception. Structural conditions, finally, also led COINCA into making wine and providing credit and technical assistance to grape growers, much as such conditions led CCAM into rice-milling. As an activity, the task of wine-making had the same desirable traits as rice-milling—as explained later. But the distributional traits of wine-making were just the opposite of rice-milling: it kept benefits limited to a minority of better-off grape-growing members, rather than spilling benefits widely.

In Tarija, in sum, two "easy" tasks were undertaken—fertilizer supply and wine-making—as dictated by the agro-economic environment. One had

highly desirable distributional qualities and the other, just the opposite. The same kind of leadership produced both activities.

Entrenched leaders and trouble. Though entrenched and better-off coop leaderships are often a cause for concern, they are nevertheless what one usually encounters in agricultural coops. That this kind of leadership occurs whether or not coops are successful or socially responsible suggests that we need to find other causes—as in the examples above—for the problems usually attributed to this phenomenon. Though donors have little power to change the nature of coop leadership—and it may not be their place to try to do so—they can exercise some control over the more undesirable effects of entrenched leaderships. This can be done by choosing tasks to finance, and environments in which to finance them, that will bring out the similarity of interests between the better-off leadership and the rest, rather than their differences.

Because we associate trouble with entrenched or elite leaders, we have perhaps failed to notice a few distinctly positive aspects of such leadership. First, entrenched leaders can provide continuity to a coop as a service and income-earning enterprise—a continuity that is quite valuable, in light of what we have learned about the frequent disruption of public-sector programs caused by high turnover of their managers and staff. Second, better-off community leaders often have considerable entrepreneurial experience and drive, which can make the difference between success and failure of a coop business venture. In this sense, the coop "exploits" the skills and interests of its entrenched leaders. Third, in many Latin American communities, a community leader is expected to perform at least some socially responsible

deeds. The coop provides an opportunity for the leader to meet these expectations, as a way of achieving and maintaining status in his community. By drawing on entrenched community leaders, then, the coop can be seen as hitching certain socially obligated persons to its cause.

Our thinking about the problems of entrenched leadership by a few better-off persons has been confused somewhat by our concern about "the bottom 40 percent." With some exceptions, the Bolivian groups provided few direct benefits to that group—the landless and near-landless poor. But this was less a result of the coops being run by a better-off and entrenched leadership than of their being organized around the supply of services to agricultural producers—and thus "irrelevant," as some of the Santa Cruz landless said, to their needs. Agricultural coops, in short, are not the best way to reach the landless, unless through the employment effects of increased farmer incomes—a "trickle-down" approach to poverty that most proponents of coops do not accept. If a criticism of coops is to be made, then, it is not that a better-off entrenched leadership ignored the poorest, but that donors chose to support an inappropriate instrument for reaching the poorest.

Success and inadequacy

How were the Bolivian coop associations able to grow and take on more activities while plagued by weakness in management? A clue can be found in the four tasks undertaken by all the groups—credit, consumer stores, marketing, and agroprocessing—and the fact that performance was consistently better (or worse) at certain of these tasks than at others. Agroprocessing ranked as the best-performed task—followed, in descending order, by mar-

keting (including trucking operations), stores, and credit. Management inadequacies, in other words, seemed to be partly related to the nature of the task. Problems were consistently more prevalent in some activities than in others, leading one to suspect that some tasks were easier than others, or less vulnerable to bad management, or more demanding of good management. That might be why success and inadequacy could coexist.

That agroprocessing would be the least vulnerable to the management problems of rural coops comes as a surprise. Processing and other forms of manufacturing have often been considered by coop advisers to be too difficult for struggling agricultural groups like the Bolivian ones—in terms of the technology of the task, the complexity of the market, and the large investment required for fixed capital. Credit programs and consumer purchasing operations, in contrast, require almost no such technological and market expertise, and little or no investment in fixed capital. But in terms of management, processing turns out to be remarkably "easier" than credit and stores. In some ways, moreover, it is more tolerant of lax management; and in other ways, it is more likely to induce good management. In order to explain why, I outline briefly the major problems of credit and stores.

Credit and stores. The most striking management problems of coop credit and store programs fall into three areas: (1) the setting of prices for merchandise and credit (interest rates), (2) credit-repayment policy (most stores sold on credit, at least to start out), and (3) accounting practices. Like many other coops, the Bolivian groups frequently charged prices for their services that were too low to cover costs. According to coop rhetoric, prevailing

prices reflect the machinations of "exploitative" middlemen, who will be replaced by coops that charge lower and "just" prices. This rhetoric has invested coop prices with strong social symbolism, making it difficult to charge prices that cover costs.

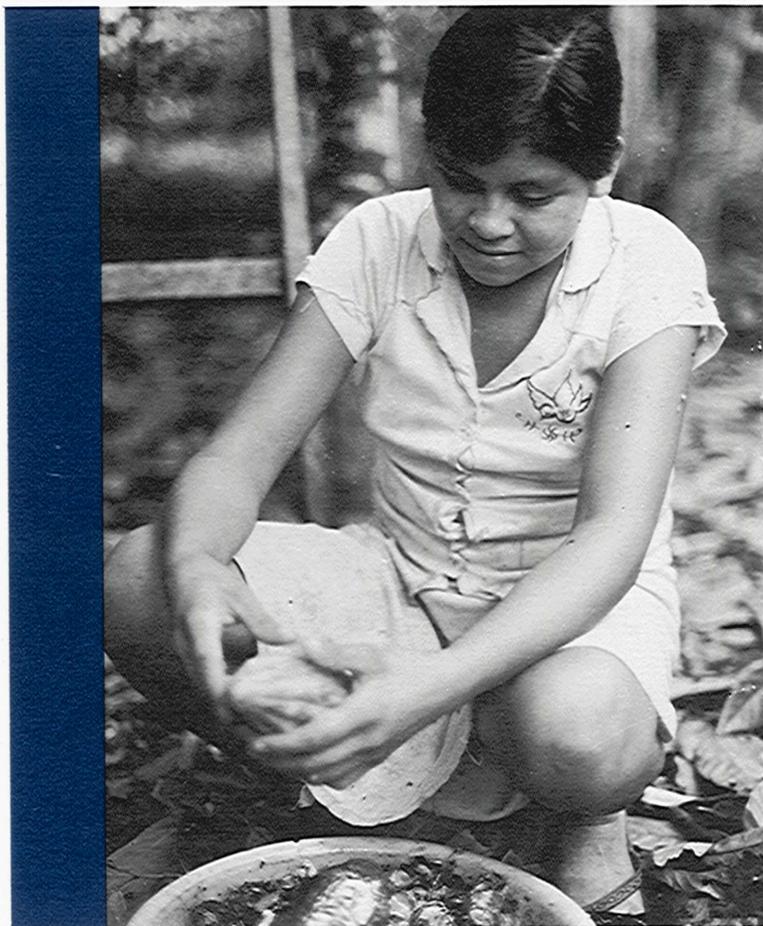
Two instructive exceptions to the problem of inadequate pricing were the prices charged by CCAM for rental of its bulldozer and by El Ceibo for transport of cacao. The only piece of agricultural equipment for which CCAM charged cost-covering rates was its bulldozer; unlike CCAM's other equipment, bulldozers were not available locally for rental from private suppliers. In setting its rental price, therefore, CCAM was not constrained by a prevailing bulldozer-rental price that it felt obligated to undercut, regardless of cost. El Ceibo, in turn, was able to "charge itself" a full cost-covering rate for truck transport when it bought the cacao and incurred the transport cost of marketing itself (an "internal cost"). This contrasted with the case where Ceibo transported cacao or other produce for producers, without buying the product. In this latter situation, the transport charge was quite direct and visible, paid by the farmer accompanying his produce. But when the transport cost was "internal," it was less visible to the farmer, since it was one of several components in the margin between Ceibo's buying and selling price for cacao. With the more visible "external" transport price, Ceibo felt obliged to charge an inadequate one-third less (and lower than prevailing prices) than it charged itself for the "internal price" of transport, as reflected in the marketing margin. Ceibo could get away with charging the higher price on internal transport, it explained, because nobody would know or complain. When the price charged was "hidden" along with other costs in

the marketing margin—or when there was no prevailing price to undercut—it was easier for coops to use criteria of cost and financial viability in determining the prices they charged.

Casual repayment policy, as seen above, also contributed to the problems of credit and store operations. Coops find it very difficult to be tough about repayment because it means being hard on their own people—particularly their leaders, who are often the largest borrowers and who play an important role in making decisions about who gets credit. Rigorous repayment policy spoils the comfortable and rewarding aspect of credit and store programs—the act of giving—because delinquent borrowers must be denied new credit and purchases. Together with the difficulty of charging adequate prices, these repayment problems caused the operating capital of coop credit and store operations to dwindle rapidly.*

Whereas the difficulties of price-setting and credit policies were partly social and political, those of bookkeeping and accounting for store and credit programs were more a result of inadequate skills. A store manager had to keep track of many small transactions with different units of measure and different prices; the same had to be

*Credit funds were afflicted more rapidly than store capital, since the discrepancy between coop and bank interest rates was greater than that between coop and private store prices. Also, it was hard for credit funds to keep up with inflation, unless principal and interest payments were indexed to inflation—another price policy that coops would have considered “evil.” Stores, in contrast, could protect themselves better from inflation by “indexing” the prices of merchandise on the shelf, though there was some reluctance to do this on social grounds, as well as some ignorance in the more remote areas about current price increases.



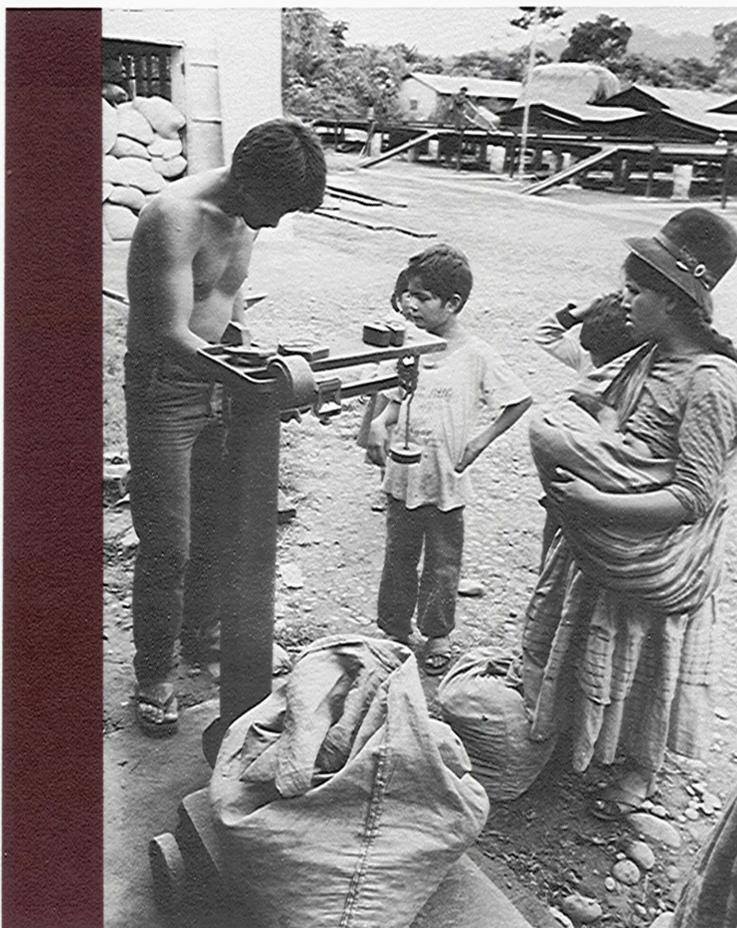
Wilhelm Kenning

El Ciebo, Alto Beni. Stripping hulls from newly harvested cacao pods.

done with inventory (it rarely was) and for sales on credit. A credit manager needed even more fluency with arithmetic in order to make the various interest calculations for each repayment installment. Though these accounting requirements do not seem overwhelming, they turned out to be so for groups with no experience at it and with little training in arithmetic. As a result, the accounting was often simply ignored. COINCA lent out credit from an IAF-financed rotating-credit fund for three years without recording any of the transactions, and Bella Vista's large consumer store could not take time out to record transactions or give receipts because there were always “too many customers waiting in line.”

Agroprocessing and marketing. When viewed against these problems of credit and stores, agroprocessing begins to look less complex—but in an administrative, rather than a technical, sense. In contrast to stores, processing (and marketing) involves the simple aggregation of units of a homogeneous product—unmilled rice, cacao beans, wine grapes—with a standard measure and price. This contrasts with the consumer store's breaking down of things into small amounts, and its myriad measures and prices—a more complex process that presents greater opportunities for graft. Graft is also less likely with agroprocessing because the product belongs to the farmers, and they will be directly affected if they do not

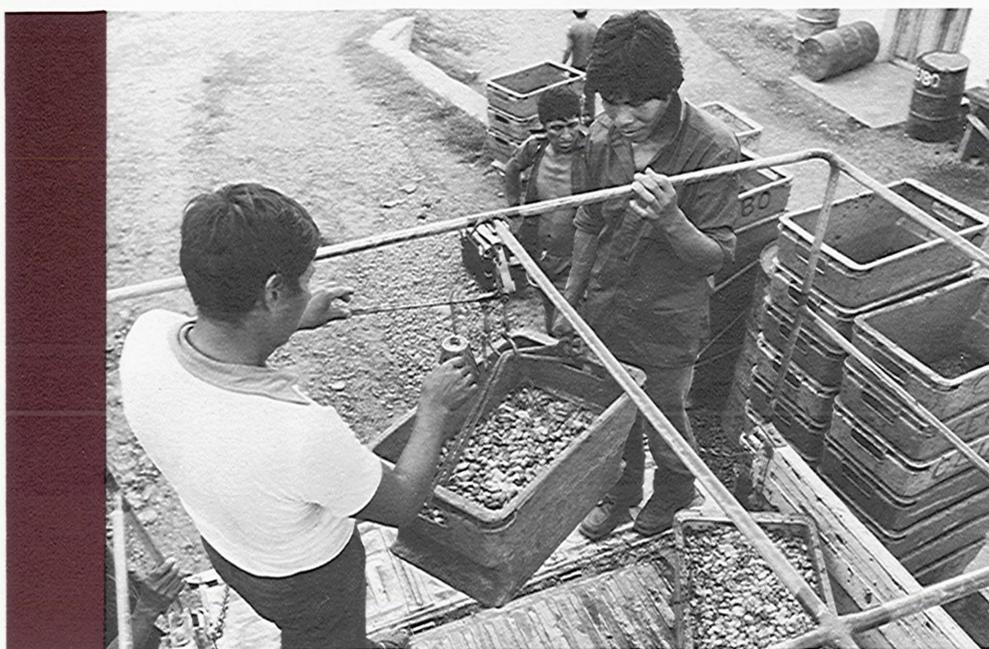
El Ciebo, Alto Beni. Weighing members' freshly harvested, undried cacao at cooperative warehouse.



Wilhelm Kenning

get their return. Misappropriation of credit or store merchandise, in contrast, does not affect coop patrons directly—even though it is bad for the coop and, in the long run, for its patrons. There are strong social pressures against graft in agroprocessing and marketing, then, that are not present in store and credit operations.

Setting adequate prices is easier when coops are engaged in agroprocessing and marketing. All growers, of course, will want the coop to sell their crop at the highest price possible. In marked contrast to credit and stores, the marketing coop can charge what the market will bear—since the buyer is an impersonal outsider, or even an adversary, for whom the coop has no particular concern. Similarly, there is little social constraint on the prices charged by the coop for the various components of its marketing or agroprocessing services—transport, labor,



Wilhelm Kenning

fuel, depreciation of equipment, overhead—because these prices are not directly in view: they are aggregated into a total that is reflected in the margin between the coop's buying and selling price, as seen in the above story of El Ceibo's "hidden" price for transporting cacao. Though the coop's marketing margin is clearly of concern to growers, and very much in view, the costing of each item in that margin is less so. Prices charged for credit and merchandise (and hauling and equipment rental), in contrast, are more visible and more subject to invidious comparison to prevailing prices.

Agroprocessing and marketing are in no way burdened with anything similar to the difficult social problem of being tough about credit repayment. Improvements in the management of agroprocessing and marketing usually

are "technical" tasks—greater utilization of capacity, better scheduling of buying and selling operations, and arrangements for timely delivery of working capital. Though all of these problems can be major, they are not politically or socially difficult to handle.

One of the most remarkable differences between agroprocessing and credit or store operations is the effect of mismanagement on capital. If stores and credit operations cannot deal adequately with prices, repayment, and accounting, they will lose their operating capital and jeopardize the very existence of the operation—as happened with CCAM and COINCA. But if the management demands of a rice mill or a cacao-processing plant are not met, the coop will not lose its capital. It will simply earn less income, or none at all, while the plant stands idle or is poorly used. In this sense, agroprocessing is more tolerant of lax management than credit and stores, regardless of how easy or difficult it is.*

Agroprocessing, and its embodiment in equipment and buildings, is endowed with a certain protective isolation from meddling. Decisions about plant operation are less interesting or less within the understanding of members than the topics of who gets credit, what kind of merchandise should be bought for the store, what rates should be charged for credit, and what prices should be charged for merchandise. The separate and "unknowable" nature of a production task also makes it easier for coops to justify handing over the activity to an outside technician.

*If the fixed investment in the plant is financed with bank credit, of course, the capital may indeed be lost if the loan cannot be repaid. This was not a concern for the Bolivian groups because, like most coops, their processing facilities were acquired with grants from donors, rather than with loans.

The four processing operations of the Bolivian groups—two rice mills, a winery, and a cacao-processing plant—were run as separate businesses, which members could "join" without subscribing to other coop activities. The winery and the large rice mill (CCAM's) were run by paid outside professionals—an enologist and an experienced rice-mill operator—who kept an iron control over the books. Agroprocessing performed better, in sum, because the inaccessibility of the technology, together with the inconspicuous nature of the prices charged for the various components of the marketing margin, helped to keep meddling opinions and disruptive political pressures at bay. Agroprocessing was desirable, in other words, because it kept "participation" out.*

Agroprocessing has another positive feature. Like any construction project, coop processing plants usually elicit large member contributions in labor and in materials such as sacks of concrete or loaned tools and equipment. (This is in contrast to the ongoing labor contributions required of members for collective plots and for store-keeping, which are often disliked by members and potential members.) New coop members are frequently allowed to pay their capital subscription in labor and materials, as occurred with the construction of Bella Vista's rice mill. Credit and stores, as well as trucking and agricultural-equipment rental, offer no such opportunity for member contributions—except for cases where the coop constructs the

*The "technological" insulation of agroprocessing versus credit and stores is not unique to this coop activity. In general, development projects and programs that are "technology-intensive" are often less vulnerable to political meddling—for the reasons noted above—than are those where a knowledge of technology is not required in order for someone to offer opinions and wield influence.

store building rather than occupying an existing structure. The membership, therefore, does not feel the same pride of ownership for the credit fund and the store's inventory as it does for the processing plant. Processing installations, finally, enable coop associations to get credit at local private banks; both COINCA and CCAM obtained commercial credit—an unusual achievement for coops still dependent on donor financing—by pledging, respectively, their winery and their rice mill as guarantees.

Another way of expressing the above arguments is that agroprocessing does better than credit and store operations because it requires a project that finances capital, rather than operating costs. Donors have been criticized for indulging in just these kinds of projects and neglecting the less glamorous projects where operating costs are central and not overshadowed by capital costs. In various ways, however, the Bolivian agroprocessing plants were not stereotypical capital projects. The technologies were "appropriately" rustic; the construction techniques were labor-intensive; and operation of the plants generated the most employment of all coop activities. The plants also represented linkages forward from agricultural production, providing growers with the opportunity to appropriate more of the value added to their crop. In addition, the profits of the processing operations were crucial to covering the losses in the areas of credit and stores, allowing the coops not to be completely undone by the costly learning process of these latter activities.

The processing plants, in sharp contrast to credit and stores, were more tolerant of lax management, because it would not necessarily lead to a loss of capital. At the same time, lax management *would* result in a failure to earn

income from one's investment. In this sense, the processing task contributed to eliciting good performance: the coop could not utilize plant capacity fully and earn income from it without good management. When donor funds are provided for budget support and operating capital, in contrast, the recipient gets the income and a first round of benefits without having to perform. All these qualities make the "capital-intensive" agroprocessing project look more appropriate than it would seem—at least in comparison to the less capital-intensive credit and store programs, or to general budget support. Given certain conditions, then, the donor weakness for capital-intensive projects may not be all that reprehensible.

Agroprocessing is not without its disadvantages. Along with marketing, the agroprocessor runs the risk of making one large mistake in judgment that can cause a tremendous loss. Bella Vista, for example, withheld its rice from the market in the expectation of a large price increase, and ended up having to sell below the original postharvest prices. Similar tales of woe are a common theme in the history of cooperatives, both successful and failed. With credit and stores, in contrast, loss of operating capital through poor management is gradual—perhaps one reason why it is tolerated for so long. The agroprocessing (and marketing) accomplishments of the four groups did not come easy, then, but these activities also did not suffer from the problems and sustained losses that credit and stores did.

Whether or not a coop should go into processing will be dependent on the crops its members produce, the nature of available technology, and the market. Rice-milling, cacao-drying, and wine-making were all accessible technologies, and their markets were

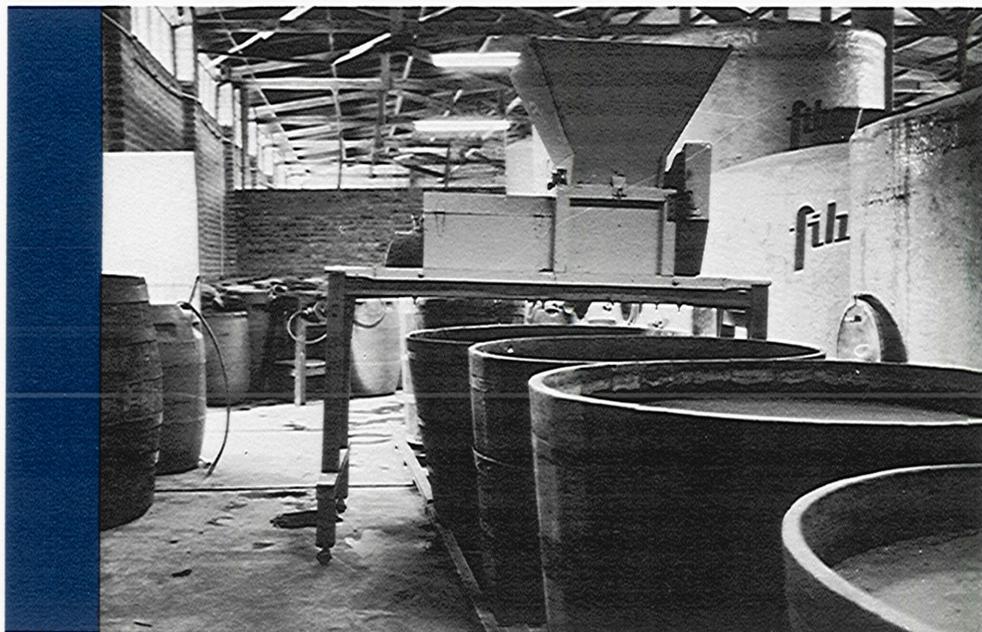
not difficult to enter. (Cane-milling, in contrast, was not; though it would have been a "natural" step for CCAM's cane-grower leadership to undertake, it was more complex and capital-demanding, and the market was more formidable, than the rice-milling operation for which CCAM settled.) Another example of accessible processing activities comes from the history of U.S. agricultural coops in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when coop processing was successful only in dairy products and fruit-drying (raisins, figs, and nuts). As in the Bolivian case, rustic technologies were already available for such production, and processing was already being carried out by farmers at home.

In deciding whether to support coop proposals for processing operations—which sometimes seem frighteningly ambitious—donors can learn to distinguish between the easily-mastered

technologies (and markets) and the more difficult ones. A cross-project look at what has worked can also provide some help—with the Bolivian projects suggesting grain-milling and the initial stages of cacao- and (coffee-) processing, and the U.S. experience suggesting fruit-drying and, based on the experience of many other countries as well, dairy products. Each case, however, has to be judged on its merits. Processing will not always be appropriate.

The problem of free capital. With our knowledge of the winning qualities of agroprocessing, we can now understand better the problems of credit and stores. Grant-funded credit operations do poorly, in part, because the coop association does not have to pay the money back. It is not forced, therefore, to take on the disagreeable task of being tough about borrowing-require-

COINCA, Tarija. Wine vats in coop warehouse.



Wilhelm Kenning

ments, repayment, and interest rates. Thus it was that CCAM started to get tough on borrowing-qualifications and repayment, and to charge prevailing interest rates, only when its IAF-financed credit fund was so decapitalized that there was no other alternative but to seek a private bank loan for more capital. "Free" donor capital, then, seems to be a culprit in the credit problem. But the agroprocessing projects also received free capital from donors, yet this did not create the same serious problems—except for some casualness, on occasion, about excess capacity. Indeed, free donor capital for agroprocessing seemed to facilitate rather than hinder improved management, by providing time for the coop to make mistakes and learn the business.

How could it be that free capital was a problem for credit but not for agroprocessing? The elements of an answer already have been indicated above: in order to carry out the proper decisions about price and collection policy, credit and store operations must behave in ways that are socially costly and unpleasant. Agroprocessing has no such problems. Either its cost components are hidden from view, or the socially popular sales price for the marketed product (i.e., the highest possible) also happens to be the right price in income-earning terms. Or, decisionmaking is of a technical nature with no direct impact on members and of little interest to them. Credit and purchasing operations, in contrast, need the help of outside pressures "beyond their control." The repayment discipline imposed by a bank loan, and the fear of losing assets or further bank credit if repayment is not made, can help coop managers to carry out unpopular and uncomfortable decisions.

Having to repay credit for loan funds and purchasing-operations also helps coops to make better choices about



COINCA, Tarija. Scalding chickens for plucking.

which activities to take on. Coops tend to want credit, stores, processing plants, and marketing operations all at once—because that's what coops are supposed to do. But credit, though it sounds very good, may actually not be as important for some groups as other services. CCAM in Santa Cruz, for example, was the only group among the four in Bolivia that actually went to the bank to obtain credit for lending to members—charging a market interest rate to members, pledging its assets, and repaying on time. This is a good test of how serious a constraint credit was in Santa Cruz, in comparison to the other regions, to the improving of farmer incomes. Compared to Tarija and the Alto Beni, that is, land in Santa Cruz was plentiful and labor was costly. This meant that credit was more crucial for increased agricultural production, because the credit-financed hiring of additional labor and renting of agricultural equipment were necessary in order to expand the area under cultivation. In the other areas, where land expansion was less feasible and labor was less costly, increased production would have to rely on improved inputs and cultivation practices. These

"land-augmenting" techniques would not be as demanding of capital, particularly where labor was less costly.

When credit is not a prime constraint, coops may less willingly take the plunge into bank credit. Providing credit funds to coops as loans rather than grants, therefore, may constitute an excellent mechanism of self-selection: those groups that are still interested, even after knowing the conditions, may be more up to the difficult task ahead. Given that credit operations require such strength of organizational character, it may be best to simply eliminate credit from support to the groups that do not need it as urgently as other services. It may appear coldhearted, of course, to suggest that fledgling peasant coops be subjected to repayment discipline in order to help them make some choices. But it should be remembered that the complaint of most peasant farmers who want credit is that the bank will not lend to them, will not treat them well, will cause them many costly trips back and forth, and will not disburse the credit on time for clearing and planting. They are more concerned about gaining access to the bank, in other words, than

about getting special consideration on repayment conditions and interest rates.

Loss, learning, and change. Requiring repayment is not the only way to provide coops with more outside support and guidance for the taking of difficult steps. Well-timed donor warnings about suspending disbursements on a grant—or refusals to consider grant amendments or additional grants—can have the same effect. Two marked improvements in the management of the studied groups occurred as a result of such feared deprivations. COINCA received a highly unfavorable audit report some years into the first IAF grant; the audit focused, not surprisingly, on problems in the area of credit and stores. (The winery received a clean bill of health.) Since COINCA believed that the IAF would provide no further disbursements or grants until it made the audit-recommended improvements, the audit provoked a crisis that resulted in certain improvements in management.

In an analogous sequence of events, Bella Vista found that it could not complete its payments on an IAF-funded truck because of a tenfold increase in the price of the dollar (in which the truck payments were denominated) over an eight-month period. Previous to the crisis, Bella Vista had been rather lax about charging adequate trucking rates and using the truck to full capacity. With the suddenly increased repayment burden caused by the devaluation, Bella Vista decided in desperation to raise its hauling rates and embark upon a new program to market bananas, a major crop of the area. (Bananas are particularly appropriate for excess-capacity problems of trucks because they are marketed throughout the year; previously, Bella Vista had marketed only coffee and

rice, both of which have only three-month harvest periods, which partly overlap.) Though the IAF did not actually suspend disbursement to Bella Vista—the value of its Bolivian-currency disbursement simply diminished drastically—the effect was the same: Bella Vista would not be able to keep the truck from being repossessed by the supplier unless it raised truck income enough to cover its installments.

These crisis-induced improvements in management had one feature in common: the coop associations knew exactly what to do to make things better once the crisis was upon them. COINCA had to stop lending to borrowers who were delinquent on past loans, to keep better records of loans made and payments received, to charge interest and penalties on delinquent accounts, and to keep better records of store inventory. Bella Vista had to raise truck rates and fill up the excess capacity of the truck through more aggressive marketing operations. It was not increased learning that brought about these decisions, in other words, but markedly changed external conditions. Such “reactive” improvements in management are not unique to the Bolivian coop associations. The reactions are like the “satisficing” behavior of private firms, portrayed in the recent economics literature as being more realistic than the “maximizing” model in describing how firms behave. The satisficing firms, like the coop associations, do only what is necessary to get by. They will even show a “preference” for spending as opposed to profit-making—on labor costs, management perquisites, and other ways of improving the work environment—unless jolted to do better by sudden competition or other external events.

If certain management problems are the result of an undemanding environment rather than a lack of knowledge,

then people do not necessarily have to be trained or convinced in order for things to improve. Instead, one may be able to reduce the problems by “changing” the environment—a power that donors often have, since they are an important part of a coop’s environment. The IAF sometimes ignores its power to change an environment for the good. It has a distaste for intervention and is more preoccupied with the vulnerability of coops to the uncontrollable parts of their environment—the sudden price changes, the shortfall in fertilizer supply, the failed harvest, the opposition of powerful intermediaries, and political repression.

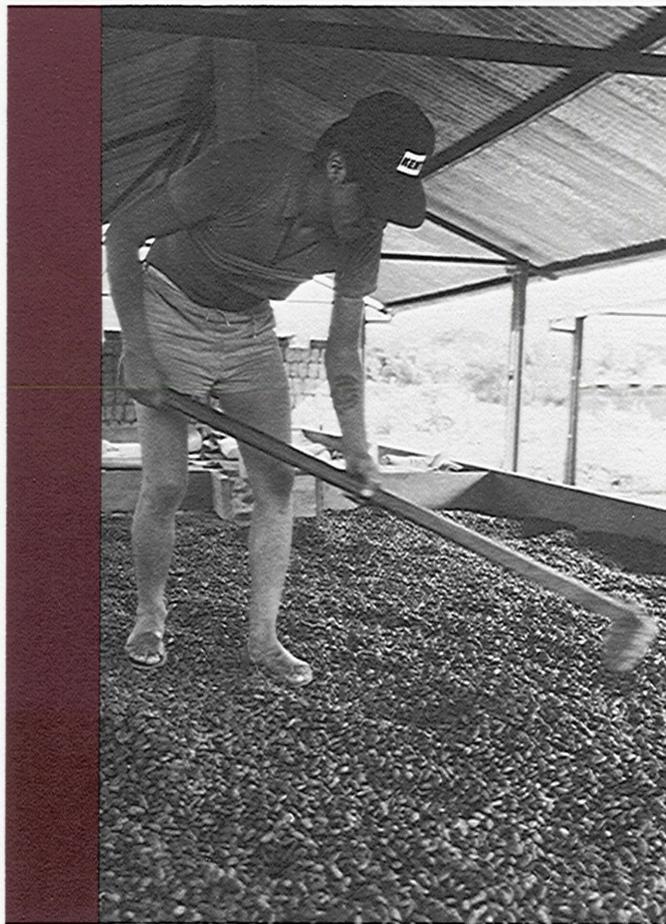
For donors to exercise their power wisely requires two kinds of knowledge. First, they need to know which kinds of project agreements are most conducive to good management and allow time for learning. When few strings are attached, for example, agroprocessing seems to do better than credit and stores. Second, they need to know at which moments in a coop’s development, and for what kinds of activities and problems, will radical reductions in donor permissiveness lead to constructive results. The need to make these kinds of judgments suggests that donors devote more time to analyzing a project *after* it is underway than, as is usually the case, beforehand.

Easy successes. One final point about the ways that donors can constructively intervene and the best moments to do so. All of the studied groups produced impressive early successes. El Ceibo quickly captured 40 percent of the cacao market of an entire region, paid growers almost twice the price paid by the large middlemen, and still earned a handsome profit. COINCA succeeded in obtaining such a large bulk discount on a fertilizer purchase that it could sell fertilizer to growers at

half the prevailing prices. CCAM opened roads to distant communities with its bulldozer and motor graders, supplying them with their first consumer stores, trucking services, and reliable access to markets. These remarkable successes led to subsequent and more ambitious grants from a pleased IAF.

If the groups had done so well with so little to start, it seems reasonable to have assumed that they could have moved forward easily. Almost without exception, however, the later years turned out to be more difficult, with less impressive results, than the early ones. Prices charged or paid crept closer to prevailing prices; transport operations started to run losses as equipment got older and maintenance became more expensive; decentralized store operations shrank or closed up; credit funds decapitalized. Early coop success, then, did not necessarily augur a vigorous future. In fact, a coop that fails (especially one with years of free donor funding) may have lived several seemingly healthy years before its failure. This is strikingly illustrated by the data on U.S. coops that failed, which show a ripe average age, "at death," of 10 years.

El Ceibo provides one of the most striking examples of the difficulty of holding onto a spectacular early success. As noted above, Ceibo made a handsome profit with its first foray into large-scale marketing of cacao, but it had no experience managing so much money. A good part of the profits were therefore unwisely invested in urban real estate, another part was robbed (allegedly) from the manager as he traveled with it in cash from the Alto Beni to La Paz, and the rest was used to set up a small chocolate factory in the nation's capital that made little contribution to coop or grower income (though it had important symbolic



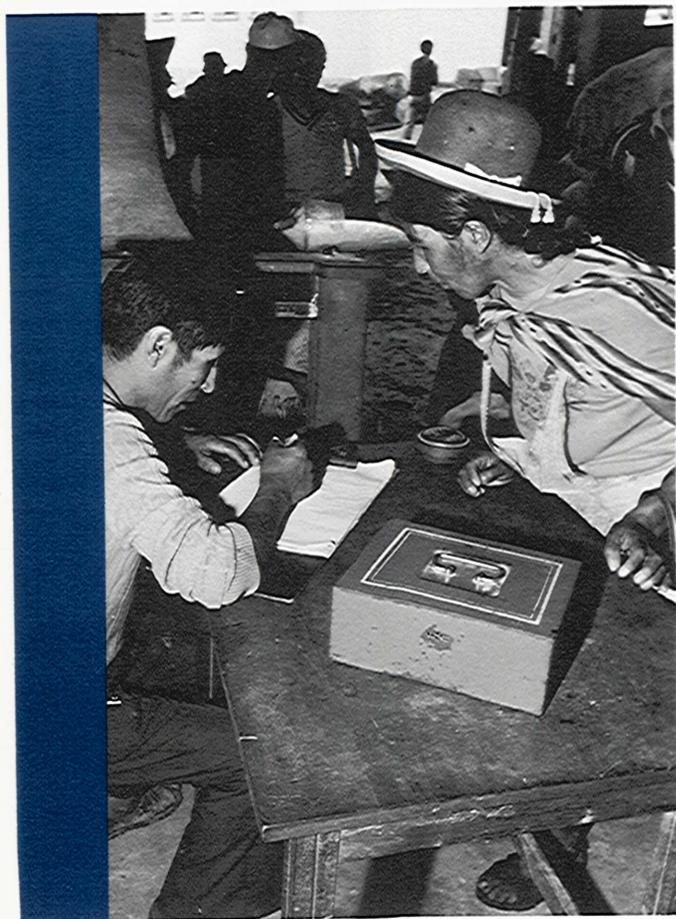
Wilhelm Kenning

El Ciebo, Alto Beni. Spreading cacao in mechanical drier.

value). Though the first success had generated enough capital to sustain itself, the inability to manage that capital resulted in two or three dark years for El Ceibo. Even when things improved again, with Ceibo controlling more than 60 percent of the cacao market in 1982, the association still was not able to come up with the finances (US\$20,000) for its dream project—a cocoa-butter plant in the producing region.

Though the reasons that coops have difficulty in maintaining their early successes may seem obvious, they bear stressing here because donors sometimes overreact to the first blush of success. First, the early years are more successful because it is easier to spend money than to earn a sustained return from it. Second, some time will usually pass before management inadequacies take their cumulative toll on the returns of a new organization. Third, uncontrollable events in agriculture and marketing will bring some bad years sooner or later, and those costs must be covered by returns from the early and subsequent good years.

If success is easier in the beginning, then donors should exercise some control over their enthusiasm at these first signs of success. They should not rush in with subsequent grants designed to build more elaborate organizational structures on top of that first experience. The subsequent grant might be better viewed as covering a "settling" period—rather than as a carrying of the torch forward to ever larger operations and new activities. Restraint does not necessarily mean doing nothing, but it does require using more discretion to decide which combinations of activities should be financed and under what conditions. Instead of committing additional funds to replenish or expand a grant-funded credit operation, for example, one might try to place it on a repaying basis. Or, new grant funds could be used to improve coop access to local banks—e.g., by providing technical assistance, in the form of a local person or organization with good connections, in the preparation of project proposals for local bank funding. Or, instead of financing an expanded marketing project, the donor



Wilhelm Kenning

Cooperativa Bella Vista, Alto Beni. Campesinos selling rice and coffee at the cooperative.

might decide that the coop was now capable of trying for its own bank credit and might want to instead finance another activity—like agricultural extension, or land-titling—with high social and economic payoffs but lower probabilities of obtaining financing elsewhere. Early successes, in sum, should be looked upon as more fragile than they appear.

Conclusion

I have made various suggestions about how donors might improve the way they make decisions about coops and other projects that seek to improve the conditions of the rural poor. These suggestions, if followed, do not necessarily require a cooperative as their instrument. Sometimes, as we will see, the coops are a good form in which to undertake the pursuit of our goals, though the form will not always fit our image of what a good coop should be. Sometimes, moreover, we will want to conduct the pursuit of our goals

through coops for a limited time only, after which the coop may tend to stagnate, decline, or limit its benefits. At this point we may want to facilitate a transfer of the activity from the coop to the state (or to another entity), or at least support some interaction between the two. To do this would be to support a sequence of institutional development of which coops are an early stage. This means that our support of coops may not be worth its while unless the subsequent steps in the sequence also take place.

Finally, our experience with coops can teach us a great deal about decentralized community or regional initiatives. Sometimes, non-cooperative forms of these endeavors will be an even better approach to the task. Normally, we tend to ignore or reject these other institutional forms because they do not have the “good” qualities we associate with coops—they may be controlled by elites, they may be weak on management, they may involve only a few people. But since our study

has shown that coops themselves often have these same “failings”—even when they yield substantial benefits—then we need not be so restrictive in our search for alternatives. At the same time, we will have to pay careful attention to the structural factors that contribute to the good results, a central theme in this study.

Unfortunately, I have not come up with a better description, or term, for what “coops” actually are when they are doing the good things that the Bolivian groups were doing. Though this kind of naming would help us recognize the kinds of groups we want to support, it would also be inconsistent with the findings of my analysis. What determined the various accomplishments of the Bolivian groups, that is, was not only their organizational form. It was also a combination of structural factors—the sequence in which activities were undertaken, the social structure of the communities, the varying characteristics of the principal crops grown, and the traits of the various activities undertaken by the coops. Since these combinations are different for every group, the same organizational form can easily give rise to different results—some satisfying to us, and some not.

JUDITH TENDLER is a consultant to the Inter-American Foundation. She has also been a consultant to the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United States Agency for International Development, and a variety of other development assistance institutions. Her books include Inside Foreign Aid and Electric Power in Brazil: Entrepreneurship in the Public Sector. KEVIN HEALY and CAROL MICHAELS O'LAUGHLIN are foundation representatives for Bolivia and Peru, respectively. This article presents the summary and conclusions of a monograph, What to Think About Cooperatives: A Guide from Bolivia, that will be published by the foundation later this year. It can be obtained by writing the foundation's Office of Research and Evaluation.

Fieldclips: Argentina, Uruguay, Honduras

The work and travel of foundation representatives offers them privileged opportunities to observe how people in Latin America and the Caribbean carry out their daily lives—and how their organizations work. In the following notes, three foundation representatives share recent—and very different—on-the-ground experiences observing the circumstances and struggles of the poor. Anne Ternes describes collaborative effort among sheep raisers in the remote outback of northern Argentina. Cynthia Ferrin discusses the development of a micro-enterprise project in Montevideo and then reports on a tiny community's efforts to reverse continuing migration to the city. And Mac Chapin observes community meetings among the Garífuna of Honduras' northern coast.

Wool raising on the Argentine outback

Anne Ternes, May 1983

The Centro de Desarrollo de Comunidades, CEDEC, works in the province of Río Negro, in an area that circumscribes the city of Bariloche. This city, which sits at the feet of the Andes, is a tourist mecca of lakes and forests at the westernmost point of the *línea sur*, a dry expanse of rangelands extending eastward to the coast. The name *línea sur* comes from the railroad which runs from the coastal capital of Viedma to Bariloche. As you move eastward along this line, trees disappear and only dry grasses and sheep are seen. Closer toward Bariloche, in the pre-Cordillera range, there are mesas and canyons, enormous outcroppings of rock, and small groupings of poplar trees which usually indicate a homestead.

Scattered very sparsely throughout this area are ranch families who earn their living from shepherding and whose tenancy situation is usually precarious. These families—of mixed criollo and Mapuche descent—are the clientele of CEDEC, a small, nonprofit association offering agricultural technical assistance and adult education services related to cooperative management. CEDEC's small staff visits six communities on a periodic basis, giving counsel on herd improvements, wool marketing, accounting practices, group dynamics and similar topics.

Extreme distances separate the communities where CEDEC works, and neighbors may live three to five kilometers apart. Many children in the primary grades must be sent to rural boarding schools run by the state. Women's orga-

nizations are unheard of; it is a long horseback ride to even a neighbor's house, much less to the small clusters of houses that pass for villages in this vast rangeland. Even the men see one another infrequently, and in most areas there is not so much as a tiny store where people can meet. With the onset of rain and snow, when paths are impassable for long periods, everyone stays home and even the weather seems a conspiracy to isolate people.

There is little here to nurture collaborative effort, but cooperation occurs nonetheless. During my visit to this "outback" area, CEDEC staff took me to two rural schools. These schools are important because they provide a reason for collaborative effort in rural areas and because the teacher is a significant community leader.

Teachers are rarely from rural areas. Recruited from the cities of the interior and from Buenos Aires, teachers often accept a post sight unseen. The motivation is a mixture of vocation, a tight job market, and an attractive hardship allowance. Once settled in their posts, an enormous capacity for self-reliance is called forth since distances reduce contact with provincial authorities and other colleagues.

Consequently, the teacher bears an enormous load. Responsibilities may include the purchasing of foodstuffs on credit from an understanding merchant, repairing the school building, nursing sick children, and serving as a local notable to be consulted and included in many community activities.

The teacher faces periodic student desertions when children are needed at

home as ranch hands or due to bouts of pupil illness caused by an overabundance of fatty meats (goat and mutton) and red wine in the family diet. This problem stems not from poverty but from habit, since meat and wine are plentiful and are frequently the simplest solution at mealtimes for a woman having too many things to do at once.

The importance of the school is cast in relief by the landscape, and I was very impressed by the dedication of the teachers I met. I am convinced that their central role in community development efforts is due to the respect they command among the ranch families. CEDEC has identified some very able and well-disposed collaborators in these people, and its future plans have been strongly influenced by them. As an aside, I noticed that the *couples*, who often share teaching responsibilities, also share the housekeeping and child-rearing responsibilities in as equal a fashion as I have seen. The circumstances oblige it, and the couples collaborate with grace and humor.

The Cerro Alto community receives technical assistance and advice from CEDEC. The local ranchers' committee is a subgroup of the Cooperativa Pichi Leufu, which is approximately 50 miles from Cerro Alto. The distance precludes frequent visits but the cooperative has a truck, and the executive committee comes as often as justified. The Cerro Alto ranchers are building a warehouse for stockpiling wool and have already purchased a platform scale and a wool press.

The members' wool is being sold jointly for the first time this year, a minor event to outsiders, but a small triumph over geography to the neighbors involved. In the past, each man sold his loose wool to whatever buyer came to his farm, and the price was set on the spot. Ranchers seldom knew what was a fair price since wool prices vary daily, while buyers often carry powerful radios in their cars to check with the home office before making a bid.

The day CEDEC and I visited was also the day for the wool-weighing, so after eating an *asado* of goat and mutton, we proceeded up a slope to the small shed that temporarily houses the scale and the press until the warehouse is finished. Before any bales could be weighed, the scale had to be tested. Several committee members were weighed, then a bale was

hoisted on to see if the scale seemed on the mark. These preliminaries, far from being a time-consuming nuisance, denote the enormous importance of fair weights among ranchers who have ample past experience with short-weighing. In addition, the buyers who will come the next day will also test the scale, since this is the area's first experience with group purchase and with baled wool.

Finally the wool is hauled out of a thatched, adobe shed which is thick with flies on this hot day. Each bale is examined carefully: one of the younger men stands off to the side, noting weight and ownership, while odorous hulks of filthy wool rise around us like a new-world Stonehenge. As we are intent on this work, a well-traveled and dusty station wagon comes up the lane and pulls under the trees next to the resting horses. A current of tension spreads: a wool buyer is ambling up the hill, appearing a day early to assess the lot ahead of his competitors. After saluting the assemblage (and casting a curious side-glance at the obvious outsider lounging at the side) the buyer moves from bale to bale, pulling out tufts and determining their quality. As he moves about, the weighing resumes, but the ranchers watch surreptitiously. After a careful examination of the bales and of the scale, he bids us goodbye and says he will return for the Saturday auction. His appearance is taken as a good sign that the joint marketing effort has not scared the buyers away.

The ranchers' anxiety is understandable. Saturday's wool auction will be the most important event of the year. With the exception of an occasional sale of hides in the month of October, these families will have hardly any other income. After the sale, families will purchase their provisions for the entire year, since stores are distant and winter often makes travel impossible. The simple elements provided through IAF's modest grant of \$5,350—a warehouse, a scale, and a baler—loom larger when seen in this light, because they support the ranchers' first steps to get a better price for their wool.

Unfortunately, the wool is not the best quality because the range affords a poor diet and the sheep suffer from scrapies. Scrapies is such a prevalent problem that the government sends inspectors who can quarantine a herd for two months until the sheep are treated. The quarantine is a serious matter since wool cannot be sold in the interim. The local committee will set up a small supply of veter-

inary supplies for treatment so that members can give their herds the recommended two baths a year. The selection of the brand of veterinary medicines is not a simple choice: some appear to be too diluted to be effective, and others are so strong that livestock have died in the past as a result of inadvertent exposure.

The next stage for the Cerro Alto committee, after the wool is sold, will be to

finish the warehouse. Through the assistance of the Pichi Leufu cooperative, the committee will offer some of the provisions that families need. The building will also serve as a meeting site. It is a source of considerable pride since the only other structures in the area are houses and an occasional school. What the committee will do after that is still in discussion.

Micro-enterprises and community development in Uruguay

Cynthia Ferrin, April 1983

In June 1982, we made a grant of \$20,040 to The Asociación Cristiana de Dirigentes de Empresas (ACDE) and the Instituto de Promoción Económica Social del Uruguay (IPRU). Nearly one year after this micro-enterprise development program began, I visited the project.

The project's first activity was to survey a lower-middle-class, urban neighborhood of Montevideo. This survey identified approximately 240 micro-enterprises, each of which employed from two to eight people. Some results were expected: most enterprises were family-owned-and-operated businesses in the service sector. Other findings were surprising. For example, the survey detected 15 carpentry workshops in the same neighborhood, and the majority did not know the others existed!

Then, based on the survey, a group of 32 businessmen was organized. This group continues to meet once each week and eventually will form a new organization with legal status (*personería jurídica*) to be the representative association for small businesses in this part of Montevideo.

During the past year, ACDE and IPRU have provided services to the association. For example, a three-day training course on social security legislation and benefits was offered to the small businessmen. Some of these businessmen were not covered by any government-sponsored program and received advice on how to provide for their future. Other training programs were offered on how to keep simple accounts and how to set up joint marketing networks.

Both ACDE and IPRU admit that they, too, are learning by doing. They cite one example where they wanted to combine the resources of several carpentry workshops and purchase wood in quantity. The idea was that if raw materials could

be obtained in bulk at lower prices, and the carpenters worked together, their options would be increased. Once the carpenters got together, however, they found that each had a special skill, produced just one or two items, and needed a particular type of wood. All was not lost though, since one carpenter who makes doors and windows met another who makes desks and chairs, and now they will bid together on several projects to build and outfit offices and/or storefronts.

Recently ACDE and IPRU—through a small fund provided by Catholic Relief Services (CRS)—began offering credit to the businessmen. Amounts of \$500 to \$1,000 have been loaned to several businessmen on an experimental basis. The businessmen's association decides who should receive loans, following a meeting with the applicant and the completion of a simple questionnaire. It will also be the association's responsibility to deal with those businessmen who do not repay on time.

ACDE and IPRU feel this experience will be important to any longer-term use of credit in the program. In the future, the organizations will continue to provide requested services to the association and help it consolidate its programs and activities. The IAF may be asked to extend its project for several months and provide bridge funding, until discussions have been completed with other potential funding sources.

I traveled to Tres Islas to meet with the community prior to recommending approval of their \$29,000 project. When I arrived, I was amazed at the changes that had occurred in the seven months since my last visit.

When I first met with representatives of the community in August 1982, only five men were present. At that time we talked about their concerns for the community and how IAF might be able to help. Those concerns were many since

there is no access to electricity, running water, or other basic services. Equally disturbing was the continuing migration of residents to Montevideo over the last several decades. If the trend were to persist, the town would surely disappear! I encouraged the community representatives to think through their plans, decide which needs were most important, and consider how these needs could be met before deciding whether or not to seek foundation funding.

By November I had received a project request, which described prospective activities in three areas: community development through the construction of a small health clinic and potable water system; economic development by building a *baño de ganado* (a cattle dip) for area producers who are all small livestock farmers; and social development by extension of services to other, smaller towns in the region.

When I made the trip to Tres Islas in March to discuss the request, I was met by some 40 people, including women and children. As a matter of fact, I interrupted a meeting in progress which had been convened by the newly formed Sociedad de Fomento de Tres Islas, a local association of farmers affiliated to a national membership organization. It turns out that the group now has 80 members, each of whom pays at least N\$30 per month (US\$1) membership dues! This is especially interesting, since Tres Islas only has 68 residents, and most are occasional workers on large ranches in the region.

The society has been active in other

ways as well. Representatives met with local officials in the departmental capital of Cerro Largo and were successful in obtaining the donation of one hectare of land for the health clinic and the necessary equipment, provided the community could maintain the clinic in the future.

Representatives of the Sociedad de Fomento also visited the Liga de Trabajo in Fraile Muerto, where producers' cattle is auctioned. Since in the past there was no similar organization in Tres Islas, any profits which were realized from the sale of cattle were retained by the Liga. Now the Liga has agreed to pay the society the sum of N\$10,000 immediately and to remit profits to it in the future.

Rarely does a community mobilize so quickly and accomplish this much in such a short time. Many communities would have anxiously awaited the foundation's decision and the possibility of obtaining external funds before proceeding. The fact that Tres Islas has been able to accomplish so much on its own without external funding has renewed its confidence. Now, the community is far more likely to make good use of external resources without deviating from its projected development plan.

The project was approved in April. The first activity will be to construct the livestock dipping facility. The income to be realized from this service then will be used to cover the operating costs of the health clinic. In the second year of the project, the community will begin making sanitary improvements in local homes so that potable water can be brought into the community.

Meeting with the Garífuna in northern Honduras

Mac Chapin, October 1982

OFRANEH is a national-level organization made up of the Garífuna, or Black Caribe, population of Honduras. The Garífunas live in towns and villages along the northern coast, where they group together in semi-isolation from other ethnic groups. Virtually all Garífunas speak Spanish, but among themselves they prefer to speak Garífuna, which is a curious blend of the African, Arawak, and Caribe Indian languages, with a peppering of French, Spanish, and English.

Recently, I traveled with two advisors from ASEPADE—a Honduran technical assistance group—who were helping organize a regional meeting of OFRANEH.

Juan Ramón, Mario, and I first visited the village of Masca, which is situated approximately 25 kms. to the west of Puerto Cortez and fronts the beach within sight of the Guatemalan border. The core of the community is Garífuna, although there are a few "indios" living in the village and a small number of quasi-wealthy Honduran families who have established summer homes along the road. A local chapter of OFRANEH has been established in Masca, and all of the leaders are older men, although women take a vocal and firm hand in community affairs. Among the Garífuna, status traditionally is correlated closely with age.

For the first hour and a half we sat around telling stories. The Garífuna are inveterate storytellers; and numerous tales—often somewhat and occasionally

thoroughly off-color—were an integral part of every meeting we had along the coast. The stories in Masca were told by ex-sailors and featured humorous cultural misinterpretations and outlandish adventures in ports around the world, from the United States to Asia.

Finally, we moved into the meat of the visit and began to discuss the upcoming regional meeting of the Puerto Cortez chapter of OFRANEH. We discussed organizational and logistical arrangements for the meeting, and talked about the reason for uniting common interests. After a short time, we set off to have a traditional Garífuna meal of *hudutu* (which is a bright yellow soup of coconut, fish broth, and spices), a rubbery and delicious lump of mashed plantains, fried Spanish mackerel, and casave bread.

That afternoon we journeyed along the coast east of Puerto Cortez to the end of the dirt road, stopping at the village of Baja Mar. A few "Indian" families live at the fringe of the settlement, but the core is Garífuna. The village is a tight cluster of cane-walled, thatch-roofed houses, which fans back through coconut and banana trees from a windswept beach. Men, women, and children were everywhere, standing in small groups and speaking Garífuna. We wandered conspicuously through this setting to one of the thatch houses, where we crammed ourselves in amid 10 or so villagers active with OFRANEH. Again, the meeting began with story-telling, this time in Spanish for our benefit. The atmosphere was easy, spirited, friendly, and very enjoyable. The village, the people, the cultural bonds, and the tight social interaction seemed more indigenous than the pattern in Black villages I have visited along the Atlantic coast in Panama and Costa Rica. The Garífuna may be poor and marginally located in the Honduran economy; but many of them are travelers, working in ports such as New Orleans and New York. These villages live from those remittances, so they are not culturally dispirited or broken.

The next morning we attended the regional Puerto Cortez meeting of OFRANEH, which was made up of the communities of San Pedro, Puerto Cortez, Masca, Travesía, Baja Mar, and Zaraguena. The session began—how else?—with stories. Some were delivered in Garífuna, but others were in Spanish. In one, a Garífuna sailor had returned from 20 years at sea and gone to a movie. Throughout the show, he wove monotonously from side to side. Finally, the man

seated behind him asked him why he did this, and he said he had been at sea so long he couldn't control his body. The second man replied that he had much the same sort of problem: he had 40 children and couldn't stop his pelvis from moving back and forth. The storyteller then demonstrated this ailment with some complementary hip gyrations as the audience roared.

In another, an epidemic swept through a Garífuna village. The authorities arrived and decided it was due to the parrots in the village. So they set about searching for pet parrots. An older woman who had a parrot she loved dearly, thrust it beneath her skirt. The authorities passed by and, finding nothing, started to leave. Just as they reached the door, the parrot shrieked: "If this is all I have to look forward to, shoot me *please!*" (Thunderous laughter.)

Then the meeting proper got under way. Juan Ramón briefly sketched the present activities and the grand plan for OFRANEH before the main activities on the agenda began. Other regional chapters are being formed in La Ceiba, Tela, Trujillo, and Sangrelaya, which would also elect officers and name delegates to the national OFRANEH meeting in November or December of this year. This structure is in its fledgling stage, and although nothing has been done yet to develop concrete projects in the various Garífuna communities, all of the Garífuna I met are very anxious to begin them.

Then, the officers of the Puerto Cortez regional chapter were elected. It went smoothly, without conflict or dissipating argument, and the result was a mixed collection of young and old, men and women. Francisco (Pablito) Arzú, who has spent many years as a sailor in the United States and is now retired, was elected president. He is a natural leader. When the meeting was over, a small platoon of leaders approached me and asked what the foundation could give them. We spoke of some small agricultural and community-level projects, and perhaps some training in this, that, or the other. I said that it was evident that OFRANEH was starting to gain strength as an organization. They had spoken of developing a concrete work plan for the various communities. The national congress will be a first pass. When it occurs, they should keep us in mind. Who could fail to like these hardworking people with their boundless and outrageous sense of humor?

"Sistren," which means "sisters," is the only theater company in the Caribbean that has developed from the initiative of working class women.

Drawing on personal ghetto experiences, Sistren writes

and performs plays that make audiences more aware of the problems that women face, particularly in this part of the world.

The women of Sistren came together in 1977 while being trained as teachers' aides in a special Jamaican government program. The trainees were picked from workers in the "Impact Programme," a government effort to make jobs, such as street cleaning, for thousands of unemployed women.

During the training, the 13 women were asked to do a theater piece for the annual Workers' Week celebrations. They approached the Jamaican School of Drama for a director to help prepare their performance and eventually met Honor Ford-Smith in the old, broken-down schoolhouse in Swallowfield. When she asked, "What do you want to do a play about?" they answered, "We want to do plays about how we suffer as women." Talking about their lives that day led to "Downpression Get a Blow," their first theater piece, which dealt with women in a garment factory forming a union and achieving their demands.

From that performance, Sistren was born. The women decided to stay together, continue collaborating with the director, and make more theater pieces. Sistren's first major production was "Bellywoman Bangarang" in 1978. How that play emerged tells much about how the company works together and grows. The play developed using a method based almost completely on folk traditions. Actresses played ring games from childhood, told riddles,

and sang songs that called up memories. One woman would tell a story or act it out, and as another member identified with it, she would link her experience through storytelling or action. From these improvisations, the theme of teenage pregnancy and the rites of passage from girlhood to adulthood emerged.

After creating a scene, an actress had to script it in creole. This exercise revealed that some of the actresses were better able to read and write. The more fluent helped those who were less able, and by Sistren's second production, everyone could read her own script. This informal learning process was reinforced later by various research workshops. Calisthenics were developed based on the alphabet; a dance was choreographed to spell out words. Writing exercises were linked to problem-solving skits involving conflict resolution, personal awareness, and group development. Some of the women would develop a skit on a particular problem, stop, then ask the rest of the group how the problem should be solved. After discussion, the solution was acted out. The desire to make theater increased the desire to master new skills.

Through four major productions, that growth has continued. Sistren's members have had to learn to be not only actresses, but also teachers, stage managers, secretaries, graphic artists, accountants, text designers, and printers. A textile project has been started, and members have been trained in stencil-cutting and silk-screening to make bags, aprons, and other objects to sell at crafts fairs and at acting performances. Sistren t-shirts and wall-hangings are also printed, depicting themes from the company's major the-



ater productions. This craftwork not only supplements individual incomes, it helps support the aims of the collective.

Since Sistren has a cooperative structure, each member helps evaluate everyone's work. The group is comprised of not just actresses and an artistic director. There are also "resource people," behind-the-scenes members who help with administration, fundraising, and publicity. After six years of working together, Sistren's main goals are to . . .

- perform drama in working class communities,
- create theater and drama that comment on the position of women,
- look at possible solutions to the problems of women in their day-to-day struggle,
- and provide the members of our collective with the chance to participate in a self-reliant cooperative organization.

To accomplish these aims, Sistren mounts major commercial productions

Women's Theater in Jamaica

by SISTREN THEATER COLLECTIVE



Mitchell Denburg

which develop themes that challenge and stimulate questions about the situation of women. The collective also conducts public workshops where drama is used as a problem-solving tool. Although these workshops are often free, they are as important as larger theatrical productions. Performed in prisons, community centers, and remote villages, these skits apply what has been learned in Sistren's research workshops. A sense of community is created so that an audience can be exposed to and deal with hidden or taboo subjects about women. The open-ended skits do not passively reflect life; they try to demystify it by fully exploring its realities. By facing what has been considered indecent or merely irrelevant, the actresses record women's rejections of the forces that thwart their lives.

Although grounded in the experience of our members, we at Sistren try to explore the experience of *all* women. The subjects of plays are thoroughly researched, but sometimes community

workshops turn up new information and themes. In meetings with women from factories to schools, from sugar workers to the urban unemployed, many described themselves solely in terms of their work in and for the home. Meanwhile there was a void of information about this in official reports and research about our society. A continuing workshop series—"Domesticks"—explores this domestic labor, looks at how people migrate from rural to urban areas and even overseas looking for work, and tries to inform society through drama about our findings.

Sometimes that research recovers the past. The play "Nana Yah" is about Nanny, a real woman who led a guerilla fight for independence against the British in the 17th century. Through understanding the past, and our African heritage, Jamaicans can come to grips with the present. As expressed in director Jean Small's program notes,

So mi min fall pon Nanny and mi aks misself ow Nanny did do wha she di

do. Is weh she get de courage, eddication 'n tins an strenk fe fight eeh? an mi see seh is causen Nanny ad she culcha an she belief an all dat appen is dat Nanny did believe dat she cudda dwit and she dwit. Strenk is a tin come outa de pas, an yuh av it deh all de time inna yuh ead an wen yuh noa seh is dat you believe yuh jes mek yuh spirit guide yuh and dwit.

(So my mind falls on Nanny and I ask myself how Nanny did what she did. Where did she get the courage, education in things and strength to fight, eh? And I see that because Nanny had her culture and her belief, and all that happened is Nanny believed that she could do it, and she did it. Strength is a thing out of the past, and you have it there all the time in your head, and when you know yourself, you believe, you just make your spirit guide you and do it.)

During the past six years, Sistren has been following its spirit, receiving critical recognition, and travelling widely. In 1979 the Inter-American Commission of Women awarded Sistren a certificate of merit for its work and a prize for the best mass media project encouraging women in development, specifically for "Bellywoman Bangarang." After that, the Jamaica National Theater Critics Award was received for another play, "Q.P.H." Recently, Sistren completed successful tours of Canada and the eastern Caribbean and will soon tour Europe. The company will perform plays at the London International Festival of Theatre and give workshops in West Indian communities all over England. Later performances will be given in such cities as Berlin and Amsterdam. In addition to the exposure these tours offer, they produce much-needed money to help support our educational workshops. Wherever we are, our work stays focused on the women of the Caribbean: as mothers, as workers, as sisters, and as partners of our men.

"You can't have pure seriousness going on"

Lillian Foster

I am from Kingston. I went to Kingston Technical High School, and I went the domestic science way—nowadays they call it home economics—so that I could get into Kingston Public Hospital to train as a nurse. But I started having children from an early stage. I had to stop from school, and that is what blighted my prospects.

Although having the children early, I wasn't really such an out-and-out girl. My godmother held me inside—from school, to house, to church. Nowhere else. I couldn't even go to the gate and

look out. So when I got pregnant with my first child, everybody around the neighborhood was wondering how that happened. You know, I was like a lamb that was led to the slaughter. I don't think it's the best way for parents to have their children—like on a chain in bondage. Maybe the least chance they get . . .

So when I had the first child, the trouble started. Goddie didn't want to keep me, but you know, she looked it over and I stayed there. When I find myself pregnant with the second one, I was thrown out. Yes, she put me out. I had to go live with my sister, but she couldn't really keep me to have a baby: she occupied just one room. Well, it so happened that there was a man that says he used to see me going to school. But he didn't know that I had another child before. So when I was pregnant with the second child, he saw me and asked me what happened to me, and I said, "You don't see what happened to me? I'm in trouble. I'm pregnant."

And he said, "Where is the man that get you pregnant?"

At that time, the father of my first and second child was getting ready to go to England. And this other man, seeing that I was pregnant, decided to take me with this pregnancy. He rented a room and put the both of us in there. He was the first man I was going to live with. And well, he treated me nicely. I got my clothes, my food, everything that I needed. But he was sort of on the rough side: he was very jealous. He didn't want me to talk to anyone, neither a man or a woman. And it go on and on, and I found myself pregnant with my boy, which was the third child. But then I couldn't take his jealousy, and I had to leave him when my son was six-months old. And up to this day I don't live with another man. No, he let me become afraid, you know. My daughter's father, who I met after that, I don't live with him. I had

two boys and two girls: four children, three different fathers. One girl died, so my oldest he's 24, one is 20, and my little girl is 13.

I worked for about eight years as a sales clerk. Then I left to go and do some nursing, but I went the wrong way. I went to a nursing home. There was one doctor who wanted to help me to get a job in the hospital, but a lady told me if I went to work at a nursing home, she would teach me the job. I was to watch her and the other nurses and to do whatever they were doing. I stay on there for around six months without pay and spent up all my money to buy uniforms and all those things. All that went down the drain: I thought that she would really teach me something, but she was just looking somebody to do her job. If I had followed that doctor, I would have gone very far, because when you know one thing, you catch on quickly. Nursing was what I really wanted to do. So, you know, I got downhearted and stopped.

So there I was at home for a year, not working. And this Special Employment Programme came up. I said, "Well, let me go and do it, because I'm working for my honest bread." Soon after that, Sistren started—in 1977. And I'm in it until now, nearly five years. We do our plays by improvisation. We take our own experience—teenage pregnancy, mother and child experiences and so on—and we put bits and pieces together to form the play. And we make up our own songs. Yes, man, it's fantastic! We're far different from other groups. That is why whenever we put on a show, people always craving to come and see what we are doing. Most groups use scripts, while we just improvise, you know. Then we write a script, but whatever is written in the script is just what we say.

Our first major production was about teenage pregnancy. We saw teen-

Lillian Foster



Mitchell Denburg

agers going to school, getting pregnant, mother turning them out; man getting them pregnant and leaving them alone to bring up this child and look after it. It's a real mixed-up thing. So we call the play "Bellywoman Bangarang," because we always like to give our plays a funny name. This play has two acts. In the first act, you have around six little scenes. The young people working, going to school, having games, and from there start growing up, 'til they start having boy-friends. Mother watching girls having their period and, after a while, lose their period, get pregnant, and they guy run off and leave, and the mother have to take over again. Maybe the mother can't bear it—your coming with more than one unwanted kid—so she put you out. Things like that. But within the seriousness of those scenes, you have a little humor coming between, because you can't have pure seriousness going on. That is in the first half of the play.

Then in the second half of the play, we show another type of problem that women face: rape. And—oh mercy—I would really like you to see that show! When that rape is going on, we don't do it with a man and a woman. We are

only pure women; we do it in a different form. And I tell you, that thing come off. We have some people crying.

Our other major show is "Q.P.H." Our acting director, Pencer Lindsay, said she would love to do a show based on the fire at the Eventide Home for the Aged. Year before last, on 22nd of May, Eventide Home was burned down. So we tell this story of three persons—Queenie, Pearlle, and Hopie (that is why we call it "Q.P.H.")—and what happened to them. Pearlle, this woman come from a well-to-do family, but mother turned her out. From there, she started to drink and become a drunkard, and she also became a prostitute. She was one of the biggest prostitutes in Jamaica. And she went to Eventide, where she died from consumption. Hopie was handicapped from a young girl. She used to walk around and beg, and she end up in Eventide. She died in the fire. Queenie is still alive; she's still down at Eventide, in the part that didn't get burned out.

I want to tell you, we did research on that, too. At the time of the fire we went down there and talked to people. A lot of charred bodies: just bones, pure bones. Oh, my God!

In the play, we start with the lives of the three women, and then how they got to Eventide. When we come to the fire scene, everybody gets old at that time. You can just imagine that you are old, and the fire is in this building, and you can't move to get out. Somebody have to help you, and the only help is the same older people. The stronger ones tried to help the weaker ones. When we have that scene—mercy—a lot of people in the audience cry!

Now, our play "Bandoolu Version" is based upon three women living in a tenement yard in a ghetto and the problems that they face with their man. Two of the men are thieves, and one woman in that yard, she don't like those things. She don't put up with her man to be a thief. The other two women throw a word at her all the while and curse her and want to fight her. They come in and want to kick down her door and steal what she have in her house—just like what going on here now. So we did a play around that.

Another play, "Nana Yah," is about this strong warrior woman Nanny from history. You've heard about Nanny and the guerrilla fighters who fought for their freedom. Well, that is what "Nana Yah" is based on. Just the same as the other plays, we put bits and pieces together. We use our own words to build up this play. But regardless of what we say and what we do, it's based on research. You can't just go about and do a thing and say, "This thing happened at such-and-such a time," and it's not true. You have to have true saying, and then you work around it to build your show. We did research work in St. Elizabeth to watch the type of dance they do, the ritual: how they set up the table to feed the spirits. We put different kinds of food on the table and rum and all those things. And the dance—we call it

Cyrene Stephenson

Etu—and for what reason they do the dance. And that is “Nana Yah.” It’s fantastic to see women moving around as men, as soldiers, fighting for their freedom.

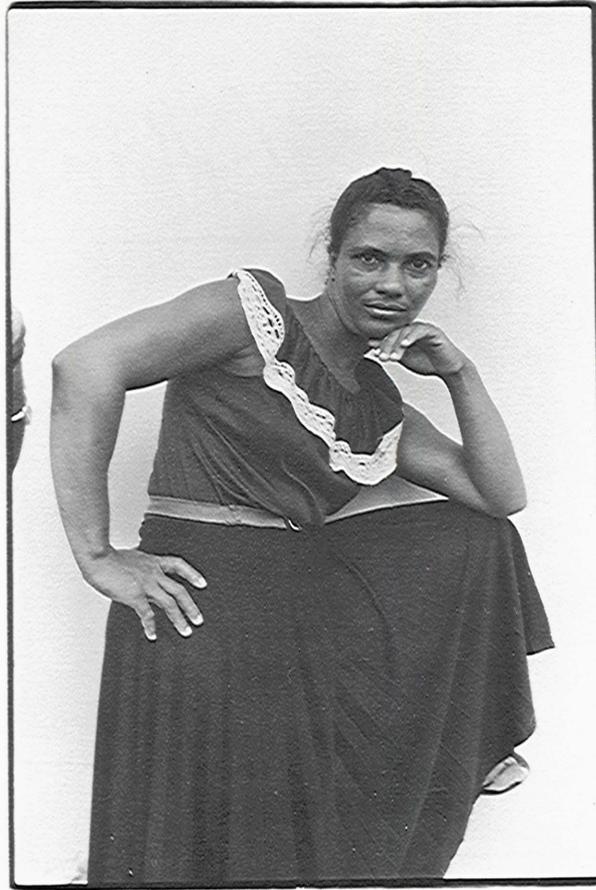
We also do workshops that mostly deal with women—you know, raising women’s consciousness. It’s not that men are left out, but we are a group that deals with women’s issues. We go to the rural areas, to prisons, schools, community centers. We share our views with other groups and they share their views with us. And we have traveled abroad: we went to Barbados and to Canada. It was fantastic. People were clamoring that the time was too short; they wanted us to stay. It’s possible that we may go again, because they want us back, but the pockets are low.

“We always focus on the problems that the low-income people meet”

Cyrene Stephenson

Sistren takes up most of my time now. Sistren mean a lot to me because it gives me more strength. I mean it shows me a way that I can put myself out and do something for myself, right? It teaches me to meet people. Because sometime when I’m in the country, I would just close myself. But now that I meet a lot of people, I have to socialize myself.

We always focus on the problems and the suffering that the low-income people meet: the women have a lot of kids and maybe they go and sell themselves, or them go and see a man and the mother kick them out. And they end up having a baby what them don’t even want. The man leave them and gone; the mother have to take over



Mitchell Denburg

again. If you’d ever been to any of our workshops, you’d know that we teach the low-income people how to help themselves—not only depend on other people but how they could help themselves and take care of their kids. We try to show the mother that when the child make a mistake, just take the child and sit with the child and teach the child. Talk in a quiet form that the child can understand instead of going around and beat and curse the child.

When we have a workshop, we talk with the people and they involve themselves. And through that, we always use their problem to show them through the skit. Like when we put on a skit at a workshop in Claredon, a lady stand up and said, “Who tell you about me problem?” And when we finish, you see the difference in them before they leave. Even the men. When we went to the prison, a guy in the prison said how he was going to come out and hurt the woman who let him reach there. But when we finish the skit, he just come around and—well, I don’t know if he really did that once he outside—but at the moment, he came around to our thinking and forget his own.

My boyfriend, he’s an ignorant person, and it’s hard to even tell him anything really. I try, but he’s very hard to deal with. He’s not employed all the while, because that kind of work that he doing—building—there’s a lot of people doing the same thing. Maybe he get a house two times a year—maybe two houses a year! So most of the time he’s not working. And Sistren has helped me, because sometime I would just get ignorant, too, and step out and forget certain things. Instead of just walking out on a person, you try to help the person. I myself, get mad at my kids. And they say to me, “What the use going up there and teach other people, and you can’t teach yourself!”

We are trying to show women that they must not depend on a man alone, and they must not say women can’t do certain things. They must always go out and try to do what they want to do. Some people think mechanic work is for man, plumbing is for man, and all those work. But if you decide that you want to do something, just go and do it.

If we had more schooling, we could manage then. Sometime we go abroad and people say they don’t understand

Lana Finnikin



Mitchell Denburg

us when we talk. Our English-wise is not good; we most use patois. I even have production now doing and I have to be trying my best to talk in the right way, because this woman is supposed to be a very high—you know—an aristocrat. What I would like is us going back to school, doing English, math, and a little history too.

“All I need is a little training to put me straight”

Lana Finnikin

I was born on the 19th of January, 1954, in St. James. My childhood years were very interesting because it was a big family—with brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles—and everybody used to live together. There were 10 of us. I was the only child from my father, and I didn't live with my mother: I grown up with my grandparents, right? So I was a spoiled child.

My mother got me when she was taking her local examinations. When she was entering for the third year, she

get pregnant with me. My grandmother took me from her and tell her to go back to school. She go back and get pregnant with the second sister that dies. After that they still encourage her to go back, but she leave and come to town. Nobody knew nothing about her: she didn't write and everybody was worried.

I was six when she came back to the country. She have three more children, and she leave them with my granny. At the same time, my father came back from England and was asking in the district for me. One morning I was getting ready to go to basic school, and I see this gentleman come up and ask if my granny inside. And I said, “Yes, sir.” I run inside and say, “Ooo! A big black man coming.” I remember he give me a pair of white shoes and a piece of cloth. My granny said if I want it, I must take it—she not taking it. I take it from him and she make a skirt. The Sunday after, I remember I wear the skirt and a blouse and the shoes to Sunday school. I was bragging the whole Sunday to the smaller children, saying that my father come back, and I see him for the first time. After that, I never see him again. I'm 28, going 29,

and I don't see him after that.

I leave St. James and come to town when I was 11, going 12. It was like I was the head of the household, because my mother do domestic work and have to come in late and leave out early. At that time, it was five, six of us; and everybody have to go to school. We would get up in the morning and tidy up the house, then come back in the evening, cook and wash, and go to bed. When Mama come in, she always say she was proud of us.

I remember when I was 17 and started to go to school for typing and things like that. One morning in class the headmaster give us some newspaper to read. There was some big girls from, you know, as you look at them you can see them come from a middle class family. The headmaster handed *them* this morning's *Gleaner* and give *us* the old newspaper to read. So I say, “I not reading the old news. I read it last week. I want something new to read this morning.” And he take me out of the classroom and carry me down and take a piece of rubber tire and give me about six lickings. When I look at my body, it was like if the natural blood stand up inside. And I took up my books and went home until Mama come home. She ask me what I'm doing there, and I show her my underclothes—I couldn't wash out anything. And we went to the doctor, and the doctor say he going to give her a certificate to take to the police for her to either prosecute the teacher or charge him with something. The doctor say that teacher shouldn't have any right to use a rubber tire: should use a cane or something else. I tell Mama, “I'm not going back there.”

Here at Sistren we have teams—secretarial team and PR team and finance team. Each team have three members. I work with the accounts for four years

Pauline Crawford

now. I didn't have any training in accounts. I just took up Sistren account and started doing it. We have an accountant come in and show me what to do and how to put the books together and things like that. She came in the other day and check the books, and she said that they are okay. All I need is a little training to put me straight. If I get that qualification, I don't need for no more accountant to come in and audit the books. But the problem is that rehearsals and things like that take up the time, and we cannot find any time to do schooling. I am also stage manager for the group: it is very time-consuming and responsible work, because you sometimes have to play the role of director. I already say, "Next year, don't count me in the work. I'm going to school to get some G.C.E.—General Certificate—and some courses in accounts."

"We start in from the bottom of the ladder and just climbing gradually"

Pauline Crawford

I was born in Kingston. At the age of about three months, my father take me from my mother and bring me to his wife, and his wife grew me until I was about three. Then she take me to the country to live with her mother. When I was about 11, sickness take her, and I had to come back to town and live with my stepmother and my father. My father is a simple man, you know—things that my stepmother do, he wasn't really that concerned. And my stepmother didn't like me all that much. She would beat me. I run away from home when I was about 12.

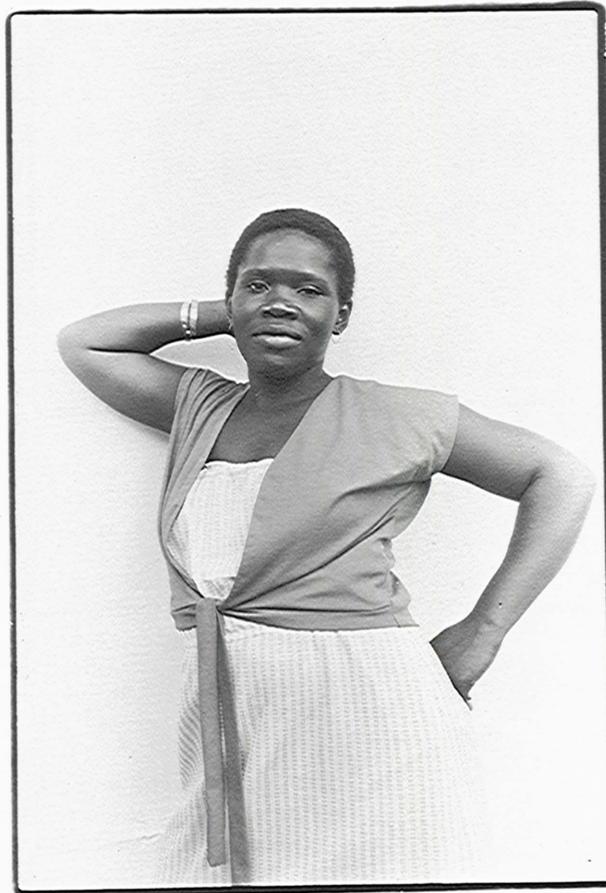
At first I say I was going to look work, and I stay with a woman awhile,

but she tell me I can't stay there anymore. Luckily, when I pack up and was leaving, I look into the *Gleaner* and see a "on premises" work in Kingston. I go there and work until I about 17 or 18. Then my stepmother come for me and me start to live back with them.

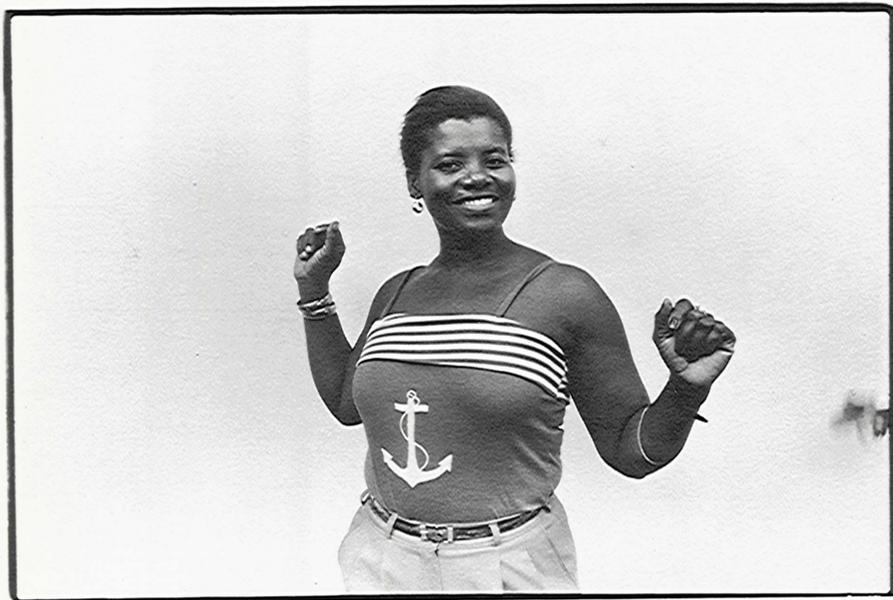
When the Impact Programme come in, my stepmother get the work, but she tell me, "Go and do it!" And being under her roof, I have to go. My friends, they laugh: it's me working and have to give the money to her because I working under her name. So I

change the name to mine, and then one night I didn't carry her any money. She say me can't stay and put me out after 12 in the night.

I work now with Sistren and all my income is from Sistren. After "Belly-woman Bangarang," the government change and they say they don't see us fit staying in schools as teachers' aides—so we lose that work. Right now we get a small allowance of about \$200 (US\$67) a month. Each month when I check up, 40, 50 dollars spent on bus fare, right? And you see this area that I



Mitchell Denburg



Mitchell Denburg

Jasmine Smith

live in. That's why I even move here—because the rent is cheap. I would like to live in a nicer area, but that would be about \$100 a month just for rent alone; and with the allowance that I get, I can't pay rent, can't buy clothes. But I'm grateful in the sense that I can eat and drink—not much—but I can eat and drink from the group.

Sistren itself, we start in from the bottom of the ladder and just climbing gradually. That is the illustration I can use with the people I know. I tell them that before we start, we never even dream of traveling; we never dream that we could be getting a small allowance from it; we never dream that it could even continue for so long. Togetherness is the key. Sometime the going get rough, you know. But it's good that a group of 13 women can really come together and through all this struggling and problems—you know, home and children—still stay together all the five years. Most of the workshops, we don't get any pay. We not thinking about the money. Deep down it's like we satisfied with what we do.

Right now we doing textiles. If we could get a market for the textiles, that would be additional income. We not getting any government assistance at this time. If Sistren get more financial aid and more recognition from our country—if the government could

really look on our side—I can foresee we moving ahead. Because we have a message out there.

"You don't have to be teacher and nurse to be important"

Jasmine Smith

When I was having those children, when I'm not working, I just sit at home. I don't have anywhere to go, unless I can afford to pay two dollars or so—then I would go to the movie. After I get this employment and we came together as a group, I was glad because I don't have to sit at home anymore. I was also afraid: I face certain problems and I think I was the only person facing those problems. But when we came together and start to talk to each other, then you find that people like you face similar problems.

In our productions, we talk about the relationship between a mother and a daughter, and how we don't relate to our daughters properly. For instance, in "Goddie and Yvonne," Yvonne is having her first period and Goddie is trying to tell her that she mustn't go out—and in a difficult way that is hard for her to understand. We should notify our daughters beforehand. I tell my two girl children—one is eight and

one is 13—from way back. So that if it come upon them, they can deal with it, and that they are not frightened. And we talk about how girls are being raped by men and how the public, like the church, try to ban the girl from society because she's been raped, and it is no fault of her own. That is the part that I play when I play Marie, who's being raped by some boy. I play also a girl that my mother don't want me and just leave me with this woman. And this woman, the only place that she allow me is go to church. And so I am not aware of the things happening round me. It is easy for me to perform these roles, because I have experienced many things like that.

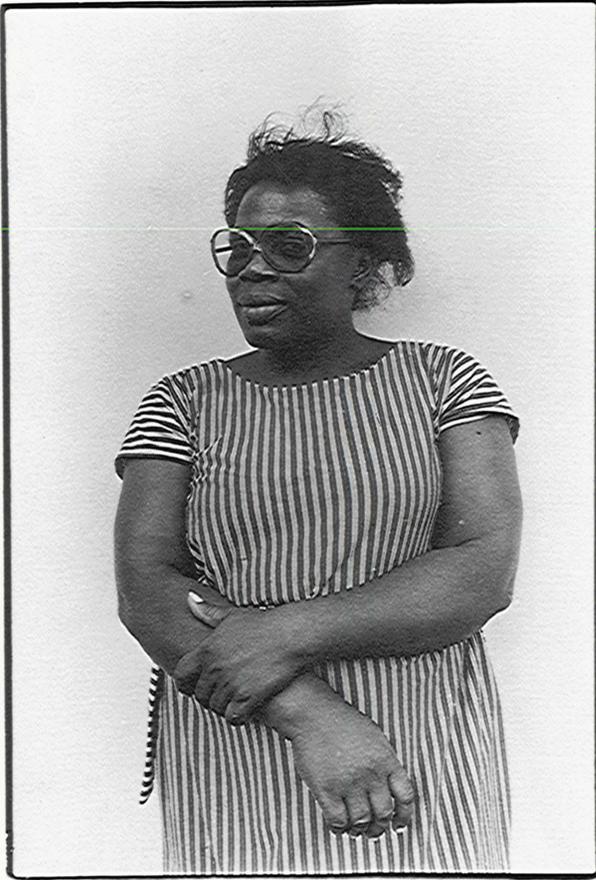
What would I say to all women? You don't have to have many certificates; you don't have to pass exams to be on top; you can work your way up by doing something that is worthwhile. All of us want our children to pass exam, and we want them to be a nurse and teacher, but you don't have to be teacher and nurse to be important. You can be important in your own way. I know that the work we are doing now is very important. I would encourage all women to keep up and do something that is worthwhile. And you will be on the forefront.

"Now I have somebody to talk with"

Mae Thompson

I was brought up by my mother alone; she was my only source. I use to tend her business. She have a farm, in St. Catherine, with cane and banana and yam and all those things. I used to collect the money for the cane and banana. Just the both of us live together. She sent me to technical school and I

Mae Thompson



Mitchell Demburg

did basic subjects: a little English, science, and a little dress designing. When I was 16, I got pregnant and have to leave school. My mother felt upset, being that she was looking for me to really come out with something. She turn me out.

I use to wait until she go into the bush; and then I just run in and thief some of the money, because I use to know where the money is. And I thief some food. One time she have a pot of mutton soup on the fire, so I just go in and take out the pot. But it was hot and drop from me and she coming through the door and saying, "Thief! Thief!" Then it happen that people talk to her and she take me back.

I have a boy, and even that child grow up without a father: my mother never want his father to come to the house. So I leave home after a time and my son stay with my mother. In Kingston, I took evening classes; I didn't

work because my mother use to support me. When I was pregnant with the second child, she give me everything, you understand? That really touch me because she took sick. She send a telegram to call me, say she could die any moment. I say, "I will come tomorrow." But she die. She took out a tooth and it gave her a hemorrhage and the hemorrhage kill her.

After the little girl, my third child, I get a little work. My mother always said to me: "When a woman work for herself, she can stand up and grow. But when you have to depend upon a man, you have to be worried." My boyfriend have a job then, but still I want my own money. So when I start the Impact Programme, I work my little money, and I buy what I want—I buy my little furniture and things. I have three children; but the second one, a boy, he was killed by a car. And my first, who is 16, he gone by himself. The girl is with me.

Right now my thinking is too weary. I'm doing this drama here right now, and sometime I worry. My baby's father oppose me. He say, "You up on stage now. You soon gone with another man." Sometime when I leave from home, I don't cook the food because it will go cold. So I wait until night to prepare food, and he become angry with me sometimes. First time him reach home before me, he say, "Don't do that again." So generally now, my little daughter, she's quite helpful. I make sure and put the food what I want to cook on the table, and when she comes from school at two o'clock, she helps me.

Why I appreciate and I glad to be in Sistren is my first coming together working with women, coming in contact with so many different people. Because it was only me and my mother alone. She use to say, "Keep yourself from women. Women are some people you not to trust or deal with too much." So now that I come to Sistren, I have somebody to talk with. And sometime people in the group will say, "You must cheer up. You must be confident within yourself."

It was a dread scene for me the first time I'm going on stage and see so much people look at me. Man, I tremble sometimes! When we went on stage, I use the cardboard that say "Strike!" to put in front of me because I was shaking. Now I feel when I go up on a stage, I can master myself. I feel confident. I wish for the group that we may continue to work with each other as long as the group continue to grow.

Interviews with Sistren members were conducted by Robert Wasserstrom and Elayair McIntosh. These excerpts will appear in Dr. Wasserstrom's forthcoming book, IF WE DIDN'T ARGUE, IT WOULDN'T BE A MEETING, oral histories of six organizations that have received IAF support.

© Robert Wasserstrom

Research reports

Through research grants, project evaluations, thematic studies, fellowships, and international exchanges, the Inter-American Foundation supports a wide range of research on development issues affecting poor people. About 30 evaluations of IAF-funded projects are conducted every year, often by teams that include U.S. and Latin American or Caribbean evaluators. Broader reviews by program area and country help the foundation test its approaches and generate new ways of thinking about development problems. Grants are made to Latin American and Caribbean research institutions for both applied and basic studies. Finally, through its fellowship programs the foundation annually provides research and training opportunities for about 50 graduate students and promising junior researchers from hemisphere countries. The following summaries report on the results of four studies recently completed with IAF support.

Private development organizations in rural Chile

In 1979, Sergio Gomez, an economist, carried out three evaluations of rural projects in his native Chile. He encountered a plethora of nongovernmental programs to assist small farmers in Chile, but relatively little was known about them. With IAF support to the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) in Santiago, Gomez conducted a survey of 41 of these programs. Descriptions of the origins, approaches, beneficiaries, and scope of each program form the foundation of the study, which now appears in summary as a chapter of his new book, *Instituciones y Procesos Agrarios en Chile*. The following presents the principal findings on the study.

Of the 41 programs examined by Gomez:

- the majority are connected, directly or indirectly, to the Catholic Church;
- more than half focus on people in particular regions or provinces;
- most have been established since 1973—that is, since the state began cutting its support for rural groups;
- their activities range from providing direct aid and technical services, to establishing and supporting community organizations, to promoting agricultural self-sufficiency, and to helping peasants join the market economy;
- finally, the programs have concentrated on two groups of people—the peasants organized during the national agrarian reform, and Mapuche Indians.

Several circumstances help to explain why attention has centered on the Mapuches and the groups that emerged from the agrarian reform. The choice of beneficiary carries a symbolic importance. An organization chooses to support certain kinds of groups in order to keep alive an idea or to provide a model that can be emulated.

The agrarian reform embodied a long-held hope of many people concerned with rural development. After the 1973 coup, agricultural cooperatives and other rural associations became extremely vulnerable. Credit and other government assistance was virtually terminated and outright repression was practiced against some of the organizations and their leaders. The private programs were established to help small farmers maintain their organizations and preserve the benefits achieved under the agrarian reform.

Gomez observed that there are other groups, in addition to the reformed sector and Mapuche Indians, which could also benefit from these nongovernmental programs. These include, for example, rural wage laborers and seasonal workers. Programs for rural youth are particularly needed as fewer young people have been migrating to cities in recent years.

Private programs have emerged in response either to the withdrawal of governmental programs or to government policies that threatened previously-won gains, but these programs do not have the resources to replicate the functions of

Programas de Apoyo al Sector Campesino en Chile, by Sergio Gomez; Working Paper 157, October 1982; Programa FLACSO; Santiago, Chile.

Instituciones y Procesos Agrarios en Chile, by Sergio Gomez; FLACSO, Santiago, Chile, December 1982.

the earlier governmental agencies. They are most effective when they concentrate on the specific problems of small popula-

Seasonal migration among the Aymara

Jane Collins was in the highlands of southern Peru in 1977, conducting research on agrarian reform for a master's thesis, when she first met families who traveled great distances several times a year to cultivate lands at a much lower altitude. After discussing the subject with Hector Martínez, a Peruvian anthropologist who studied Aymara seasonal migration in the 1950's, Collins prepared a research proposal. She asked: how is the division of labor within the family and the coherence of the community related to migration and the prolonged separation of men and women?

Collins' research, for which IAF awarded her a doctoral fellowship, explored a traditional Andean pattern—the cultivation of diverse ecological zones—in a new context: the production of cash crops. It focused on the adaptation of households to the long separation of family members. This aspect of seasonal migration had been little studied, despite the fact that such separation occurs widely in response to economic conditions.

After mastering Aymara, Collins spent a year doing field research in a district northeast of Lake Titicaca. Walking as long as five hours to reach some of the 38 communities there, she became familiar with the ecological zones of both highlands and valleys. Following are some of her observations about the region in which she conducted her study.

Coffee harvest for the Aymara families of the highland province of Huancane in southern Peru is not a matter of walking out to the coffee groves. Farmers must take a 24-hour truck ride across the eastern range of the Andes and descend into the tropical river valley of Tambopata. Some household members remain in the highlands caring for the animals, house, and fields; others make the long journey to their lowland coffee plots several times a year, often remaining three to four months at a time.

Highland families undertake this seasonal migration in response to the difficulties of agriculture at 13,000 feet—an altitude at which potatoes, barley, and quinoa (a highland cereal crop) produce low yields and require painstaking culti-

tions and identify ways that people can help themselves.

vation. Drought, frost, and hail cause such frequent crop failures that families are uncertain from year to year that they will be able to meet their subsistence needs. Many families would not have enough food to survive in years of crop failure were it not for their coffee income.

Families sell their coffee to a government-run cooperative that places it on the world market (most of it is processed into instant coffee). Yet these families grow their food using the traditional Andean footplow and an agricultural technology hundreds of years old. They are aware of the incongruities between the old and new, referring to their "food fields" in the highlands and their "money fields" in the valley. Although growing coffee sometimes yields a good income, families view it as supplementary to subsistence agriculture. Coffee prices vary, and—more importantly—rights to permanent tenure on the valley lands are uncertain.

Most of the activities associated with coffee take place during the highland dry season and overlap only slightly with the major highland agricultural activities of planting, plowing, or harvesting. But overlaps occur, which can be resolved by the household's dividing its labor; both men and women can perform the tasks required in either region. There is also an exchange of goods and services among relatives and members of the same highland communities.

Since the 1930's, when a handful of highland families began to grow coffee in Tambopata, such seasonal migration has come to meet the needs of 2,000 to 3,000 highland families. However, it may not continue indefinitely. Families continually invest labor in maintaining terraces and irrigation in the highlands and in redistributing the manure that preserves the productivity of their subsistence plots. But their use of land in the valley has been destructive. Partly because they do not perceive that land as permanently their own, they do little to maintain the soil. Moreover, the difficulties of keeping up production in zones separated by more than 200 miles of mountain roads and the rigors of highland cultivation, do not leave time and

Jane L. Collins, Kinship and Seasonal Migration Among the Aymara of Southern Peru: Human Adaptation to Energy Scarcity, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1981 available through University Microfilms International, P.O. Box 1764, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48106.

energy for a comparable investment of labor in maintaining the coffee-growing soils. Less labor-intensive measures (such as the application of chemical fertilizers, or the adoption of soil-conserving techniques for weeding around the young coffee trees) are also beyond their means. Credit and technical assistance have been relatively unavailable, despite hopes raised by the establishment of coffee cooperatives in the 1960's.

As a result, the upper Tambopata val-

ley has been devastated by loss of soil fertility and erosion; producers have moved further down the valley, claiming new lands and bringing them into production. This can continue only as long as unoccupied lands remain. As the Aymara move down the valley, other farmers have been moving up from the lowlands. Thus the Aymara's current migratory and land-use pattern is a temporary solution, and an ecologically costly one.

Caciques and reform in Bolivia

The Inter-American Foundation awarded a fellowship to Kevin Healy in 1974 for field research on "Power, Class, and Rural Development in Southern Bolivia." His dissertation was recently published in Spanish by a Bolivian research institution, Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Económica y Social (CERES). Healy now serves as IAF representative for Bolivia. The following is his summary of that newly published research.

Twelve years of agrarian reform (1952-1964) in the department of Chuquisaca in southern Bolivia were followed by a period of rural modernization (1964-1978). This study traces the actions of the local rural elite in two provinces of that department during both periods.

Using case histories and statistical measurements of the effect of the agrarian reform, the book compares the two provinces with the rest of the department in distribution of land, new resources, and other benefits for the multi-ethnic peasant population. The study focuses on local landowners and their tactics to capture control of reform efforts.

Ownership of land, cattle, and citrus, and access to hired labor are used to measure the continued concentration of wealth among 15 families after the land reform. These indices also show that the different producer groups had unequal access to "development goods" (productive resources, agro-services, social benefits, and new opportunities for decisionmaking), which were offered by the local agencies administering rural development programs.

Those development programs did strengthen linkages between the producers in southern Chuquisaca and regional and national markets. Public expenditures, production credit, and infrastructural investments led to the expansion of agricultural and swine production, the adoption of modern technology, and the

increased commercialization of farm products. However, this process is better termed "modernization" than "development," since it tended to reconcentrate wealth, power, and income among a minority of landowners, truck owners, and well-to-do merchants. Although its features were changing, a dual social structure remained. A few large landowners were transforming their estates into commercial farming operations, while a peasant majority continued to tend undercapitalized, subsistence plots.

The study examines how local elites exercised power in 12 associated rural cooperatives. These cooperatives were set up to provide directly certain services (such as the transport and marketing of maize and the use of tractors) and to broaden access to public services (such as water, consumption credit, and electricity). A modern hog-fattening center and a sausage factory were also to be established.

However, most of the cooperatives were subsumed within an informal power network run by a group of dynamic town elites (termed *caciques*) who used the jobs, financial resources, and other benefits provided by the new cooperatives to enhance their own power and wealth. Like the government programs, the cooperatives failed to foster social equity and popular participation, although they did increase production and the flow of services.

Real development in these two provinces of Chuquisaca would require greater social equity and popular participation along with increased productivity. This study concludes that the local agrarian reform did not restructure power relations and did not broaden access to key resources and opportunities.

Kevin Healy, *Caciques y Patrones, Una Experiencia de Desarrollo Rural en el Sur de Bolivia*, Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Económica y Social (CERES), Cochabamba, Bolivia, 1983.

"Power, Class and Rural Development in Southern Bolivia," Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1978.

Bread, textiles, and culture in Ecuador

Last year, anthropologist Louisa Stark evaluated three programs funded through an IAF grant of \$218,000 to the *Unidad de Educación para el Desarrollo de Chimborazo (Unidad)*, a semi-autonomous technical unit of the provincial Office of Education of Chimborazo, Ecuador. Most Unidad employees teach reading and writing in the villages; however, with IAF support, a team of about two dozen people conducted programs to provide jobs by baking bread and making clothes and textiles, and used song and drama to help inspire people in these mountainous communities to work together to resolve their problems.

Stark interviewed members of 30 villages during the evaluation. She determined that the programs did generate employment opportunities consistent with the cultural life of the communities. She also identified a wide range of difficulties that limited program effectiveness—for example, too little guidance was given to communities setting up artisan projects; obtaining sales permits cost money and involved red tape; and insufficient planning resulted in depletion of supplies of baking and sewing materials. The following are some observations from the evaluation:

Ever since the early colonial period the Indian men of Chimborazo have been forced to leave their communities temporarily to seek outside work. If villages have been able to maintain some sort of cultural and social integrity, it is because the *comuna* (Indian community) has served as a refuge from the exploitation and hardships of the outside world and because Indian women (traditionally left behind) have managed to keep traditions and culture alive. Many of the Indian communities in Chimborazo now are composed primarily of old people, young children, and women who must shoulder increasing economic responsibility.

In community meetings and conversations, people of the province frequently express a desire to avoid migrating in search of work. The bread-baking and artisan programs address this need directly. Whereas conventional development thinking might suggest that literacy should precede manufacturing, Unidad believes that managing productive enterprises such as bakeries will motivate people to become literate. To promote these kinds of activities—and to reinforce cultural expression and self-respect—

Unidad established *Ferías Educativas*: two groups of talented musicians who are adept at using puppets and in producing dramatic skits. The groups perform in Indian communities throughout the province—over 300 performances have been given to date, with far more invitations unmet. The shows entertain and encourage people to maintain their culture, to understand their rights, and to address community problems themselves.

Unidad has also addressed the need for greater self-sufficiency in food. Barley, the traditional agricultural staple of the Indian communities, has in recent years been destroyed by disease. Wheat bread—purchased in mestizo towns, sometimes after day-long travel from distant communities—has increasingly become the primary dietary staple. Indians are often exploited in these transactions, paying high prices for stale bread. The program, *Pan para la Educación*, enables communities to establish their own bakeries. It provides a gasoline-fueled oven and training in baking and in administration. Key participants are members of the community's municipal council, who not only help run the bakery but manage its profits. These profits, which are still meager, are divided into thirds—for oven fuel and repairs, for educational projects, and for community development. At regularly scheduled meetings, community officers have decided, for example, to purchase school desks and supplies and to build water systems and community centers. This was the first experience for many communities in using money at their own discretion.

Finally, Unidad has helped establish an artisan workshops program to develop cottage industries, particularly for clothing and textiles. An initial goal was to "rescue cultural values" through production of traditional textiles and clothing; but in practice, many communities opted for sewing and knitting machines to make modern, nontraditional garments. In only a few instances, however, have these activities actually produced much income for the people involved.

Unidad's staff has shown unusual sensitivity while working in the Indian communities of Chimborazo. Bakeries were established in 12 of the 14 communities. And the songs and dramas of the popular *ferias educativas*, contributed to such community efforts. Other development organizations working in the region are following Unidad's lead by constructing bakeries in additional Indian communities.

Louisa R. Stark, *Music, Bread and Tapestries: An Evaluation of Three IAF Funded Programs in Ecuador*; October 1982, unpublished.

Inter-American Foundation

Foundation Officers

Peter D. Bell, President
Sally W. Yudelman, Vice President for Program
Peter Hakim, Vice President for Research & Evaluation
Stephen N. Abrams, General Counsel
Leon M. Parker, Executive Officer, Administration & Finance
Robert W. Mashek, Director of the Southern Region
Marion Ritchey, Director of the Andean Region
David Valenzuela, Director of the Central/Caribbean Region

Board of Directors

Victor Blanco, Chairman; President and Chief Executive Officer, Multiple Medical Management
Doris B. Holleb, Director, Metropolitan Institute, University of Chicago
Alberto Ibarguen, Vice President and Deputy General Counsel, Connecticut National Bank
Marc E. Leland, Assistant Secretary for International Affairs, Department of the Treasury
Peter McPherson, Administrator, Agency for International Development
Luis G. Nogales, Executive Vice President, United Press International

Advisory Council

Augustin S. Hart, Jr., Chairman; Former Vice Chairman, Quaker Oats Company
Rodrigo Botero, Publisher, *Estrategia*
Manuel R. Caldera, Chairman, AMEX Systems, Inc.
John C. Duncan, Retired Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, St. Joe Minerals Corporation
John M. Hennessy, Chief Executive Officer, Financiñere Credit Suisse-First Boston
Peter T. Jones, Senior Vice President, Levi Strauss & Co.
William H. Jordan, Jr., Former member of the professional staff, Senate Appropriations Committee
George Cabot Lodge, Professor, Harvard Business School
Harry C. McPherson, Jr., Attorney; Verner, Liipfert, Bernhard & McPherson
Charles A. Meyer, Former Senior Vice President; Sears, Roebuck and Company
Richard Rubottom, Professor Emeritus, Southern Methodist University
Viron P. Vaky, Research Professor in Diplomacy; School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University

The Inter-American Foundation, a public corporation created by the United States Congress in 1969, provides direct financial support for self-help efforts initiated by poor people in Latin America and the Caribbean. The foundation works with private groups such as agricultural cooperatives, small businesses, community associations, and technical assistance organizations. The IAF makes about 200 grants a year for projects in more than 25 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Approximately half of its funds are appropriated by Congress and the remainder come from the Social Progress Trust Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank. Its budget for 1983 is \$26 million.

Contents

The Principle of Conservation and Mutation of Social Energy

Albert O. Hirschman

Vision and Blindness in Jamaica

Sheldon Annis

What to Think About Cooperatives: A Guide from Bolivia

Judith Tendler,
with Kevin Healy and
Carol Michaels O'Laughlin

Women's Theater in Jamaica

The Sistren Theatre Collective

Fieldclips/Research Reports