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Cover photo: Mr. Williams, ORD official in charge of agricultural supply facility on St. Vincent. Mitchell Denburg.

Economic rationalization has allowed some central stores to provide better grassroots services.

able runs rather than those routes that would serve the neediest stores. Even those central stores that obtained vehicles with the specific intention of supplying isolated stores no longer use them for this purpose. Either their trucks and jeeps are rented out, or they stand idle.

Sometimes, however, that economic rationalization has allowed the central store to provide better service to its grassroots affiliates. This can be illustrated by comparing the experience of two central stores. The first chose to focus most of its efforts on keeping prices down in its county seat by slashing profits to the bone. This sparked an interminable price war with rival grocers, and although the county-seat community store achieved a larger sales volume than any of its competitors, per unit profits remained too low to fund training programs, technical assistance, or new organizational projects. The second central store—the most successful of the four we surveyed in providing higher-quality food at lower prices—concentrated on rationalizing its wholesale merchandising by simplifying its sales inventory to a few items, by selling to mom-and-pop as well as community-run groceries, and by hiring a purchasing agent with previous experience in the private sector. Sufficient funds are available to support an organized educational program that utilizes professional staff and is tailored to the business needs of individual community stores. For instance, the head of the purchasing department also helps local stores improve their marketing. He recently conducted the leaders and workers of a county-seat

community grocery on a tour of a large supermarket. Shortly afterward, the county-seat store converted into a self-service facility, reducing labor costs while increasing sales. Similarly, the central store's accountant visits each associated community store every two weeks to assist local bookkeepers in drawing up their monthly balance sheets. The goal has been to develop necessary skills so that the local groups can eventually keep their own books. The other central stores we examined were simply absorbing this burden by keeping accounts for local outlets, with no relief in sight.

MEANS AND ENDS

Although central stores and their grassroots affiliates are hardly extinct in Colombia, many community groceries have short lifespans, and the ambitious goals of network organizers have dimmed. By those organizers' own accounts, mere survival is not enough. Only two of the 14 community stores—including COINCA—that we looked at in depth have been successful enough to launch second generation social programs. Even then, it took four years in one case and nearly a decade in the other. Moreover, the stores we examined tended to draw their leadership from other organizations rather than spawn new leaders. That is, a community store may be a vivid example of self-help in action, but the success of that enterprise tends to reflect prior levels of organization rather than the mobilization of new resources. Indeed, store management usually includes a steadily dwindling number of active leaders who find them-

Don Isidro Callejas, president of the Municipal Association of Campesino Consumers in Algeciras.

selves saddled with business responsibilities, with little time and resources left over for new organizing. Understandably, morale is often low, the sense of frustration high.

What can be done? For one thing, central organizations can target their resources more carefully. That may mean separating economic and social goals and asking how each can best be furthered. Sometimes the community store will not be the answer, or at least not the only answer. In medium-size communities it might make more sense to try to organize mom-and-pop stores and use credit or other services as an incentive to promote socially responsible pricing. Similarly, forming a citizens' committee made up of members of community organizations to monitor the use of accurate weights and measures might be a more efficient way to guarantee fair trade practices than starting and staffing a community store.

There may even be virtue in necessity. As previously noted, store management and member participation tends to narrow over time, anyway. One central store organization hit hard times and turned over ownership of three outlets to highly motivated members. Thus far, those stores are still operating and are still serving their communities. In such cases, community stores provide training in merchandising and bookkeeping that allows their managers to successfully compete in the private sector.

Given the number of caveats, should intermediary organizations continue to emphasize their community store operations? The answer is a cautious yes. Community stores will continue to



Consumer store staff in a "county-seat" setting.

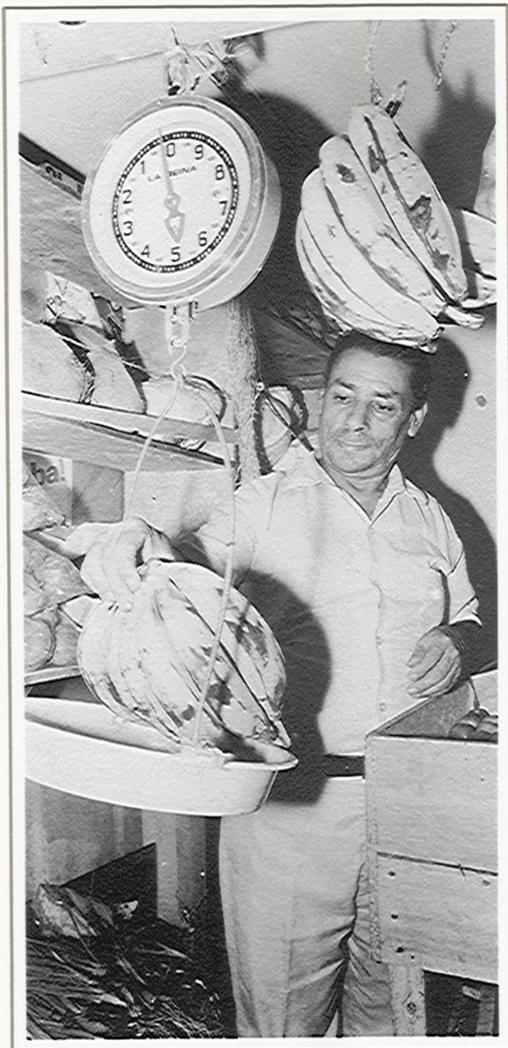
often improved a new community store's competitive position and prospects for survival in the short term, the long-term outlook remained clouded. Instead of resolving the contradictions between social and economic goals at the local level, central stores tended to absorb and reproduce—often more virulently—those conflicts within their own business operations.

As businesses, the central stores have no intrinsic price advantage in competing with private wholesalers to supply community stores. Both buy from the same middlemen, and none of the four central stores has achieved sufficient economies of scale to purchase goods directly from the processor. They have not developed effective mechanisms for marketing their customers' locally grown produce within the networks.

Their chief advantage over other suppliers—access to grants from outside donors—is offset, even dwarfed, by the task of building and maintaining peasant organizations. A substantial portion of those funds is used to subsidize credit to beneficiary community stores, usually by stocking a new grocery's shelves. Although this start-up capital is given as a loan, credit terms are usually soft. In practice, loans often become grants. After a community store gets off the ground, the central store faces the added expense of providing bookkeeping and technical assistance so the local group can meet its legal requirements and learn how to survive as a business. Should the store begin to prosper, central store organizers want the group to be independent and encourage it to buy goods as cheaply as possible, whatever

the source. The local stores that are the most successful as businesses thus have an incentive to buy elsewhere, while the stores with the worst credit have nowhere else to turn. Central store networks face the constant danger of hemorrhage from pumping capital into the least efficient community groceries. Meanwhile, central stores find themselves competing with market-oriented wholesalers who do not carry the same burden of social investment, who sell to customers that are already capitalized, who can cut off a buyer when bills are not paid on time, and for whom marketing and profits are the bottom line.

Increasingly, that competition and the need to conserve resources has pushed the central stores into more traditional, market-oriented behavior. Some of the central stores that we examined were beginning to sell to mom-and-pop as well as community stores and were rationalizing their credit and pricing policies on economic rather than social grounds. A similar reordering has occurred in transportation services. Central organizations commonly have used grant monies to purchase vehicles, on the assumption that this investment will eliminate the markup charged by intermediaries for carrying goods to the central store and from there to the local outlets. In practice, however, it has proven extremely difficult to calculate how to use a vehicle efficiently enough to cover maintenance, labor, and fuel costs: drivers still have to be paid for empty backhauls that also burn gas. One remedy has been to rent the vehicle or vehicles to a reliable member who then supervises hired drivers and schedules the most profit-



Mitchell Denburg

Member of community-run store weighing *plátanos* for sale.

with the Community Action Movement actually had a negative net worth and had suffered from periods of bad administration that forced their principal creditor—FUNDACOMUN—to exert pressure to change the management.

In one case, part of the problem was related to the fact that the groups sponsoring the stores—the County Associations of Community Action Boards—were really collections of conflicting interests: they were comprised of representatives from various local boards that were scattered in settlements throughout the mountainous area. Peasant representatives were cut off from regular contact with each other and with the stores. Consequently, the stores' operations were supervised by two representatives who lived in the county seat. One was a county employee who was in charge of repossessing tax-delinquent farms. Understandably, he had difficulty gaining the support of the peasant members from rural Community Action Boards.

There was also a second reason for the faulty management. The active members of each association perceived the community store as an instrument of political patronage, rather than as a business. Thus, in the river town, rivalry between two community leaders, each seeking to strengthen his or her political base, made it difficult to settle disputes over store operations on the technical merits of what would be cost effective.

The one store in this group that is solvent is not tied to the Community Action structure. The "ANUC store" is basically run in a family-store fashion by the administrator, his wife, and the two re-

maining ANUC members. For all practical purposes the grocery has ceased to be a community outlet: it is more like a family operation with a hired manager. Although all three of the county-seat stores depended on outside grants—either from the government, the IAF, or both—to get off the ground, this is the only one that succeeded in converting its start-up funds into operating capital.

Only one of the county-seat stores we looked at was responding to the social goals of its central-network sponsor. Classes in accounting and in dance have been organized, and both men and women have attended. Many of these students—notably several young women—have gone on to work with their County Association and their local Community Action Boards. This community store and its activities program, however, are heavily subsidized by FUNDACOMUN, and the original hope that consumer-run stores would generate profits to finance other community action projects has proven utopian in all county seats. Moreover, participation and training of members within the store's structure have also been severely limited because of the complexity of day-to-day operations, and management has been consigned to a few members or to a paid staff.

CENTRAL STORES: RAISING THE ANTE

The four regional organizations that we studied operated central stores to supply their grassroots affiliates with wholesale goods, credit, and technical assistance. Although these services

their accounts or to provide technical assistance to the manager-bookkeeper. That is, most of the surviving community stores depended upon a few highly motivated leaders and members and on access to outside resources.

Even when these stores were holding their own, however, the struggle to meet the challenge of stiff competition was altering their operations in ways that tended to undermine membership morale and participation over the long term. The process can be summed up as follows. Members tend to be highly inspired when the store opens, and enthusiasm increases as benefits are realized. A policy of keeping prices low and using reliable weights and measures puts pressure on other retailers. Prices for consumers can even drop dramatically in the short term if a price war breaks out. Usually however, an informal truce is quickly reached since most small businesses—family-run or cooperative—are undercapitalized and cannot afford to sustain losses for long. The need to stay solvent leads the community store to tighten its credit policies or even to increase its prices while competing retailers adopt fairer trade practices. It becomes harder, in purely economic terms, for members to distinguish between the benefits offered by the community store and its rivals. At the same time, the day-to-day operations of the store become so complex and time-consuming that decisions are left in the manager's hands. If membership apathy becomes too great, the leaders and managers of the store may tire of bearing the burden, and the store will fold. Or, the store may evolve into a version of the family stores with

which it competes.

The community store we studied that had just gone out of business revealed that outside support does not guarantee success and may even be counterproductive. This was the only store that did not arise solely from local initiative and did not rely on members contributing substantial amounts of their own capital. A loan offered by a central network made the idea of starting a community store attractive. However, the members of the founding group confused the loan with a donation and never really established their grocery as an economic enterprise. The inability to make that transition led to the business's folding when the start-up capital was exhausted.

Despite these difficulties, the example of COINCA shows that community stores can, given the proper circumstances, not only survive but can surpass their competition. The cooperative now has 11 employees and handles 60 percent of the grocery business in La Florida. It took over a steadily larger share of the market as family stores went out of business. Of course, COINCA enjoys several advantages that may make its success difficult to replicate elsewhere. The coop has been able to exploit its central location within a highly commercialized region where harvests occur throughout the year, and it has considerably enlarged its capital base by expanding its activities into marketing operations for local farmers. The closeness to the Bogotá market and the community's year-round production of blackberries has made it possible to dovetail marketing with restocking operations. COINCA is the only community store we exam-

ined whose trucking operation has broken even; the same trucks could carry produce into the city for sale and return laden with groceries for the store. COINCA has also used its dual service capability to capture business: unlike any of its other competitors, it offers free delivery of groceries at the same time trucks pick up blackberries at the farm gate. Finally, the cooperative also has a number of well-trained leaders who now have up to 10 years of experience in making the business work. Again, however, it has to be remembered that even COINCA's success has not prevented a steadily dwindling membership.

County-seat towns: Three county-seat community stores were examined. One was located in a bustling, working-class town of about 30,000 citizens along the Cauca River in Risaralda. The second was in a nearby mountainous community with an active coffee trade. The third was based in Algeciras, which is an assembly point in Huila for products brought from the eastern plains. The first two stores were associated with the Community Action Movement, while the third emerged from the now-defunct ANUC.

At first glance, these stores seem to enjoy the favorable position enjoyed by COINCA: they have the potential for sufficient sales volume to realize economies of scale, and once that advantage is secured, they no longer have to compete with mom-and-pop stores but with larger enterprises that also have to pay rent, wages, and employee benefits. Nonetheless, these stores had difficulty making that transition. The two linked



Campeño packaging *cuajada* (farmer's cheese) for transport and sale to consumer store.

We also found that these stores were developing new skills in community participation and planning. Despite minimal levels of formal education, members were willing to consider relatively complex problems (such as cost-accounting) and made noteworthy efforts to apply what they learned to running their stores. One reason may be that these stores start small and expand slowly, which makes the economic principles governing their operations easier to understand. Usually, however, these new skills are related to store operations, and training tends to be concentrated within the membership ranks. Only one store was sponsoring a rich social program of outside activities, and it relied on its network sponsor for the necessary resources. The two stores associated with cooperative production enterprises allowed those institutions to promote educational and organizational activities within the community.

The small village store that deviated the most from these norms was situated near a major highway, and travel into larger communities with family-run groceries was relatively easy. Despite having the highest average levels of education among these five groups, its members seemed relatively uninterested in the day-to-day operations of the business or in its solvency. Indeed, the storekeeper-member had merged the community store with her own grocery and had located it in her home. This will seem less anomalous after looking at consumer stores started in larger communities.

Intermediate-sized communities: The five

stores in this group were located in large *veredas* (rural neighborhoods) or in *corregimientos* (township headquarters with police outposts). Four of the communities were situated in mountainous areas, one among rolling foothills. All were centers of commerce for several smaller, surrounding villages whose peasants grow diverse crops—from corn, to coffee, to blackberries, to tree tomatoes. One township was only two hours by bus from Bogotá's markets; another was a bustling outlet for settlements higher up in the Andes and contained a variety of retail stores and wholesale marketing operations for agricultural products. Most of these communities also had a rich infrastructure of voluntary organizations, many of them associated with the Catholic Church.

Community-run stores find it extremely difficult to survive in these medium-size rural centers. Here, retail trade—particularly the relatively risky, low-markup variety—involves brisk competition, usually from “mom-and-pop” family stores. These enterprises enjoy several advantages. First, the business and home are under the same roof while a community store almost always has to buy or rent space. Second, a mom-and-pop store can rely on family labor, but the community-run groceries must pay their workers or resort to volunteers who hold other jobs and for whom the store remains a secondary priority. Third, the cost of wages and the difficulty in recruiting volunteers limits community store hours. Small family groceries are often open more than 100 hours per week since there is usually someone to mind the business, even if

that person is also watching the children and cooking the evening meal. Finally, the community outlet requires accurate bookkeeping if it is to avoid corruption and remain accountable to its constituency (and to outside donors like the IAF). In the mom-and-pop store, owners answer only to themselves. They know how the business is faring not by examining ledgers but by seeing whether the family's bills are being paid and whether some money is being put aside.

Given the advantages enjoyed by their competition, why were there any community-run groceries in this setting to examine at all? First, it should be noted that turnover is also high among mom-and-pop stores. Failures are related to the general difficulty of operating any sort of small business profitably, whether mom-and-pop or community store. But to the extent that *some* community stores managed to succeed financially, it is because they replicated or offset (at least partially) the favorable characteristics of the family store. For instance, one enterprise was known locally as “Don Julio's store,” and most of the seven members in the organizing group were kin. Two of the community stores we examined had managers who took nominal salaries for long hours, and one of these men had donated part of his house so the store could get on its feet during its first eight months of operation without having to pay rent. In a third community, members voluntarily helped out on Sunday, the busiest day of the week. Only COINCA, the full-fledged cooperative of our pilot study, employed an accountant; the others relied on a central store network to keep

Community stores with the best prospects for survival were started in small, out-of-the-way villages.

recruitment to protect itself from "cooptation" by prospective members who hold different values or seek personal gain. COINCA, the only "cooperative" store in our sample, illustrates this. Indiscriminate recruitment almost led to the early death of the organization when townspeople with ties to family-run groceries joined and tried to take over the cooperative. The original membership of 200 shrank to about 100 by 1980 as greater care was taken to enlist only peasants.

COINCA also demonstrates how economic necessity—the final factor—affects membership size. In 1983 a shortage of operating capital arose from a rapid expansion of store operations and led to a sixfold increase in monthly membership dues—from 200 to 1,250 pesos. Membership declined again, to 37 people. That is, the effort needed to make a community store work as a business and stay afloat exerts a counterweight that limits its social goal of attracting new members and broadening their involvement in the organization.

Inevitably, the managers and groups operating consumer stores have had difficulty in balancing this equation. In our field study, we examined 13 community stores in depth and 23 others less extensively. In all but three cases, we found the enterprises struggling: either they faced bankruptcy because significant costs (particularly of credit) were not reflected in prices, or their leadership was being criticized for overcharging on goods or for restricting credit. Both difficulties often plagued the same organization as early and continuing threats to solvency led to sharp price increases—which often still did not cover costs.

COMMUNITY SIZE AND PRIVATE COMPETITION

As previously stated, community size and location were key considerations in selecting which community-run stores would be studied in depth. We found that, depending on these two factors, community stores encountered different kinds of competition from retailers. The nature of that challenge, in turn, affected a store's solvency and its ability to meet its social goals.

Isolated or very small communities: The community stores with the best prospects for survival were started in small, out-of-the-way villages. Of the five stores we surveyed, two are associated with agricultural collectives established during the brief period of land reform in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Three of these communities are accessible only by foot or mule, and another can be reached only by a rough, unpaved road. Only one is located along a major highway and is readily accessible. None of these hamlets has more than a cluster of houses and a few services. Except for the settlements containing production coops, more people who shop at the stores live outside rather than in the village. In all cases, the community-run stores are the only groceries in the immediate vicinity.

The resulting lack of competition enhances the economic position of these stores in several ways. First, inventories can be limited to a few basic items, and customers are so well known that their weekly purchases can be predicted almost exactly. Just before market day the shelves are almost empty; on market day

they are full; the following day supplies are sparse again. Capital is seldom tied up, and the risks of spoilage or overstocking are minimized. Second, small village stores can also curtail their hours of operation, reducing the amount of wages and benefits that must be paid to the storekeeper-member or making it feasible to rely solely on volunteer labor. Finally, these stores have more flexibility to raise profit margins without losing customers. We found one of the five groups exercising this option in order to raise capital for reinvestment in store operations.

Of the various examples we looked at, small village stores also came closest to reconciling their economic and social goals. The degree of community support was high, perhaps because the economic benefits were obvious. Campesinos no longer had to make the time-consuming and often arduous trip into town on market day to buy the few items their families would need during the coming week. Donations of rent-free space for the store and an abundance of volunteers to share the workload were common. This enthusiasm was also reflected in relatively high membership rolls: the village store that chose to raise its profit margins actually had more members than many of the consumer stores we studied in much larger communities. (Of course, larger memberships were also possible because these villages are comparatively undifferentiated: the emphasis on nonprofit or profit-for-community investments coincided with a general belief that the "outside world" was full of people anxious to exploit "naive" peasants.)

The leaders of the central organizations and the local stores tend to share similar values and goals unfortunately many of those goals operate at cross purposes.

COMMUNITY SERVICE AND ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

Community-run stores are not just businesses: their economic goals are shaped and conditioned by a social vision of cooperative action. The people who start these stores do, of course, begin with a definite economic agenda. They want to lower or stabilize consumer prices by reducing "exorbitant" profits by storekeepers. They want to ensure fair trade practices by instituting the use of reliable weights and measures. They want to provide local farmers with the opportunity to realize a better return for their produce. They want people with seasonal incomes to have access to credit so that they can purchase staples year-round. They also want to accumulate profits to fund other joint enterprises—from building a schoolroom for their children, to offering adult training programs, to sponsoring religious activities.

Unfortunately, many of these goals operate at cross purposes. That is, maximizing one aim may limit the others and may even undermine the solvency of the community store. The desire to keep prices low, for instance, minimizes profits for investment in second-generation community programs. Indeed, if profit margins are not calculated carefully to include indirect as well as direct costs, the store may lack the operating capital to restock. This bottom line means that credit usually must be sharply curtailed and given to people who can best pay back rather than to those who need it the most. Since that usually undermines membership cohesion and complicates

the accounting task, stores often stop providing any credit at all.

Such contradictions provoke an almost excruciating dilemma because the need to survive is not just an economic imperative. The founders of community stores—often drawing on Catholic social doctrine—have a deep commitment to service that is reflected by their initial decision to keep prices low and to reinvest any accumulated profits in new community programs rather than returning them as dividends. This commitment is all the more impressive since we found that members of the local groups generally contribute their own funds as start-up capital for the stores. The leaders of community stores also commonly express their belief that mere "survival" of the business is an inadequate measure of success. Larger goals—such as raising the level of peasant education, expanding into the marketing of agricultural products, and increasing the political presence of campesinos in the community and as part of a larger movement—have to be pursued. That is, the people who start the stores and the networks that service them share a single overriding aim: they want their enterprise to be a focal point for organizing and mobilizing further community action.

Yet, in Colombia, community-run stores typically attract and actively involve limited memberships. (Most never enlist the 25 people required by law to register as a "cooperative.") This phenomenon seems puzzling since other organizations in these communities often have larger rolls, but several factors help to account for the apparent "failures."

First, the legal requirements—including strictly prescribed bookkeeping procedures and complex paperwork—tax the available resources and skills of a small group and discourage formal registration. Consequently, most groups adopt other judicial forms: from "precooperatives," to "associated groups," to "foundations." (It should be added that how the store is organized is not merely a question of competing legalisms. Several of the groups we looked at chose to register as "precooperatives" although that meant more paperwork and more stringent bookkeeping than the other judicial alternatives. This form also stipulates that members must contribute their own start-up capital for the store. That requirement cuts two ways: it can act as a drag on membership recruitment, but it can also be a barometer to gauge membership commitment and enthusiasm. There is also a time limit on how long a group can remain a precooperative. As a result, at the time of our interview, many groups were changing their status to that of "associated group," which mandates no mechanism for distributing profits to or even returning the initial investments of members.)

Second, shopping and, frequently, credit privileges are not contingent on membership in the group that operates the enterprise because the founders usually believe that a "community" store, by definition, should serve everyone. Most consumers have no material incentive to join the organization. There is, in fact, a disincentive since membership usually requires a substantial commitment of time and, often, of dues.

Third, the founding group limits re-

COMMUNITY STORES IN RURAL COLOMBIA: ORGANIZING THE MEANS OF CONSUMPTION

JAN L. FLORA, CORNELIA BUTLER FLORA, HUMBERTO
ROJAS, and NORMA VILLARREAL

During the 1970s, the movement to organize cooperative institutions and improve the welfare of Colombia's rural poor reached a crossroads. Efforts at land reform through the National Association of Peasant Users of Government Services (Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos, or ANUC) were meeting stiff opposition from large landowners and were declining in number and intensity. Meanwhile, high national rates of inflation were increasing the costs of food and other staples and severely undermining the living standards of small farmers and agricultural workers. Many campesino groups responded to these challenges by setting up community-run stores that would stock basic items—such as rice, beans, corn, salt, candles, and soda—for sale at reduced prices. It was assumed that by doing their own packaging, buying in bulk, and relying on enthusiastic volunteers, these stores could eliminate most or all of the markup normally charged by retailers. It was also hoped that these stores would provide a new market for local farmers, raising incomes while improving the availability of fresh foods and the quality of local diets. That is, an attempt was underway to raise the living standards of the poor by organizing the means of consumption rather than the means of production. By the end of the decade, community stores were springing up throughout the countryside.

Although some of those stores—usually situated in out-of-the-way hamlets—arose spontaneously and now operate independently, many are tied into informal networks through distribution centers associated with the Catholic

Church or regional peasant organizations. These "central stores" provide wholesale goods, credit, and technical assistance to the outlets started by local community groups. Salaried professionals (*promotores*) travel from site to site and offer a variety of services—from helping campesinos open a store, to advising them about long-range goals, to setting up a system of accurate bookkeeping.

In an attempt to learn how this movement was faring, we studied, during June and July of 1983, four regional organizations in Colombia that service networks of community stores. Most leaders of three organizations—the Grupo Asociativo de Versalles, CEMECAV (the Center for Peasant Marketing in Valle), and FUNDER (the Foundation for Rural Development)—trace their roots to and were trained by IMCA (the Jesuit-run Advanced Peasant Institute in Buga, Valle). The first two groups are located in the Cauca Valley, the country's richest agricultural region. FUNDER operates in Huila, in the Magdalena Valley, which lies over the Central Cordillera to the east. The fourth group, FUNDACOMUN (the Foundation for Communities of Risaralda), emerged from the secular, government-sponsored Community Action Movement (Acción Comunal). It is located in the department of Risaralda, downriver from the Cauca Valley where the valley floor narrows to almost nothing. All four organizations have received grants for their community store operations from the Inter-American Foundation.

We also compiled case studies of several beneficiary stores associated with each of the central stores. Our selection

was made after consultation with the leaders of the central organizations and was intended to vary according to two sets of characteristics: a) successful vs. struggling enterprises,* and b) a cross section of stores by community size and location. We then conducted a pilot study of COINCA—a consumer store in the highly commercialized, mountainous region of Cundinamarca and about two hours by bus from Bogotá—to refine our interview instruments. (This study also provided useful control data to compare with our later surveys since COINCA is an economically successful, legally registered cooperative that had received no outside assistance.)

In our interviews, we found that the leaders of the central organizations and the local community-run stores tended to share similar initial values and goals. Both assumed that campesinos are eager to unite and cooperate around the immediate need of provisioning their families, and that a community, by setting up and running a consumer store, can save the money, master the skills, and generate the enthusiasm to tackle longer-range development projects. The actual record of achievement, however, tended to fall short of that ambitious mark. Two factors seemed most responsible: early expectations often contained internal contradictions that were exposed only when the community store opened, and the store's actual operations were modified by having to compete in the marketplace.

*Although we interviewed the officers of one community store that had just closed its doors, it proved extremely difficult to obtain reliable information on failed outlets.



The part-time storekeeper (in center) and members of the "precooperative" consumer store in Potrerito, Colombia.

and enlisted in a German volunteer service program. Setting out to cultivate crops and coops in the Third World, he was sent into the colonized jungles of the Alto Beni to join the Ay-mara. He now can be seen relaxing in a hammock, sipping cocoa, when he isn't giving economic and marketing advice to El Ceibo.

While visiting here, I received two new verbal project requests. One would continue to encourage women to substitute cocoa for coffee as a family drink and would also promote better leadership in and coordination among the array of cacao-supporting activities already underway. The other would support construction of a local mill to absorb the coop's surplus rice production.

We have been helping El Ceibo since 1980, making grants to the tune of \$200,000. Now they are back asking for more, admitting that all this very impressive development effort is not yet self-sustaining and may well never be. Faced with these proposals, a heretical question pops up—why not continue to help an effective, tried-and-true grassroots group when its needs are certainly manifold, when it continually signs up new beneficiary populations, when the benefits look so tangible, and when administration has proven to be strong? Why risk scarce funds on a new group through uncertain and often shaky channels when we already have dependable structures in place to reach additional people? I thought about this and said to myself, "Why not?" Indeed, impressed by the coop's exploits, a development group from Switzerland (COTESU) has set up an agricultural extension program to help El Ceibo with its cacao trees. Aid agencies are climbing all over one another to finance a piece of the action here.

A BUS NOT TAKEN TO LAS YUNGAS

Since this was the dry season, I had scheduled my annual descent into the Alto Beni. The unpredictable weather, the narrow roads with constant switchbacks, and my nervous glances hundreds of feet downward into breathtaking river valleys guaranteed an exciting trip.

Usually I begin this phase of my trip by trying to find a ride with someone with private wheels. If that does not work out, I take the *flota* (bus) called "the Yungeña" to the town of Caranavi. There I can usually find other means of transport to the coop colonization sites of El Ceibo and Bella Vista.

For some reason, the idea of this bus trip made me uncomfortable the day before my departure. A premonition? No, I thought it was probably just a reaction to the prospect of traveling among so many strangers the day after the national independence celebration. That evening, though, I decided to call several friends to see whether anyone knew of a vehicle heading toward Caranavi or whether they could help out by loaning me one.

Finally, I reached Hermano José of Radio San Gabriel. He offered to loan one of their vehicles but first had to find the driver, who had several lively parties to attend. He finally found him after midnight and made arrangements for a departure at 9:30 in the morning. Had Hermano José not called me back, I probably would have climbed aboard the Yungeña at eight.

About five hours into our trip, we approached a bend in the road and saw a backup of five large, stationary trucks.

A crowd of campesinos had gathered where bodies were strewn along the roadway. The bus driver of the Yungeña apparently had miscalculated or fallen asleep at the wheel and driven the flota off the side of the road. Falling several hundred feet, the flota rolled over and over until its final smash. The passengers were badly banged about; one was killed, a French tourist whose body I found myself standing over at the side of the road. I stood there silently, agonizing, seeing myself in this stranger who had traveled alone on the backroads of the Andes to die several thousand miles from friends and family.

The people who had taken charge at the disaster scene implored drivers for "una acta humanitaria." The victims of the accident should be taken to the nearest hospital, which was in La Paz. I immediately told the San Gabriel driver to help out; I would continue on toward Caranavi by hitching a ride with a jeep.

Meanwhile, the word spread ahead to the bus company's offices in Caranavi that another flota had gone over the side of the mountain and that a gringo passenger was dead. The



IAF representative Kevin Healy (3rd from right) discussing project for rural women's training program in the altiplano.

coop colonists who were waiting to pick me up guessed it was me, and no doubt began to plan a funeral at the project site. When I did arrive, grim and pained by the horrible loss of life, they were surprised but pleased to see that the news of my death was exaggerated. Together, we traveled on to the campesino colonies.

KEVIN HEALY began working in the Andes as a Peace Corps volunteer in the late 1960s and has been the Inter-American Foundation representative to Bolivia since 1978. He holds a doctorate in development sociology from Cornell University. He is the author of *Caciques y patronos, una experiencia de desarrollo rural en el sur de Bolivia* and recent articles in *Natural History* and the *Washington Post* about the Peruvian island of Taquile.

BLAZING A NEW CREDIT TRAIL IN THE CAMPO

In Washington, D.C., *Beltway Bandits* sometimes refers to jet-setting international experts who drop into air-conditioned offices in the capital cities of small countries and spit out ready-made development solutions. However, the high-powered team of John Hatch and Aquiles Lanao is bouncing along the backroads of Bolivia in refreshing contrast to that stereotype. They are turning the legend of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid on its head: instead of robbing Bolivian banks, they are creating them.

And this new Butch and Sundance are hardly strangers in these parts. Since their work with the Peace Corps in the 1960s, they have continued to work as consultants among the small farmers of the Andes. At USAID's expense, they have been dreaming up successful development experiments here for years. They are savvy old boys with lots of hands-on experience and have recently come up with another smashing, innovative project. Only this time, they have put the proposal on our plate.

Over the past year, they have established a revolving loan fund (with PL-480 rice sales) that is literally hauled around from one Bolivian community to another in their stagecoach. They pull into a community, feel around for the "right" representative organization, and put the pesos on the table. If the amazed campesinos agree, it is a take-it-or-leave-it deal, made on the spot with a minimum of questions and paperwork. (Indeed, the campesinos' *libro de actas*, for the first time in a rural credit scheme, certifies the legality of the transaction.) Repayment must be in the form of cash crops or livestock, to safeguard against devaluation/inflation. A portion of the repayment is allotted to a community-controlled capitalization fund. To keep everything and everybody joyfully revolving this way for the foreseeable future, Hatch and Lanao have created a private development organization that is staffed with talented Bolivians. They call it FINCA.

During the 1983-84 growing season, this rural development pony express galloped into 200 communities. An old IAF staffer—Sal Pinzino, who is the coordinator of Food for

Peace/Relief in Bolivia—is shoveling devaluing pesos into these saddlebags as fast as he can for delivery to rural communities.

The idea seems promising, but it may take awhile to see if the credit keeps revolving. I will take a closer look from the ground level at this super *sondeo* during my next trip.

EL CEIBO'S BACKWARD AND FORWARD LINKAGES

El Ceibo is a federation representing hundreds of cacao growers from the Alto Beni. Its 25 member coops provide El Ceibo with perhaps the most solid economic organization in our Bolivian project portfolio. During even the most hazardous economic times, cacao prices have kept pace with inflation. It helps that these folks control over 70 percent of the crop from the major producing area in Bolivia and that their customers include export industries that somehow obtain real dollars for their exports. Another explanation is less obvious. After selling its cacao in La Paz, El Ceibo immediately uses cash to buy nonperishable consumer goods for transport and distribution to the local coops back in the tropics, slowing down the rate of decapitalization.

Now El Ceibo has put an interesting reverse twist on this marketing/consumer nexus. I learned during my visit to some of the local coop consumer stores that they are stocking the federation's processed *cacao*. Some *a's* and *o's* are shifted at El Ceibo's agroprocessing plant in La Paz (funded by an IAF amendment) and presto—cocoa! The local campo stores are selling this cocoa to replace coffee as an afternoon and breakfast drink. Dietary routine is being altered while the colonists create a market for their own processed crop.

Bernardo, a middle-aged German volunteer, has been a real help here. He is a sensitive and sensible campo-economist, whose only previous professional experience was—surprisingly—as an economist in the West German advertising department of Avon, the multinational cosmetics company. He tired of his high-pressure job persuading consumers that life was impossible without the proper makeup

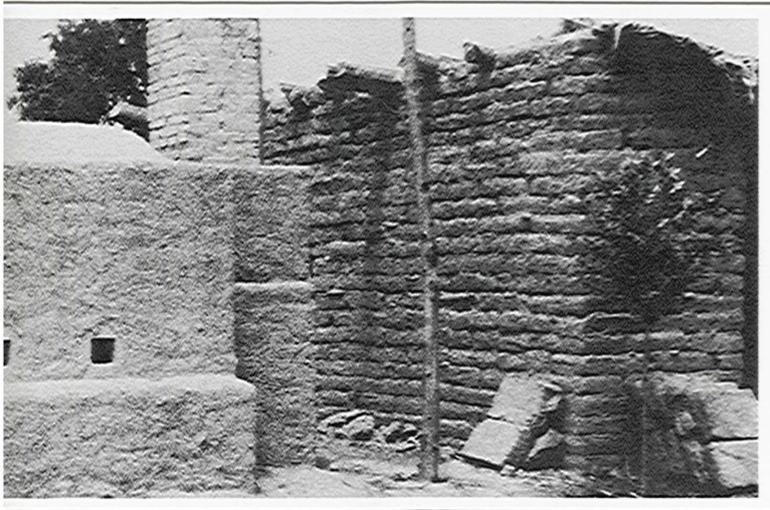


"... my nervous glances downward into breathtaking river valleys guaranteed an exciting trip into the Alto Beni."

LA KHOCHALITA'S FREE DEVELOPMENT LUNCHES

In past trip reports, I have reported on the rapid rise and sharp decline in artisan exports from the cottages of La Khochalita's 400 members. The decline seemed inevitable, given the macro-policies that are strangling Bolivia's nontraditional export sector (the sector as a whole has dropped from \$70 million to \$8 million between 1980 and 1984). A recent, IAF-contracted evaluation clarifies my previous mutterings.

All of La Khochalita's problems cannot be blamed on exchange rates. The coop had climbed to the upper end of the AMO (Alternate Marketing Organizations) market in Western Europe and provided its members with the highest wages of any artisans' cooperative in Bolivia. However, those sales reached a saturation point, and future increases in production required competing in other, nonsubsidized, markets that did not pay the same high prices. Some contraction



Julia Weisse-Vargas

had to happen, even though productivity increases by the coop lowered costs while sales rose. During the first three project years, export earnings climbed from \$59,372 (1979) to \$106,555 (1980) to \$185,865 (1981) before dropping to \$101,850 (1982), \$65,055 (1983), and \$15,000 (1984).

First, the good news. One of our evaluators, a vice president of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and a long-time development analyst in the hemisphere, conducted a baseline study of the association four years ago. In his recent follow-up study, he was struck by how members had acquired an "artisan consciousness." When these folks were previously interviewed, their self-esteem, even their simple identity as artisans, was unapparent: they were just your "average" campesinos. By achieving an "attitudinal breakthrough," they had initiated "quasi-developmental change." Now the bad news. Until the exchange rate improves and new markets are found, these export-oriented artisans cannot earn a living through their crafts.

There were other titillating evaluation discoveries. First,

the well-organized bookkeeping and record-keeping of the association was noted with admiration (the evaluator compared them very favorably with those of the best-managed, Hispanic-owned small businesses in the United States). Second, La Khochalita had a participatory style as opposed to a participatory structure. And finally, there has been a continuous trickle of consumer store and health care benefits to the now underemployed artisans. (La Khochalita has its own health clinic for members, which is staffed by a devoted husband-and-wife medical team.)

Despite these bittersweet developments, however, I found that Demetrio Zurita, the charismatic founder of La Khochalita, has not been knocked off-stride. He is a leader who combines a classically Cochabamban mercantile sense with training in theology from a local seminary. Despite La Khochalita's decline in export sales, he is full of new development initiatives and continues to work unselfishly.

He has most recently led his artisan flock into the coca-growing Chapare region (albeit in pursuit of a crop other than coca). The association first purchased 10 hectares, which was immediately put into banana production. Migrant farm brigades of 40 persons each were formed from the husbands and families of the artisans and took turns doing the work. Like Bella Vista, we have capitalist-minded, cooperative-style production systems in place, with agro-industrial designs on the horizon. La Khochalita is determined to demonstrate viable alternatives to the coca production and paste-making that are pulling thousands of poor Bolivians into an underground economy.

To accomplish that, Demetrio and La Khochalita have obtained still larger holdings in this same zone through a land grant of several thousand hectares of virgin forest. (Living up to his reputation, Demetrio steered this land grant through the governmental bureaucratic maze in record time.) The process of transforming this larger property has already begun. Six coop members recently boated up the river to fell trees for lumber. Their chainsaws were purchased with money from the association's artisan profits.

Demetrio also envisions the association eventually producing its own rice on the Chapare tract to feed members and to sell as a cash crop. Currently, La Khochalita is supplying its members with rice from the CCAM coop federation (which has its own rice mill, compliments of Bread for the World) in the town of Mineros in Norte de Santa Cruz. However, Demetrio has just recently thought of still another entrepreneurial ploy to drop prices further. He made sharecropping arrangements with independent small producers in the nearby lowlands of Mineros, insuring an even cheaper rice supply for his highlanders' consumer store.

Like Bella Vista, La Khochalita has emerged as a solid grassroots organization that will continue, while Demetrio is alive, to channel important grassroots services and benefits to its members. Project goals were not achieved, but the *social process* survived and shifted gears, off the beaten track and toward bananas, health services, and consumer store operations. The group is still alive, with a chance to make a lasting impact.

they offered a creative touch seldom available to other production projects for the poor.

The projects' various beneficiary communities have rich heritages as artisans, but the quality of their work had deteriorated under the pressures of having to compete with mass-produced articles. The idea was to help improve production technologies, jazz up designs, and introduce functional items that would appeal to a middle-class household. Ideally, many of the products would become irresistible to urban buyers, especially when such items could replace more expensive imports.

One of the consulting artists, César Terrazas, is a sculptor from a family of artists, several of whom live in Paris. He himself sculpted most of the historic monuments in the city of Cochabamba. In the Grupo de Ceramistas project, Terrazas built several kilns with community participation and gave scholarships to a handful of local potters to assist him at his community-owned production site. The two-year-old project has generated a wide range of "sample" products for use in urban homes. Many artisans expressed delight at these new

product success story is unfolding.

The second group, CIDAC, works with a variety of artisan communities to make hammocks, baskets, pottery, straw hats, and a wide range of other household items that have expanded the base of native handicrafts in the Santa Cruz region. A scattering of ethnic minorities are involved. These groups—which include the Guarayos, the Chiquitanos, the Ayoreos, and the Chiriguanos—seem positively low-key (at least when compared to the altiplano Aymara).

Progress has been uneven because CIDAC has little experience in social organization. Its leaders do, however, have an outstanding eye for beautiful craftsmanship. Artisans once had to sell on terms set by local merchants. Now they have found and are producing directly for a middle-class market through a marvelous new CIDAC store that has opened in the city of Santa Cruz. The store is the first of its kind for this region and spotlights folk art that previously was overshadowed by the highland culture of the Andes. Now every time the doors open for sales, zealous customers, with a new awareness of and pride in the region's traditional culture,

Sotomayor-Zannini



CIDAC introduced new designs for palm-leaf hats in communities of Santa Cruz.



"Terrazas supervised construction of several community kilns and gave scholarships to local potters."

product lines and recognized their potential for increasing local income. Nonetheless, old traditions remained powerful and kept the new practices from gaining overt, community-wide acceptance. So a few artisans would turn out the new items at night, when seemingly nobody was watching. Every time their new products were put up for sale in the city of Cochabamba, they rapidly sold out. Sales at the national fair were perhaps the best example. The new flower pots sold at the fair have turned up at local restaurants all over downtown Cochabamba.

César is convinced that the promise of these sales makes innovation inevitable. He predicts that an ever-increasing volume of these products will surface in commercial locales during the next few years. This will lead inevitably to a *gradual* conversion of the local Quechua populace toward these production technologies and goals. César insists that the economic and aesthetic temptations for poor potters will be too great to allow the traditional cultural and social barriers to hold back change, suggesting that still another delayed proj-

clean the display shelves out. CIDAC is even afraid that demand will swamp production capacity. Thus, on many weekdays, the doors remain shut.

Once again we find an artist/project leader who was able to set in motion a major improvement in product marketing and quality control, but who was slow to form the base organizations needed to expand production and run the business. One wonders what would have happened if artisans had been organized before the artist's arrival. Quicker results? Perhaps, but this wayfaring field representative knows the law of comparative advantage: You seldom find *all* the right ingredients at any single project site.

So, the development sequence in both these artist-led projects started in reverse and that may have limited their impact. Still, certain skills have been renewed among poor artisans. Maybe this road to development is slower, but given the current national economic collapse, it may also allow small groups of campesinos to walk proudly forth with some products to behold.

agronomist and a German volunteer accountant who helped them with marketing, only to see them go to work as employees for the big brewery that purchases coop barley. Redención Pampa's 400 members were strongly united, however, and not about to put past friendships or federation loyalties before good barley prices. So two years ago the coop financed its own truck and subsequently refused to sell to the brewery's agents. Instead, members load the coop truck for trip after trip north to negotiate higher crop prices in La Paz.

Some of this group's solid organizational muscle has been developed through an ability to adapt the coop structure to old rituals. Meetings to outline strategy often are low-key and last late into the night as members sit in a candlelit hall, chew coca leaves, sip alcohol, and reach a consensus. The several hundred coop campesinos have confidence in their leaders and turn over their crops on consignment, which means they wait patiently for their devaluing pesos to arrive in a strongbox from La Paz.

gathered in the Centro, where there was a small amphitheater with freshly baked adobe walls. A mike hung on a wire across the middle, and the amplifier and recording equipment rested on an adjacent table. Soloists, duos, and full *conjuntos* wore an array of ethnic dress and played music with Quechua lyrics. The performers were refreshingly amateurish. One man from Calcha walked off stage in the middle of his song, saying his vocal cords were "tired."

Under portable lights, the program continued into the night. An Aymara group from the altiplano put on a play about the *reforma agraria*, that historic event of 1952. The campesino crowd, shivering in the cold, wrapped their ponchos tighter and sat spellbound to watch.

The next day this amorphous mass of artists and spectators met outdoors for an *asamblea del pueblo* to discuss local issues. That done, a local Quechua theater troupe reenacted the history of Bolivia, bringing the audience repeatedly to its feet in appreciation and amazement (for many campesinos, this was the first dramatic performance they had ever seen).

The activities provided several days of an Andean cultural



"A mike hung on a wire and soloists . . . wore an array of ethnic dress and played music with Quechua lyrics."



"The next day an amorphous mass of artists and spectators met outdoors for an *asamblea del pueblo*."

A FESTIVAL OF CAMPESINO CANCIONES IN PUTUTACA

The Centro Cultural Guarani-Quechua recently put aside its daily concerns with artisanry, health, and agriculture to hold the Third Annual Festival of the Canción Campesino. For this noncampesino, attendance meant a seven-hour, rambling drive from Sucre over dry and barren hills west to the tiny town of Pututaca. Even on busy days, Pututaca has only several hundred people, but during festival week, the town is covered with big banners, and the population swells into the thousands. The festival, which is outside Bolivia's tourist traffic, is a local event. It celebrates cultural reaffirmation and expression in a remote village that, now more than ever, wants to rejoice about its past.

For months, people in their home communities had been engaged in intensive song competitions to screen finalists for the big day in Pututaca. Now a throng of campesinos had

high. There were lectures on Guarani herbal cures, and artisan displays of Potosí woolen hats and other popular dress items. The festival was an event that stimulated community, ethnic, and project vitality in an impoverished area, suddenly full of unexpected riches.

ARTISTS IN SEARCH OF A MISSION AT THE GRASSROOTS

The IAF is helping to fund two artisan projects in Bolivia that have unlikely leaderships. The Grupo de Ceramistas and the Centro de Investigación, Diseño Artesanal y Comercialización Cooperativa (CIDAC) are headed by urban artists who had little prior understanding of or experience with promoting grassroots development organizations. Both groups can be considered experimental and a challenge to conventional thinking about the sequence of grassroots development. The IAF decided to support these two groups because

MICRO-MINING COOP BOOMS AND BUSTS

Most of the small mining enterprises receiving IAF support are still getting clobbered by macro-economic policies. They are paid in pesos at the official rate, which is incredibly undervalued. The only mining in Bolivia that captures real dollars in its sales is the gold mining sector, and I am sad to report that we are not funding any grassroots gold miners.

Recently, though, many of the tin miners of Cooperativa Minera Kerensky Ltda. temporarily abandoned their operations to join the gold rush in warmer climes. Fortunately, 20 hardy workers did stay at their jobs. Because our funds devalued from exchange rate discrepancies and the onrush of inflation, the Cooperativa lacked money to rent a road grader to open the feeder road connecting the mining camp to a main roadway. They have instead used their funds to hire nearby campesinos to get the job done the long-term, backbreaking, labor-intensive way. Kerensky is still breathing, but awaits the enactment of a more-enlightened exchange rate policy.



Calera Colmarca's miners work with picks and shovels to quarry limestone.

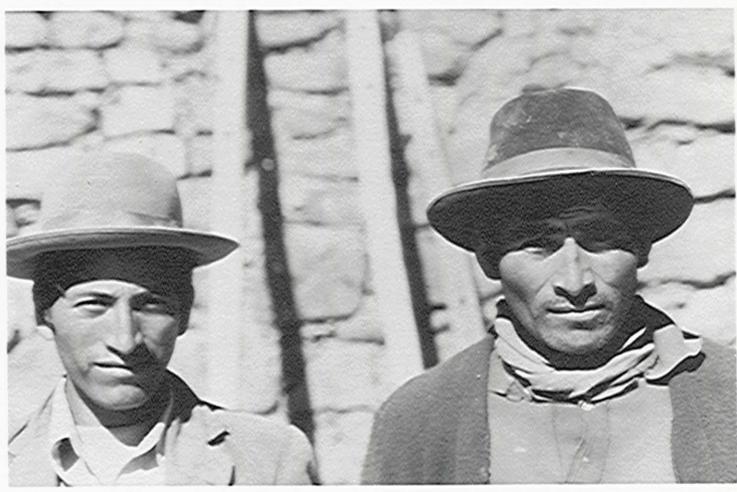
Meanwhile, present rates continue to choke the goose that lays golden export eggs (excuse the wrong metaphorical mineral).

Fortunately, we are also funding a mining coop whose product is not for export and thus is not being crushed by currency differences. Calera Cooperativa Minera Colmarca (a limestone quarry managed and owned cooperatively by three campesino communities) has resumed operations. Work had stopped for eight months during a price dispute with the quarry's only customer, a cement factory. When the factory finally exhausted its stockpile of limestone, it resumed its purchases from Calera Colmarca despite the ever-climbing price. Now, the quarry's hundreds of tenacious male and female miners are back at work on their local hillsides with shovels, picks, drills, and compressors. The group's 40 dumptrucks and the IAF-financed garage, auto mechanics workshop, and mechanical shovel are also humming again.

AGROCENTRAL'S FINANCIAL ROULETTE

AGROCENTRAL is a coop federation that seemingly binds together all the riverbeds, steep valleys, and small towns of rocky Chuquisaca. Its main tasks are the fiscal monitoring and the wholesaling of consumer goods to some 15 town-based coops. During the drought of 1982-83, AGROCENTRAL expanded its scope by participating in a national emergency program and distributing food and seed through its social network, which reaches out to numerous communities. Campesinos made repayments for seed in kind instead of cash (avoiding psychologically deplorable interest rates of 900 percent). For example, the coop received three kilos of potatoes for each kilo of potatoes it distributed, and the crisis turned eventually into a capital-accumulating windfall.

However, another financial bonanza has AGROCENTRAL concerned. With the national inflation rate approaching 2,000 percent, it has been suggested that all those *aportes* (supports) by individual members to the coops and even the



Two leaders of Redención Pampa, which has adapted coop structure to traditional forms of group consensus.

coop's existing physical assets should be *revalorizados* (revalued). As each old peso becomes many, campesinos can be fooled into thinking they have hit the jackpot. They may be tempted to withdraw these huge sums and leave the coop and/or vote unanimously to sell off the assets. As widespread individual poverty deepens, the leaders of AGROCENTRAL grow more worried, and I don't blame them.

REDENCIÓN PAMPA'S END RUN FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Redención Pampa coop sits on a low-yield, barley-growing plain in Chuquisaca. It belongs to AGROCENTRAL, the aforementioned federation. Despite this allegiance, the campesino members occasionally steer their own course.

For instance, they worked closely in cultivation and marketing for a number of years with an AGROCENTRAL

I was somewhat fearful (given his suspicious character and off-the-record remarks/threats) when I returned to Bolivia this time, and wanted to avoid a face-to-face encounter. No cables or announcements of my arrival went to him. Nonetheless, my anonymity did not last long at the Hotel Oruro. Two days after I checked in, his Bolivian girlfriend called and asked me what the decision was. I asked if she had received a letter. She had not. I hedged my reply, saying no decision had been made but keep checking the mail. The next day, the Italian's brother dropped by the hotel, demanding a decision. I told him that I would be receiving news from Washington any day now, and it was all in the hands of higher-ups.

Two days later, I was shocked to read in La Paz's major daily a big article that was accompanied by photographs of the man who wanted to be our grantee standing in police custody, next to piles of Nazi propaganda and an arms cache (found at the "coffee coop" site). According to testimony from the Minister of Interior, the man was identified as Emilio Carbone, an international terrorist involved in the bombing of the train station in Bologna, Italy, and the paramilitary operations of Bolivia's drug mafia after the 1980 coup. What a résumé!! He had come here to start a neo-Nazi group and deal drugs on the side. His brother and girlfriend were reported to be in hiding.

After swallowing all these tidbits, I decided to phone the development agency that tried to broker this guy and see whether they had other interesting projects to share. When I reached the people who had recommended Carbone to me, they argued that their grant was made to the coop of which Carbone just happened to be "the most literate member." Of course, the less literate members and the coop records were nowhere to be found when the police arrived. And of course there were only a few coffee plants but many terraced mountainsides of coca plants. This is a good case study of project cross-referencing gone awry. And scary!

NUTRITION INNOVATION

The IAF made a one person grant to the La Paz pediatrician Ana María Aguilar to underwrite a study on the rehabilitation of malnourished children. The six-month-long study took place at the Children's Hospital in La Paz (the facility is state-owned but barely has funds to cover operating expenses, not to mention experiments and innovations). For three of these months, Aguilar and her colleague Carmen Casanova studied 30 children at different stages of malnutrition. The subject proved timely. The hospital's records show that before "The Crisis" about 50 percent of the children interned were diagnosed as malnourished; now the percentage has climbed to 90 percent. In most cases the mothers of these children are equally underfed and probably belong in the hospital with their kids.

The two medical doctors' approach in this experiment was twofold: treatment of the children at the hospital would be supplemented by education of the mothers at their homes in the slum districts. (More-advanced countries in South America, such as Chile, have a long tradition of treating this problem in hospitals and clinics, but in Bolivia the idea is brand new.)

Their achievements are many. They succeeded in introducing new dietary formulas for the different stages of malnutri-

tion. They broke the hospital's barriers to mothers staying for long periods alongside their children. They galvanized the medical staff to focus on the problems of malnutrition. Finally, they laid the groundwork for a permanent rehabilitation unit in the hospital, and Partners of the Americas has eagerly made a grant to create such a unit.

Thus, one small, individual research grant made a big difference in paving the way for a poor public entity to better assist poor children, just when their situation was drastically worsening because of disaster in the national economy.

CETHA'S MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS

The Centro de Educación Humanística Agro-pecuaria (CETHA) is an experimental agency, operating under the aegis of the Catholic Bishops Conference. During the past three project years it has launched an exciting program to bring education to the marketplace. CETHA has its home base in the community of Carmen Pampa in the coca-growing region of Las Yungas. The agency's mobile team takes to the roads of this rugged and rich terrain, following the tracks of the roving truckers to the market days of five provincial towns. As the campesinos from surrounding communities come into these towns to do their subsistence shopping, they can now also take classes from CETHA for credits toward high school degrees.

CETHA's educational methodology is simple but flexible. Adults receive live instruction and take assignments home to be completed between farm chores. Teaching is tailored to individual ability and motivation. Each student can advance at his or her own pace. Standardized tests determine graduation to a higher grade. The mimeographed educational materials produced by the teachers on their farm in Carmen Pampa are of high quality.

The IAF asked Barbara Leons, an evaluator/anthropologist with a long Yungenan track record, to take a look at this unconventional setup. We asked her to find data about the number of students, their backgrounds, and how they used this nonformal education. The third question would obviously be the most difficult to measure; however, it reflected our major project worry. Was the project only providing another springboard for migration to the city by ambitious campesinos, thereby depleting the human resources of the countryside?

Her findings show that the number of students increased over the lifetime of the project and that poor men and women were being reached. But the evaluator also discovered that a significant minority of noncampesino students were taking the courses. Who were they? Rural schoolteachers. These teachers were high school dropouts who wanted to upgrade their skills and acquire diplomas. Contrary to my negative, perhaps knee-jerk, response ("these people are comparatively well off, and the program was not designed for them"), the evaluator argued that this was a positive development, since the teachers touch thousands of young campo minds, creating a ripple effect.

CETHA is coming back to us with a renewal request to keep their educators operating in the local markets.

ing about us; but they insist on frustrating our efforts by requesting audits. They exploit the renewed *sindicato* autonomy given to everyone, in order to make and unmake things and satisfy the whims of bosses. They say they have support from the grassroots, but this is false. In some communities there are two or three infantile instigators who are affiliated with the *sindicato* of APROQUI. They spread calumnies from the gutter that are inflammatory and libel our leadership and even the whole of Operación Tierra. They take the few mistakes of the coop and wave them like a banner in Lipez and elsewhere. Yet they are silent about our accomplishments, saying on the contrary that we have done absolutely nothing. Now the cold war of the Sindicatos of Lipez has been extended to the city of La Paz, where other Lipeños have been incited against us.

Indeed, there have been threats to seize Operación Tierra's physical assets. Instead of good healthy competition in an organizational equivalent of the marketplace, we may be viewing another old rerun of the factional frictions and squabbles that characterize so much of grassroots development.



Two pioneering doctors "broke the hospital's barriers to mothers staying for long periods beside their children."

ITALIAN COFFEE FOR THE BOLIVIAN COKE MACHINE

If you remember my last trip report and the suspense surrounding the Italian recommended to us by another development agency, I owe you an update. This was the man who took me to his "coffee farm," nestled amidst coca fields, and requested support for coffee-processing equipment. (The other development agency already had made a small project grant for some equipment.) During our mountain drive together, he dropped the name of Klaus Barbie ("the most cultivated man I ever met"), making me more than a little dubious about his commitment to grassroots development. When we arrived, he gave me a guided tour of a somewhat suspect, very makeshift coop, and I quietly and carefully began composing my response. The IAF, shortly after my return in March, sent him a politely worded rejection letter from Washington.

DISTINGUISHED FLOATING VISITOR AWARD

Amantani is struggling to catch up to the progress of Taquile. Amantani's flow of visitors is a trickle compared to its neighboring island's, but in all honesty Amantani is more beautiful. And perhaps one should take stock of the *quality* as well as the quantity of visitors. On my last trip I was thumbing through the 1983 register of guests at a campesino bed-and-breakfast hut and found the name of one Ivan Illich from Cuernavaca, Mexico. In the space beside his signature he had doodled comments about solar energy experiments, highlighting their potentials. Oh my! A tip from a world-famous guru. I am telling our TRABOL solar energy experts about Amantani as soon as possible.

AN ALTIPLANO "PELEA" IN NOR LIPEZ

Operación Tierra is a campesino coop federation on the quinoa-growing plains of Potosi, just west of the Chilean border. The federation finally received its transport truck (delayed for two years by exchange rate upheavals) from the IAF, and big-time marketing operations were about to begin. However, shortly before the truck began to roll, an upstart campesino *sindicato* (APROQUI) heated up this cold, arid terrain by challenging Operación Tierra's legitimacy and authority as the "voz del campesino." APROQUI declared that the federation, despite its populist rhetoric, was monopolistic and must move over and make room for a new rival. Supported by a Belgian volunteer advisor, APROQUI began making contracts with the National Bolivian Mining Corporation to market quinoa from some of the same communities represented by Operación Tierra's affiliated coops. The rivalry could be a long one since the *sindicato* is linked to the National Confederation of Campesino Syndicates, which gives them grassroots clout, i.e., leverage from La Paz.

Last year, anxious about the local effects of an altiplano drought (there was even an article in *Diario las Americas* about Lipez), IAF asked the anthropologist Ben Orlove to also examine this incipient bottom-up conflict. He returned with a theory that was novel—to say the least—for those of us frequently putting out these altiplano prairie fires.

Orlove pointed out that Operación Tierra had empty organizational shells at the community level. Its delivery of services could be improved by having to compete with another organization that was offering similar incentives but was also actively recruiting campesino affiliates. He argued that as the conflict bubbled over, it did not have to be destructive. Instead of draining energy, it could help revitalize the federation, injecting an edge of competitive capitalism missing from the underdeveloped scenario. The argument was often compelling, but the conflict was still "in motion," and it seemed likely that the dispute might yield some surprises as it continued to unravel.

In the latest issue of *El Socio* (Operación Tierra's internationally circulated newsletter) the front-page story declares that the coop is besieged by its *sindicato* adversary. Under the banner headline "The Fight of the Sindicatos Against the Cooperatives of Los Lipez," the article says:

These persons from a small group never participated at all in the activities of Operación Tierra and, as a result, know noth-



Kevin Healy

"Its flow of visitors is a trickle compared to Taquile's, but in all honesty Amantani is more beautiful."

step backward to gain a clearer perspective of the way forward.

TAQUILE'S REVERSE TOURISM

In the last several years, campesinos from the islands of Taquile and Amantani have set up a thriving tourist trade. Recently, with a few dollars from a small IAF allotment in their pockets, a group of these islanders from the Peruvian side of Lake Titicaca set out to sample grassroots tourism in Bolivia. They hoped to gain and share new insights and were able to visit more than 13 other IAF-supported organizations in the Departments of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Chuquisaca.

One stop took them to the Masis musicians (an organization that teaches flute music to urban and rural youth). The Taquileños and Amanteneños traveled with these teachers into the campo and spent a late evening with Tarabuqueños who spoke the same dialect of Quechua. (The Tarabuqueños

Centro Cultural los Masis



Centro Cultural los Masis helped campesinos around town of Tarabuco to revive traditional music.



Masis teachers have instructed over 2,000 Bolivian youths in traditional music and dance.

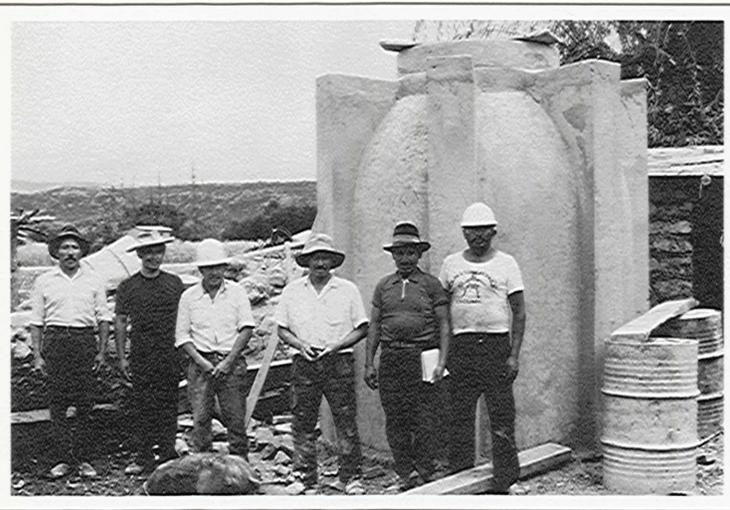
were resettled in Chuquisaca from the Lake Titicaca region some 500 years ago by the Inca.) The two groups talked into the wee hours about ethnic pride and the cultural legacies of their forefathers.

The reactions to the trip among the Taquileños and Amanteneños have been intriguing. Most participants felt that highland Indians are much better treated in Bolivia than in Peru—after all, Bolivia is a more highland society. (An interesting acknowledgment, indeed, by Peruvians.) All are looking forward to various Bolivianos paying return visits to Titicaca in the coming year. The group also expressed a great interest in starting a music school of their own to preserve Titicaca's traditional songs for their children. They were also impressed by their experience as *turistas* and took everything in with an analytical eye. When I asked which project site had the greatest appeal and inspiration, they named SEMTA's solar-heated public showers in La Paz. When I expressed surprise at their interest in taking hot showers, they remarked that, of course, it would not be for them but "for the tourists who stay on our island."

the labor of hired campesinos. Using brigade labor power to cultivate a single tract is a conscious effort to avoid reproducing low-yield, ecologically destructive *minifundias*. It also permits more expeditious clearing of enough land for the application of scientific management techniques. This paves the way for mechanization, which reduces the necessity for back-breaking campesino labor as the motor for material progress. Above all, Bella Vista wants to firmly implant a cooperative and rational work scheme so it will not have to embark on still another colonization effort 20 years from now.

Bella Vista's plans for the future are also branching out into the cosmopolitan milieu of La Paz. The coop is presently installing the second floor of what will be a four-story "campesino hotel." This project too is being self-financed from "annual earnings" and will be a waystation for coop marketers and other assorted campesino clients. When coop officials asked me about training in hotel management, I confessed that the only place I knew of was Cornell which, like La Paz, has cold winters.

The cooperative has also made progress on the transporta-



TRABOL found biodigestors took too much cement: even small-scale commercial dairy farmers could not afford them.

tion front. Its 12-ton truck enjoyed huge earnings this year, helped by devaluation and inflation gyrations in the economy. The coop is almost effortlessly paying off the self-help component of its truck project.

Of course one reason for all of these strides is that Bella Vista has a very unusual project manager. Guillermo Salas is a formally trained but scruffy accountant who offers a combination of vision and steady management. Although born and bred in the city, he is much more at home in the campo and plans to stay there and build rural institutions. He does not have an eye out for a La Paz office job. Believe me, this guy would be a rare bird in any tropical territory.

So there you have it. Bella Vista is a conventional coop—tucked away in both old and new colonization belts—that has bucked the odds and seemingly has the institutional energy, continuity, and stability to succeed. Our projects have gone on almost as long as the cooperative's evolution, but the latter social process is a much bigger success story.

"MALDIGESTION" AMONG DAIRY PRODUCERS IN COCHABAMBA

Biodigestors are partially buried cement tanks, full of rotting cattle dung, which let bacteria loose to do their chemical dances and generate methane gas. To those people who are attracted to the technology (which is widespread in India and China and has found its way into experimental stations in Guatemala) and who hope it will reduce rural fuel bills and put quality nutrients into their soils, I cry: WATCH OUT! And above all, COUNT YOUR COWS!

Our project tests show that with fewer than 25 cows to pasture, the process is not economically viable. That is, not for the small farmer. I cannot quote the exact price tag because of Bolivia's currency craziness, but take my word that it is too much. TRABOL, the Bolivian group that designed these tanks, evaluated the technology under actual field conditions and not in the rarefied atmosphere of an experimental station. Their study of volunteer female milk producers in the lower Cochabamba Valley demonstrates that the cost-benefit ratio is very risky for a subsistence family clinging to a few skinny animals. The biodigestors might eventually prove useful as some kind of bomb shelter, but that is a far cry from the war this homespun project was supposed to win. TRABOL will write a pamphlet to document its results in order to enlighten other appropriate-technology buffs and loco donors who want to sink money in this mire.

TRABOL, meanwhile, has shifted its attention to a groundwater pumping technology based on parabolic solar collectors. The pump-collector technology was invented by none other than Jaroslav Vanek of Cornell University, who some might remember as a guru of worker self-management theory during the 1970s. Well, Jaroslav has partially abandoned theory to set up an experimental solar pump laboratory in his Ithaca backyard and basement. He now has graduate students in economics building collectors and testing pumps. For most, this beats downing literature and writing equations about self-managed enterprises that are drowning in the sea of supply-side economics. His technology is being disseminated throughout the Third World, and he and his students are globetrotting to offer demonstrations.

Two of those students landed in Bolivia via a small IAF travel grant. They encountered a drought—and unexpected problems with their applied approach. An especially severe problem was posed by the low atmospheric pressure at 13,000 feet. The campo audiences were unimpressed by the demos because the gadget pumped slowly from a mere two meters down.

Nonetheless, interest in Bolivia is presently much greater in the Vanek pump than in the solar collectors. The latter have proven to be relatively expensive, with their shiny imported aluminum film. The pump remains a promising invention for this cash-strapped country because it can also be powered by natural gas, which remains relatively cheap. TRABOL will continue its experiments to refine and adapt the whole Ithaca technology (which now includes steam engines), while Jaroslav works at home on the new specifications from Bolivian field tests. Given all the available solar energy in the Andes and the rising cost of most conventional fuels, practical technology experiments of this type must proceed—even if it sometimes means temporarily taking a

Kevin Healy



Bella Vista work brigade cooking evening meal at new colonization site in Yucomo.

thousands of other campesinos, farmed unwisely. Using conventional tropical subsistence strategies, they undid their ecosystem.

Then an unlikely transformation began. In 1983, Bella Vista launched a second colonization effort, deep into a virgin frontier area five hours distant by truck and hoof through brambled jungle. This time, settlers did not have to start from scratch. In 20 years, they had learned how to handle machetes and hatchets, how to gauge which way tropical trees fall, and how to grow lowland bumper crops such as rice and bananas. Most importantly, long experience with slash-and-burn agriculture had taught Bella Vista the importance of planning ahead for the rest of the 1980s and the 1990s to avoid the mistakes of past colonization.

Here is how it worked. The coop purchased chainsaws with the profits from its coffee transport and marketing operations (financed by IAF) and its rice mill (financed by Pan Para El Mundo). They selected from the coop coffee club 40 tenderfoots who had inherited unproductive or too little land, and formed them into work brigades. During key agri-



Coop work brigade setting out to clear jungle in Norte de Santa Cruz.

cultural periods, these brigades took turns making the long trek into the jungle to carve out a settlement and clear cover for the coop tract.

After arriving, the *jóvenes* befriended the native population, the Chimanes. Whereas many colonists take these natives to be a lower species and consequently a part of the brush to be cleared away, Bella Vista saw something else—human beings who knew how to feed themselves in harmony with their jungle setting. The Chimanes taught the colonists how to hunt and fish with bows and arrows in exchange for some consumer coop know-how and trading privileges at the branch consumer store. (This store, incidentally, utilizes the coop's vehicle, administrative savvy, and inventory to offer, in an essentially undeveloped area, quality goods at bargain prices, another advantage under this form of cooperative colonization.)

Bella Vista's recent efforts are breaking new ground in several ways. Colonization, when done "cooperatively" in Bolivia, usually involves pooling capital from businessmen with

Bolivia is a country that faces extraordinary problems: drought, hyperinflation, political and social upheaval, and dwindling resources. Nonetheless, grassroots organizations of all kinds are busy with new programs, and in some cases they are making important strides forward. Kevin Healy is the Inter-American Foundation Representative to Bolivia. What follows recounts one of his

trips to the field—his hopeful search for and encounters with the small, the brave, and the beautiful. His report is not a comprehensive project-by-project evaluation of IAF grantees. Rather, it is a collection of project “snapshots” taken during August 1984 from his own very personal observation points on Bolivia’s sometimes frustrating, often heroic, and always unpredictable road to development.

ON THE ROAD IN RURAL BOLIVIA: IN SEARCH OF THE SMALL, THE BRAVE, AND THE BEAUTIFUL

KEVIN HEALY

This was another of those high-risk, high-altitude climbs into our Bolivian project territory. Once again I found unrelenting democratic frenzy and a national economy hurtling along like a runaway freight train. During the past year, there were 442 “sectoral” strikes (post offices, hospitals, factories, mines, etc.) and six national strikes (totalling 34 days). The banking system was closed during one stretch for nearly a month. Yet even when it seemed that everything was about to collapse, life at the local level somehow muddled on for another hour or week, until the next societal seizure.

The sense of vertigo was unrelenting: prices soared while the value of the peso plummeted. The inflation rate—already the highest in the world—passed 2,000 percent. In the past three years, the currency devalued from 25 to 14,000 pesos per dollar.* Printed outside the country, pesos have become Bolivia’s third largest import product. And all the while, domestic production (except for coca leaves and cocaine paste) contracted—tighter and tighter.

I worked my way through this chaos, taking advantage of the dry sierra roads, to locate our grantees. I discovered most of them to be weary from the effects of the economic disaster, but remarkably vigorous in pursuing their local program strategies.

*In the last week of May 1985, a dollar could fetch 320,000 pesos in Bolivia. There was one catch: you had to go to the right place. The government has set an official exchange rate of 49,550 pesos to the dollar, but most people exchange their dollars with street vendors or at one of the numerous *casas de cambio* (currency-exchange houses) that operate openly, even in La Paz. Prices of goods and services are based on the higher, black-market rate. With demand for dollars soaring, the government plans to boost the official rate to 75,000 pesos per dollar. Most experts believe the unofficial rate will also rise.

What does this mean for IAF and its grantees? Many grants are financed with Social Progress Trust Funds (SPTF), which are administered by the Inter-American Development Bank and tied to the official exchange rate. Each dollar’s worth of SPTF pesos has one-sixth the buying power of any other dollar (so a \$10,000 jeep in Bolivia costs \$60,000). To circumvent this discrepancy, project budgets have been doubled and disbursements speeded up, but continually supplementing grants has exacted a stiff price. More than \$320,000 had to be added in amendments last year just to keep grantees’ heads above water. Naturally the in-house administrative costs have also been high. Even the task of sending a peso check has become complex. Since one million pesos are only worth about three dollars, there isn’t enough space on a single check to handle IAF-sized disbursements. A recent \$36,000 outlay, for example, required 18 peso checks.

As usual, these Andean travels took their own meandering course, providing enough adventure, thrills, and encounters in grassroots development for another lively trip report—the kind that may strain some readers’ credulity.

BELLA VISTA’S NEW TERRAIN

The drought of 1982-83 sent thousands of highlanders scurrying to the lowlands for jobs as hired laborers, and in search of arable land. The emergency was grave enough in some areas to produce permanent shifts in demographic patterns: rural resettlement began to augment the long-standing migration to urban areas. Several of our grantees have joined this new flow, and such projects will probably become an increasingly important source of organizational models. At the very least, this resettlement will offer campesinos the chance to grow their own food during this prolonged period of national crisis.

Bella Vista, an IAF grantee since 1977, offers some useful lessons to these new settlers. The coop sits in a coffee-growing zone that has been colonized for two decades. The coop’s campesinos truly *have* had enough ups and downs during that time to match any trip along the treacherous Yungas and Alto Beni roads. They have been beset by Rangers of the Bolivian Army (in the 1980 coup), coffee rust, rutted roads that become quagmires, skyrocketing tire costs, a low-powered vehicle that staggers uphill on mountain climbs, and internal organizational problems that alternate between stagnation and strife. There were times when we considered giving up our support. (Indeed, Judith Tandler pronounced the coop all but managerially dead in her comparative evaluation in 1982.) But we somehow always reconsidered and gave them just one more “time extension amendment.”

As it turned out, the seven-year project did not lead to an institutional dead end but helped solidify a grassroots organization that keeps moving forward.

To appreciate this organizational maturation, it is useful to recall the starting point. Coop members were at first no different from other Bolivian colonists. Bella Vista’s coffee growers also migrated from the highlands and, along with



Street corner in La Paz. "Even when everything seemed near collapse, life muddled on for another hour or week."

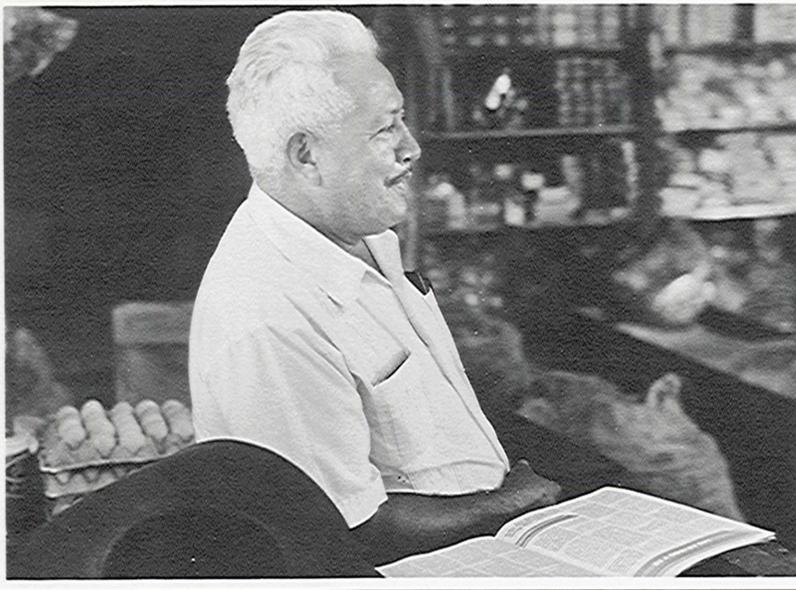
grassroots development

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Jan L. Flora

spring up spontaneously anyway, and they will need a variety of services to get on their feet. In the larger towns, when more informal means such as citizens' watchdog committees fail, it may be necessary to help start a community store to stir competition, promote fair trade practices, and hold down prices. In out-of-the-way hamlets, a community store may be invaluable because it will be the only store. That store can also be a vital tool for organizing the small community and mobilizing its resources.

However, as the experience of the Grupo Asociativo de Versalles shows, new stores need a solid foundation. Organization should begin with an in-depth study of the rural neighborhood that singles out potential leaders. Establishment of the store should then be incremental, allowing members to learn, at their own pace, the cooperative and technical skills needed to operate a business. The Grupo Asociativo has also developed a valuable method of recruiting new leaders by establishing soccer teams in conjunction with the community store. Team participation promotes cooperation among the players, builds local pride, and gives leaders higher visibility. (Two notations should be added. First, this method of organizing has an obvious gender bias, and alternative ways to recruit women need to be discovered. Second, this method is not limited to promoting community stores: it can be a valuable tool in other kinds of development activities.)

Finally, it seems obvious that central organizations badly need to rethink their wholesale marketing operations. As previously mentioned, those opera-

tions have no intrinsic advantage and several disadvantages over those of traditional intermediaries. It takes considerable time and often the waste of resources that comes with trial-by-error learning to master the complexities of marketing. Those groups that have already gained those skills and are sound fiscally should probably continue; those in trouble or considering entering the field should carefully reexamine their alternatives. In general, central organizations should realize that the primary "good" that they can offer is not money or in-kind credit but knowledge. It is vital that the members of the local store invest some of their own resources so that they will have a real stake in the enterprise and its operations. Since so few community stores ever develop sufficiently to sponsor secondary social and educational programs, the temptation exists to siphon off supplemental funding from central organizations for such programs to cover up business inefficiencies. Additional social programs should be funded directly and operated apart from the community store structure.

*JAN and CORNELIA FLORA have done research in Colombia and have served with the Ford Foundation in Bogotá. They are currently professors of sociology at Kansas State University, where they are both active in studying farmers' organizations in the United States and developing countries. Jan Flora has done research on agrarian structures in Cuba, Colombia, China, and Nicaragua and is a coauthor of *Change in Rural America*. Cornelia Flora is the author of numerous books and articles, including *Pentecostalism in Colombia: Baptism by Fire and Spirit*. HUMBERTO ROJAS, a rural sociologist, is Associate Director of OFISIL, a research organization in Bogotá. He has wide experience with grassroots groups in Colombia and neighboring countries and is coeditor of *Estudios Rurales Latinoamericanos*. NORMA VILLARREAL is a consultant who has worked with the United Nations and various Colombian agencies. Her previous experience includes working with INCORA, the Colombian Agrarian Reform Agency, and teaching agricultural economics at the National University in Bogotá. RON WEBER contributed to the writing of this article.*

A Snapshot of Decisionmaking at IAF:

A SELF-HELP HOUSING REVIEW

Most articles that appear in *Grassroots Development* are based on IAF project evaluations and field studies. This article is based on the daily experience of reviewing proposals, visiting projects, and making decisions on funding requests. It explains how experience with self-help housing—learning through analysis and learning by doing—was brought to bear in reviewing a recent proposal from a group in Argentina.

The Proposal

On October 15, 1984, IAF received a request for \$124,000 from PROF (a pseudonym)—a group of 23 Argentine professionals who proposed to help 44 families build their own homes and four community buildings in one of the many squatter settlements that keep springing up on the fringes of Buenos Aires.

PROF is a volunteer organization of housing professionals, social workers, and legal and medical practitioners. Its members devote their holidays and weekends to construction and to related activities on behalf of the urban poor. Organized by a parish priest in 1980, PROF emerged determined to put a dent in Argentina's severe shortage of adequate housing (various studies estimate that as many as two million families live in makeshift or substandard dwellings).

PROF's work with a group of poor families displaced by urban renewal led to the formation of a grassroots community group called COOP (also a pseudonym) in May 1981. In early 1982, members of COOP—with a gift of land from a local organization and supervision and technical assistance from PROF—began to build 28 housing units. This alliance has also produced ancillary benefits. Local officials have been persuaded to extend access roads and power lines to the settlement. In addition, the community has begun to manufacture kitchen knives, thereby providing a small but growing source of income as well as a new trade for some younger residents.

Now that the original 28 housing units are completed, a second phase has been planned that will include 44 additional units and four community buildings. Foundations for 28 of the houses have already been laid on a plot PROF helped COOP acquire adjacent to the original construction site. The four community buildings, three of which will be built on the original site, will house a small business (like the knife-making enterprise), a child care center, a dining/meeting hall, and a health facility.

So far, the costs of this second phase have been met by COOP's own membership contributions and funds raised in collaboration with PROF. With only minimal funding budgeted for general and "housekeeping" expenses (PROF expertise and COOP labor are being volunteered), 98 percent of the \$124,000 requested from IAF would be used to purchase construction materials. This will cover 78 percent of building material costs during the two-year project, with the rest being picked up by PROF and outside sources.

Beneficiaries of the single-family homes will work hand in hand with PROF volunteers 20 hours a week. Homeowners will be chosen on the basis of economic need and interest in joining COOP, with preference given to female-headed households. Each family's monthly payments to a rotating loan fund will be designed to recoup outlays for land and materials in order to finance further housing but will not exceed 10 percent of the legal minimum wage. Since indexing for inflation will not exceed the adjustment in any beneficiary's monthly income, PROF expects some capital losses and plans to cover the shortfall through outside fundraising.

For PROF, housing is the first step in an "integral" community project. It will train the beneficiaries who have organized to build each other's homes to govern themselves, lobby for needed public services (such as electricity, roads, and water and sewage lines), and create new community sources of income. Moreover, through a network of similar self-help housing groups in Buenos Aires, PROF will share its experiences to advance both homebuilding and community-building techniques.

Issues Raised in Review

A group of IAF staff reviewed the request. The discussion focused first on the general issues involved in self-help housing projects, then shifted to how the Foundation should respond to each issue. The team agreed the proposal was strong, but in light of this broader context, questions were raised in three categories:

—First, what were reasonable long-term expectations for a volunteer group like PROF in helping a local group like COOP? The imme-

mediate task of any housing project—and the most elementary criterion of success—is to build houses. The PROF/COOP combination seemed a good bet to meet that fundamental goal. But was that really “enough”? Beyond the simple installation of housing, what kinds of planning and organizational skills would this community have to develop in order to address the wide array of other problems that it faced?

—Second, was a revolving loan fund—the standard financing mechanism of such projects—realistic considering the high inflation rates prevailing within Argentina? Could the loan fund retain its capital value when new homeowners, many of whom lacked regular incomes, would repay such a small percentage of their mortgages each month? If the fund began to decapitalize, would PROF realistically be able to tap philanthropic sources for subsidies when such sources hadn't helped out in the past? And if the money ran out, how would PROF secure utilities and other infrastructure for the homes it had already built, much less provide self-help housing aid to new clients?

—Third, was this proposal simply a nuts-and-bolts construction project, or did it break new conceptual ground? IAF's overriding concern in making grants for housing is to support programs that will become models for public and private agencies that are looking for creative new ways to meet the broader needs of the displaced. PROF's budget, earmarked almost exclusively for materials, focused upon construction. Would the project entail significant experimentation? Would it test a novel design or innovative construction techniques or offer new insights into community organization, training, income-generating activities, and marketing as these relate to housing?

Why IAF Said No

“Lamento informarle que . . . la Fundación ha determinado no conceder el apoyo solicitado,” wrote an IAF representative about three months after receiving the PROF proposal. By this time, he had visited the project in the field. In its final analysis, the Foundation did not doubt PROF's considerable expertise in assisting the poor. The Foundation felt that the two groups—with a grant—could satisfactorily construct the houses and community buildings proposed. Yet the Foundation still said no. Why?

Since 1972, IAF has made about 40 grants, totaling about \$7.5 million, to housing organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Nearly half of these grants funded construction; most of the rest supported supplementary activities—including technical assistance, studies, or related income-generating activity. All produced both written documentation and sets of ideas about the nature and output of self-help housing projects.

IAF has concluded from these experiences that it cannot seriously address housing shortages merely by financing new construction; furthermore, while there is considerable institutional satisfaction in making a small number of poor families homeowners for the first time, this payoff does not justify the relatively large capital investment per family. Behind these findings stand two questions. Does the self-help housing process have spinoff effects that stimulate sustained development in the community? If so, under what conditions is this most likely to occur?

IAF has learned to be skeptical of the hypothesis that self-help housing activities, by their very nature, strengthen community organizations and increase the abilities of local people to resolve other types of social and economic problems (see *Grassroots Development*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1982). In carrying out evaluations and observing self-help housing projects firsthand, the Foundation has found that housing groups generally work diligently on construction during the initial phases of a project. Once the actual housing goes up, however, project participants appear no more inclined to participate in further development activities than nonbeneficiaries. Indeed, there is frequently a rapid (if understandable) fall-off of interest. Intermediary groups like PROF find it difficult, at least temporarily, to mobilize residents around nonhousing issues, or to

get them to administer and initiate new activities; the housing project ends up as a subsidy to a few lucky, hardworking individuals, not a community-wide development or learning process.

In the PROF/COOP proposal, both of these possibilities caused concern. First, given the previously mentioned weaknesses of a revolving loan mechanism in a hyperinflationary environment, the Foundation believed that the houses could be constructed *only* with substantial external subsidy for land and materials—and that with little cash left over and a possible decline in community energy, the secondary projects of community health and educational facilities would be postponed indefinitely. In short, the long-term prospects for the COOP/PROF partnership seemed unpromising.

Second, COOP itself looked toward PROF to take charge of the project. Although on paper PROF strongly emphasized “integral” community development, its proposal was vague about how to accomplish that aim, increasing the doubt that COOP could keep the ball rolling once the PROF plan was set in motion.

The IAF decision to turn down the PROF proposal does not mean that all future housing projects are excluded. Rather, in searching for ways to maximize the impact of its funding of housing projects, IAF wants organizations like PROF and COOP to look beyond the physical and into the organizational aspects of house construction. This is far from unrealistic. PROF, as it happens, is associated with an active network of Argentine self-help housing organizations (see *Grassroots Development*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1984). It is in an excellent position to go beyond heavily subsidized infrastructural projects (such as the one proposed) in favor of projects that try more innovative, replicable methods.

IAF believes also, from experience and studies, that self-help construction is generally more successful when linked to efforts to raise the incomes of potential homebuilders. With the exception of the successful knife-making enterprise, the PROF proposal generally overlooked ways to help beneficiaries finance their houses. It relied instead on external subsidies to help buyers pay their monthly mortgage payments and also keep the revolving loan fund capitalized.

Who, then, should have financed infrastructure and material costs? Most members of this community work in the informal sector, earning only minimal wages from occasional work at the port and in construction. But many of the local women produce clothing at piecework rates for local textile factories. Could a “housing project” begin, the review team asked, with a grant to help them sell their work directly to local retailers and boutiques? Would budget items geared toward income generation, marketing, and training be more appropriate than the purchase of construction materials? And might not this create a stronger ongoing community organization that would be better able to compete for public services and resources?

While the Foundation decided not to finance the request it received, it remains willing to consider alternative (perhaps untried) ideas from PROF and COOP. It suggested the possibility of funding *just* the construction of the day care, dining, and health facilities as an initial proposal, if there were sufficient local planning and initiative. Because COOP alone would probably be too small to qualify for government health and daycare workers, the team observed, a second community might have to become involved. Another alternative was to finance construction of a building to house, say, a women's garment workshop, which would also be a hub for training and technical assistance activities.

PROF and IAF face similar challenges: to find approaches that do more than subsidize a few families, which is the net effect of housing programs if they lack broader application. IAF cannot pick up the tab for finding low-cost solutions to the shelter problems of Argentina. Government and private organizations can—and are trying to—do that. But IAF can assist groups like COOP and PROF to experiment with innovative techniques and help *them* to point the way. The discussion within the Foundation of this particular project clarified lessons from earlier experiences with housing projects and crystalized guidelines for responding to future proposals.

Subsistence farmers on the Eastern Caribbean island of St. Vincent have raised their production significantly over the last eight years by growing—and selling—a wide range of new and nutritious crops. The Organization for Rural Development (ORD) has been deeply involved in this transformation, so we asked Gary Brana-Shute—an anthropologist who made four visits to the project last year on IAF's behalf—to take part in a team evaluation of ORD's past contributions to local farmers and suggest future courses of action.



Mitchell Denburg

Victor Frances family on their plot of land cleared to plant bananas.

THE ORGANIZATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT: HELPING THE FARMERS OF ST. VINCENT STAY ON THE FARM

GARY BRANA-SHUTE

St. Vincent lies 100 miles northeast of Grenada in the Lesser Antilles, one in a chain of islands that stretches like a bow from Puerto Rico to Venezuela and separates the Caribbean from the Atlantic. The island's northern half is dominated by the Soufriere volcano, which is thickly covered with tropical vegetation and rises to a height of 4,058 feet. Located just five miles from the eastern and western shorelines, Soufriere seems to have literally erupted out of the sea.

Some 15 miles to the south, at the opposite tip of the island, is the city of Kingstown with its 10,000 residents. St. Vincent's capital is as poor as the landscape to the north is lush. Since 1976 it has housed the cramped headquarters of the Organization for Rural Development (ORD), a voluntary grassroots institution that is dedicated to improving the nutrition and agricultural production of small farmers and to developing local leadership and economic self-sufficiency.

ORD's task is not easy. St. Vincent has an annual per capita income of US\$539, making it the poorest territory in the English-speaking Caribbean and second only to Haiti as the poorest nation in the New World. By conservative estimates, 25 percent of St. Vincent's work force is unemployed. Underemployment is so pervasive that the government does not even attempt to measure it statistically. The future looks, if anything, even

bleaker. Fifty-five percent of the population is under the age of 15, and St. Vincent's birthrate is the highest in the Caribbean.

Despite the appearance of lushness, the local economy has never thrived. Sugar failed as a major crop after the abolition of slavery in 1838 and a collapse in world sugar prices around mid-century. A subsequent attempt to introduce cocoa on the island's large estates was crippled by a devastating hurricane in 1898, and the eruption of Soufriere four years later ended the experiment entirely. Today, 80 percent of the island's population are subsistence farmers. Bananas account for 60 percent of St. Vincent's export earnings, but few peasant farmers can afford to harvest them exclusively. The vast majority of plots are under two acres in size and hence too small for efficient cultivation of this crop. (In effect, these steep and tiny parcels of land are a legacy of the "provision grounds" where slaves planted their own subsistence gardens when they were not laboring on the sugar plantations of the British.) Furthermore, fertilizer is costly, and post-harvest losses, particularly from bruising, are all too common.

Thus most small farmers diversify their production. Some bananas are grown for the export market; some ground crops are marketed locally; and other ground crops and vegetables are grown for household consumption. The

work, however, remains backbreaking, and the danger of crop failure high. (A hurricane can wipe out a year's labor in a single day, and few Vincentians forget how they were nearly forced to evacuate the island in 1979 when the volcano threatened to erupt.)

Insufficient prestige and poor financial return have combined to push many of the elderly from the land and have kept the young from taking their places, producing a 20-year decline in the number of small farmers and a parallel shrinkage of land under cultivation. Migrants frequently head for Kingstown, then move on to Trinidad, Barbados, the French West Indies, Canada, and the United States.

* * *

Jethro Greene, the coordinator of ORD, is a tall, well-built man in his early thirties whose buoyant self-confidence seems to rub off on all those around him. He enthusiastically advocates the needs and agenda of his organization in meetings with regional marketing groups, outside funding agencies, and Vincentian businessmen. He champions ORD's independence from any political party. As he explains, "Development must come out of concrete experiences of success and failure; it must not be associated with a political philosophy."

Greene has been an effective leader because he is an insider. He grew up

Woman vendor in Kingstown's central market.



among the farmers of rural St. Vincent and remains open to their needs. He has no university training, but feels this is not an obstacle to his work. Sensitive to all the subtle nuances, he talks a small farmer's language, can sit down with them to share a bottle of rum.

Without Jethro Greene, ORD might have crumbled soon after its beginning, nine years ago, at a convention of the Rural Youth Development Council. The Council periodically brings the isolated communities of the island together for everything from soccer and sewing circles to road repair and religious meetings, and this convention was called to form a coordinated, scientific, and systematic approach to subsistence farming that would combat the effects of inflation, high unemployment, costly food imports, malnutrition (particularly among children), inadequate government extension services, poor roads, and insecure and insufficient markets. ORD marched out of this gathering under the banner *Produce More, Import Less*.

Within a year of its founding, ORD had held its first major convention and drafted a constitution. By 1978 it was officially recognized by the St. Vincent government and granted the status of an incorporated, voluntary, nonprofit, statutory body. It continues today to expand its membership while attracting financial support from such external donors as the IAF (which in 1978 awarded ORD

its first grant), the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Although ORD has always avoided a formal organizational structure, it seems sufficiently institutionalized to survive even Jethro Greene's departure. The group now employs seven full-time professionals, 13 part-time field technicians, and an extensive network of volunteers attracted by local development initiatives.

Indeed, ORD believes that effective rural development activities require social mobilization as much as agricultural and economic assistance. Its rural development package therefore includes community training in such skills as bookkeeping, resource planning, and proper nutrition and child care. When ORD targets a new farming community, it asks small farmers to identify which problems they want to tackle, allowing local leaders and solutions to emerge. Rural subcommittees (27 are projected for the end of 1985) are formed after a village can demonstrate the self-direction and cohesion needed to plan and manage its own projects.

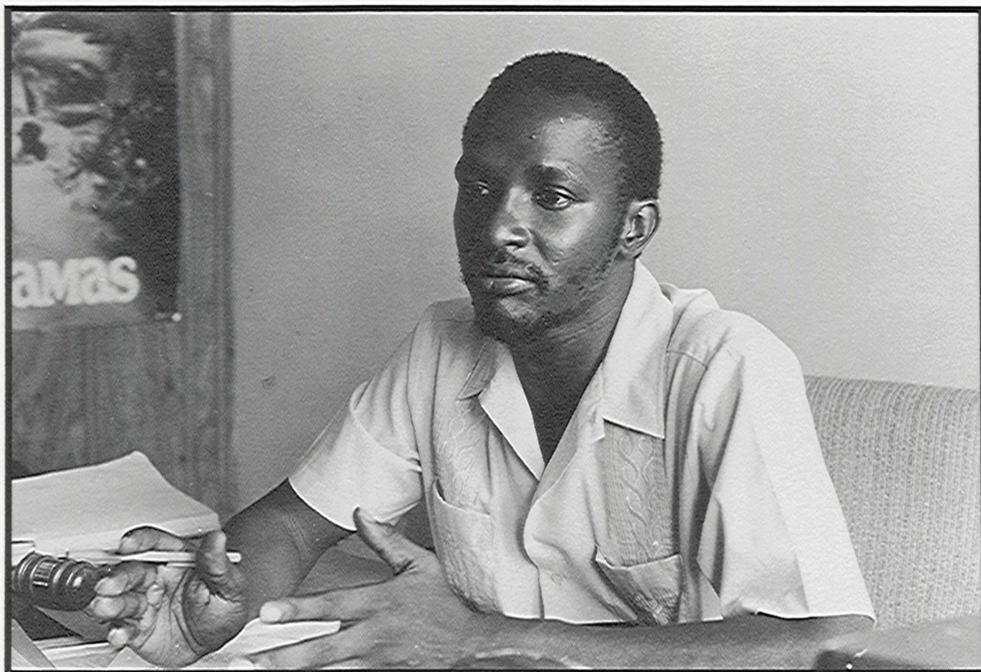
How effective has this strategy been? ORD began its activities by working with 10 rural subcommittees on Operation Cheap Protein, the first in a series of programs designed to increase the health and productivity of subsistence farmers so that the most successful could become semicommercial and then

fully market-oriented growers.

The vast majority of ORD beneficiaries in the early stages of the operation were growing just enough to feed themselves. Their diet was mostly ground crops, supplemented occasionally by poultry and fish. To change that, fieldworkers were recruited from communities and trained by ORD to teach their neighbors how to apply fertilizer, prepare the soil, and determine proper planting distances for such crops as peanuts, high-lysine corn, and soy and wing beans. A revolving livestock program was also introduced.

The introduction of peanuts proved to be the most successful of these initiatives. On the personal level, one woman proudly reported, "My children look healthier and feel better since we got peanuts." On the macro-level, production reports vary, but records show yields of 1,000 to 2,000 pounds per acre, allowing most farmers to repay ORD for seeds and fertilizer and still produce a surplus for home consumption. Increased production also halved the market price of nuts to about \$2.15 a pound, greatly benefitting consumers.

The revolving livestock program met with mixed results, however. Ninety black-belly sheep were introduced unsuccessfully from Barbados in 1980: tethered to trees or posts, most hanged themselves when they lost their footing on St. Vincent's rugged slopes. The re-



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Jethro Greene, coordinator of ORD.

volving plan for pigs has had better luck. Breeding pairs have been loaned to farmers who have then returned the sow and boar and half their litter for distribution to other beneficiaries. In addition, 2,000 chicks (plus credit, wood, and wire to build chicken coops) have been supplied to 173 farm families.

The plan for beans and corn—traditional crops long grown unproductively on the island—was a dismal failure that actually laid the groundwork for a great success. Discouraged farmers figured they had nothing to lose when ORD offered below-market rates on seed for seldom planted vegetables—including carrots, tomatoes, eggplants, and cucumbers. Not only are such vegetables now a routine part of the diet of ORD beneficiaries, primarily because women have planted kitchen gardens, but they are now available year-round at lower prices. For example, the price of tomatoes once fluctuated with the season from \$4.90 to \$.75 a pound. With steadier supply, the price has now stabilized at \$1.75 a pound. Farmers now sell their surplus produce through “traffickers,” mostly village women, at markets in and around Kingstown. Income that would have otherwise gone to outside middlemen stays within the community.

In effect, most ORD members have reached the semicommercial phase of production. In response, ORD is offering them informal seminars in book-

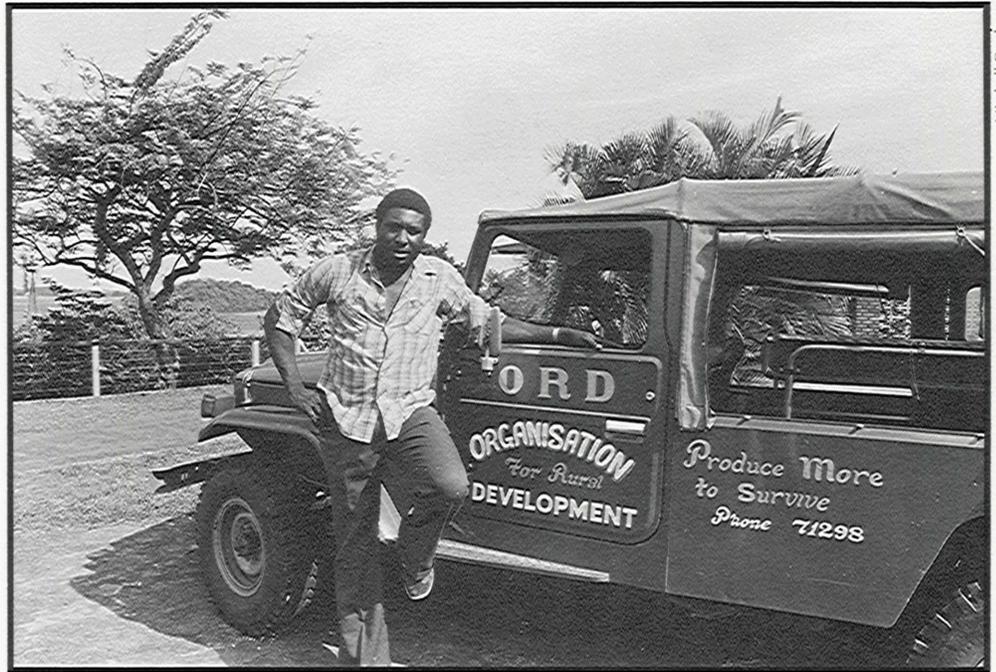
keeping, fertilizer and pesticide application, household and farm management, and human relations. ORD has also built corrugated-iron storage barns around the island to meet the increased demand for fertilizer, seeds, and pesticides. Administered by members of the rural subcommittees, these supply depots are important meeting places for farmers. Fertilizer and seed are sold here at less than market value, with no downpayment required the first year (the loans are paid off with end-of-season profits). Beginning with the second year of participation, a farmer's downpayment requirements rise annually in increments of 10 percent, leveling off at a maximum of 50 percent.

ORD has been so successful at increasing production that it now issues credit and support services only for crops with secured markets. In 1983 it signed an agreement to sell the yam crop grown by ORD members to the Eastern Caribbean Agency, a private marketing outfit. ORD thus recovers the cost of seed, and farmers can count on selling their crop. Ginger, once grown only in small quantities, is being sold under a similar buy-all contract with the Eastern Caribbean Agency. Farmers sell their ginger through ORD at the stabilized rate of \$.55 a pound; ORD retains several tons of ginger each year for distribution to new farmers entering the program.

These economic achievements have changed the lives of many people. Malcolm is a 27-year-old Rastafarian. Three years ago, ORD convinced him to start growing vegetables. Now he is about to purchase a motorbike and an acre of his own land. Esther, who is 60 years old, led our three-man evaluation team up a steep mountain path to proudly show off her yam and ginger patch. She told us her son would soon come home from Canada to stay, and together, they were going to farm full-time. Mr. Abrahams has found a new role as ORD's elder statesman. His stories and proverbs help farmers and the ORD staff alike to keep their bearings; when younger members face dilemmas, they turn first to him.

Roughly 2,500 farm families have been directly touched by ORD's activities. In the process, youths under the age of 25 and women have been mobilized. Nothing could be more important since the latter are now a majority in the labor force and the former will present the Caribbean with its most crucial development problem during the remainder of the century.

More young people are staying on the land. With ORD's encouragement and support, they are realizing that farming does not mean being trapped into repeating their parents' “cutlass and hoe” existence. ORD seminars are introducing young people to agriculture as a lucrative business, and they emphasize



Olson Mandeville, driver and fieldworker for ORD.

the importance of training, planning, and management. This approach subtly attacks the stereotype of the poor, ignorant farmer. By substituting vegetables for ground crops (for many of the young, a reminder of slavery), it promotes a tangible symbol of how individuals can escape a legacy of dependence. And by saving and being responsible, as one old-timer put it, one can "stay out of the rum shop."

Women represent over 40 percent of ORD's membership, and that reflects the profound role they play in St. Vincent's agricultural society. Female-headed households now outnumber those headed by men. Between 1960 and 1979, the number of women in the labor force increased from 36 percent to 52 percent. "ORD could not survive without the women," according to its chief coordinating officer, who also noted that a high percentage of women have stuck with the organization over the long haul, while many men join and quickly drop out. In return, ORD has created new opportunities for its female members: the previously mentioned "traffickers" who market village produce are one example of this.

Other benefits have been more subtle, perhaps because they reach beyond a program's quantifiable aims. The reduction in malnutrition and the improvement in household diets that followed the introduction of new crops has been

augmented by training courses in hygiene, food preparation, and meal planning. An ORD fieldworker on the island's Atlantic coast observed that young girls inundate her with questions about family planning and other non-agricultural matters, a small piece of testimony to the increasing importance of ORD in all aspects of community life.

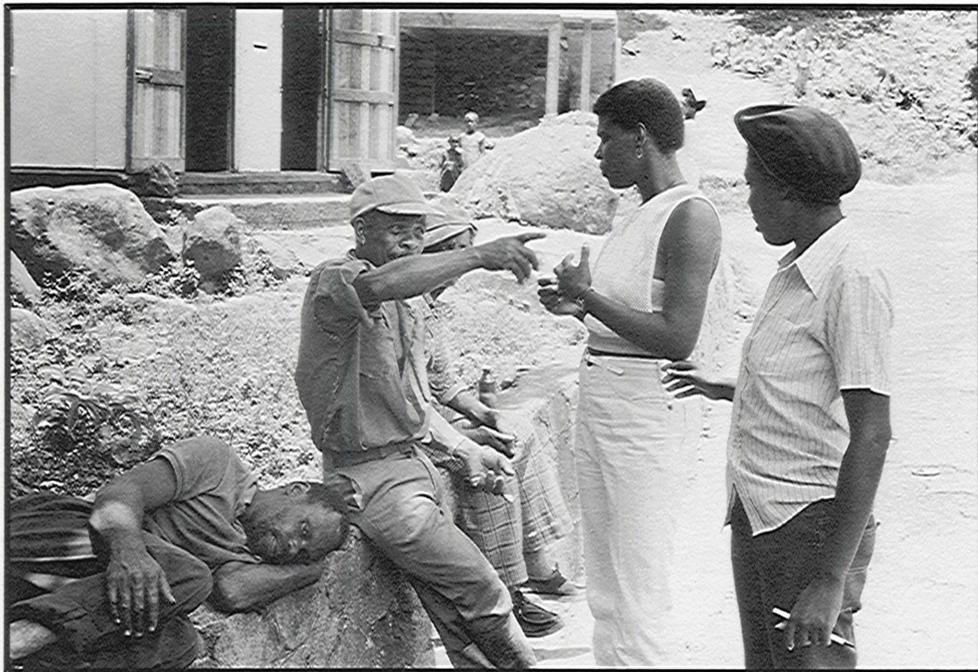
ORD's future depends on its ability to market the growing variety and yields of farm products grown by its members. The considerable degree of self-sufficiency that has been achieved cannot alter the fact that Vincentians will never be able to produce all that they need. They live in a modern world, after all, in which the acquisition of capital for everything from clothing to roofing material depends on their selling the surplus they can't consume. Failure to discover and tap sufficient markets for surplus production, a perennial bottleneck for agricultural development programs in the Eastern Caribbean, could undermine the trust and support ORD has gained from thousands of farmers.

Vincentians remember all too clearly what has become known as "the carrot business." Several years ago, there was a huge demand for carrots in Trinidad, and the few Vincentians who planted them that year profited handsomely. The following year, virtually all of St.

Vincent's farmers planted carrots. The market was swamped, prices plummeted, and many farmers suffered devastating losses.

The lesson was obvious: Any attempt to market produce requires planning to assure that crops are diversified and do not exceed market demand. ORD is thus training grassroots managers around the island to monitor what farmers are planting. ORD is also collaborating with the St. Vincent Ministry of Trade and Agriculture to train ministry staff in marketing strategy. Both share in funds provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Canadian International Development Agency. "We seek new markets for traditional crops, and new crops for new markets," one ministry official remarked.

Additional help that will simplify that task may soon be on the way. The National Marketing Board (a national committee of government officials and business representatives) and the previously mentioned Eastern Caribbean Agency are trying to identify new and rationalize existing markets. Recognizing that information about variations in supply and demand would give small island producers a competitive edge, the two organizations are making plans to link by computer the island markets of Barbados and Trinidad with the small island producers of St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Dominica, and Grenada. As goods are re-



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Bulah Heinds (2nd from right), chief ORD agent in Vermont district, talking to local farmers.

quired or gluts develop, word can be spread quickly to the grassroots.

Lest one leap too far ahead though, it has to be remembered that the bulk of St. Vincent's cash crops are still brought to the Kingstown market by traffickers every Monday morning. The island's major outside market is Trinidad, three days away by small schooner. The few fresh vegetables that are actually exported only rarely survive the trip. The newly elected government of Prime Minister James Mitchell therefore continues both to explore the acquisition of improved schooner service and to lobby donor governments and agencies for expansion of the existing airport.

Some of the shipping problem can be bypassed by supplementing the export of raw vegetables with processed items such as jams, jellies, juices, and sauces. Boosting small-scale processing to a commercial level is one way to absorb the growing agricultural surplus while generating increased foreign-exchange earnings. Accordingly, ORD staff are soliciting agroprocessors to buy its members' peanuts and peppers.

Of course, all of these activities will necessarily begin to alter ORD's chemistry. Increasing the self-sufficiency of subsistence farmers meant enlisting their cooperation, and ORD's informal grassroots approach was an asset. Opening new export markets and coordinating them with domestic produc-

tion, however, requires a more formal management structure that may distance the group from its local supporters. Nonetheless, the pressure to rationalize operations seems irresistible. ORD—like the farmers it serves—needs to penetrate markets and earn the resources to start buying its own fertilizer and other agricultural inputs, supply its own credit, and cover its own payroll and overhead. Only with a percentage of market profits can ORD reduce its dependence on outside donors and expand its role as teacher, adviser, banker, and broker.

* * *

There is an old West Indian proverb that compares West Indians to crabs in a basket. Scrapping, crawling over one another, they try desperately to get out. When one somehow manages to climb to the lip of the basket, the others reach up and pull him back down.

Cultural anthropologists are more prosaic. The individualism of the West Indian farmer is well known, they say. This quality is a byproduct of living in an extremely precarious economic environment where one must be fiercely protective of self and family. Numerous studies of such societies show that competition for scarce resources fosters the anxiety that "someone else's gain is my loss."

What appears to be happening in St. Vincent is that farmers, thanks to ORD,

are discovering the benefits of cooperation. Perhaps *this* will be ORD's most enduring achievement. Traditional "swap" labor teams have been given new life: when a woman wants to construct a chicken coop, for example, other members of her community now help out because they know they can count on her later when they need to clear new land for planting. Small voluntary organizations are also emerging, always a good sign. Community groups now meet regularly to discuss plans, problems, and possible courses of action.

At one such meeting of six women and four men, an older woman sat quietly in the background. As the conversation strayed into the rarefied air of marketing theory, she gestured firmly with her hand, pulling the talk back to earth. "Without ORD we ain't got nothing," she said simply. "You better keep on with it."

DR. BRANA-SHUTE is an anthropologist, based in Charleston, S.C., who lectures, writes, and consults on the Caribbean. This article is based on an evaluation of ORD conducted by Gary Brana-Shute, Beryl Carasco, and Walter Matadial.

HAITI'S BAREFOOT OPHTHALMOLOGISTS

FAITH MITCHELL

Jacmel is built on seven dusty hills, which we zigzagged up and down during the course of the day, never taking the same street twice. Accompanied by an ophthalmic technician, I sought former patients of Eye Care Haiti among the area's poor and isolated rural population.

We first interviewed a 76-year-old woman who lived with her husband in the front room of a weather-beaten, wooden house. Her glasses had thick lenses that made her eyes swim out disproportionately large. As we talked, she described how her sight first began to fail and what she had done. Believing that penicillin was a cure-all, she had bought ointment to rub onto her eyes (a common and usually inappropriate method of self-treatment in Haiti). With her vision steadily diminishing, she went to Eye Care Haiti. A doctor at the clinic removed her cataracts and provided glasses. She is now unable to make and sell embroidery, but can work around the house and care for her husband.

Our next stop was up a narrow dirt street and across a barren hill. The shoemaker we visited was small and thin, with fingers frayed like old leather. When I asked about his eyes, he replied: "My sight isn't good. Today is hot and sunny, but to me everything is very cloudy." He explained how he had once been examined by an eye doctor on temporary assignment from the U.S. and had been fitted with glasses. His sight seemed to improve, but the relief was temporary. Eventually the shoemaker consulted Eye Care Haiti, and learned that he too had cataracts which required

surgery. "I see worse and worse each day, and my head throbs . . . but I put the operation off because they said it costs 125 *gourdes* (US\$25). I can't afford so much." Unable to find the money, he still hoped to work out a compromise with the clinic. Meanwhile, he seemed resigned to his pain and failing sight.

Difficulties such as these are endemic in Haiti. In 1969, a survey of 2,500 people in the Léogâne region found that most of the sample population had suffered from eye problems during the previous year. Yet few had sought professional assistance. Most had tried to treat themselves or waited for the ailment to cure itself.

Postponing effective treatment often has irreparable consequences. The chief causes of blindness in Haiti are cataracts, pterygium,* scarring of the cornea, and glaucoma.** Although cataracts and glaucoma are not curable, visual impairment is slow and can be controlled if detected and properly treated in the early stages. Neither of those "ifs," however, is certain in Haiti, where medical facilities are scarce and most people cannot afford proper eye care.

Widespread poverty also plays a direct role in causing and aggravating other visual diseases. Conjunctivitis (which primarily affects children) thrives in the same unsanitary living conditions that

are responsible for the country's high rates of tuberculosis and typhoid fever. Eye infections that should be easily cured are chronic and become acute.

The Léogâne survey was conducted by Eye Care Inc., an organization (based in the U.S.) that designs programs for preventing and treating eye diseases in many countries. The study suggested that a comprehensive solution was needed—reducing the epidemic of eye impairments would involve education, hygiene, early screening, and treatment. Eye Care Haiti was founded in 1979 in collaboration with *École St. Vincent*, a private voluntary organization in Port-au-Prince, to meet that challenge. By 1989, Eye Care Haiti's network of rural outreach clinics with links to more sophisticated surgical centers will be completed. The organization plans to reduce the incidence of eye disease by utilizing teams of professionals and paraprofessionals who can develop, evaluate, and deliver ophthalmic services.

THE "BAREFOOT OPHTHALMOLOGIST"

The keystone of Eye Care Haiti's efforts is the Ophthalmic Assistant Program (ECHOAP). Ophthalmic assistants are community-based paramedics trained to screen the poor for eye diseases, to teach them about preventive eye care and social hygiene, and to treat minor problems on the spot while making appropriate referrals for severe cases. They work alongside professional ophthalmologists in Eye Care Haiti's regional clinics and independently in re-

*A triangular thickening of the conjunctiva, resembling a bird's wing. If the pterygium obscures sight, surgery may be required.

**An accumulation of pressure inside the eye that eventually destroys the optic nerve and causes blindness. Damage is irreversible, but it can be limited through long-term medication. Severe cases may require surgery.



Blind woman weaving straw placemat.

Mitchell Denburg



Eye Care Inc.

Barefoot ophthalmologists outside regional center of Eye Care Haiti.

mote villages. The first clinic opened in Léogâne; more ophthalmic assistants are now based at the *École St. Vincent* in Port-au-Prince; in Mirebalais, north of the capital; in Jacmel, on the south coast; and in Jean Rabel on the northwest coast (see map).

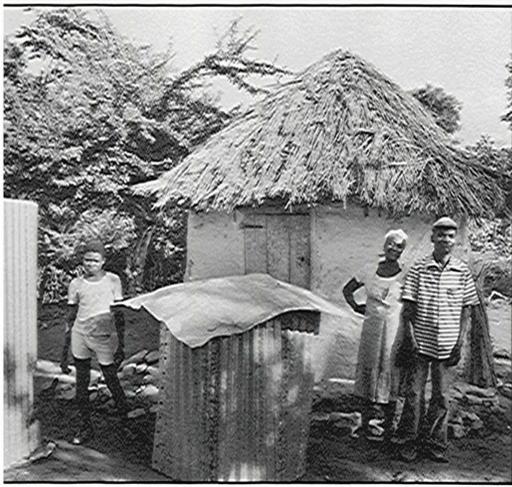
The idea behind ECHOAP is not new. Community-based paramedicals first appeared in China. These "barefoot doctors" were required to have a primary school education and received up to six months' training in public health and simple medicine. Thanks to their efforts, infant mortality and malaria rates dropped, and life expectancy rose. Paramedicals had increased the number of people with access to health care while maximizing the time and talents of college-educated physicians. Subsequently, the idea has spread to and been adapted by many developing countries.

In Haiti, the selection criteria for "barefoot ophthalmologists" stress two qualities: a high degree of self-motivation and a long-term interest in community health. At each clinic, the ECHOAP advisory committee interviews local residents and admits 12 applicants to an introductory program. This initial six-week term is designed to improve basic skills and includes in-

struction in rudimentary math and science, a review of the French language, and an introduction to eye care. Eight participants are then selected as formal candidates; each must be 18 years of age or older, have completed the *troisième* (equivalent to the ninth grade in the U.S.), and have demonstrated a prior interest in community service through paid or volunteer work.

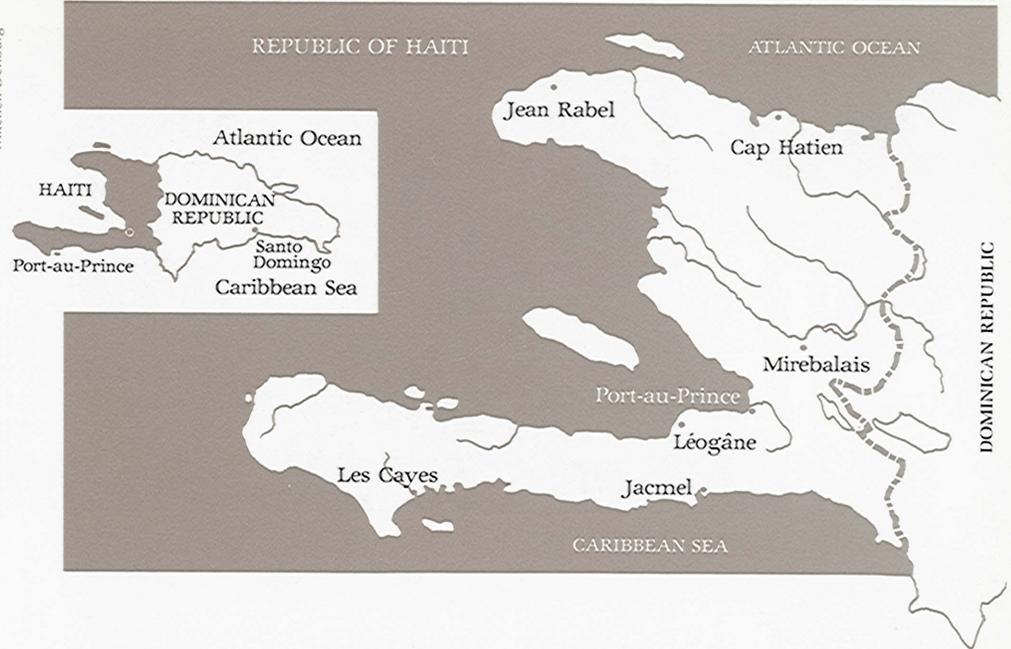
Students receive a full year of classroom instruction and clinical training. In the classroom, they learn about medical ethics, communications, instrument repair and maintenance, the psychological aspects of visual impairment and rehabilitation, ophthalmic theory, and standard first-aid techniques. Practical training is conducted in private ophthalmologists' offices, the operating room at *École St. Vincent*, the eye clinic and hospital at Léogâne, and mobile screening clinics. After completing the program, candidates are certified and begin working in the communities from which they were recruited. As ophthalmic assistants, they periodically attend classes to maintain and upgrade their skills.

To assist paramedicals at the village level, ECHOAP employs community workers called "collaborators." Chosen in consultation with community coun-



Mitchell Denburg

Haitian family. Left to right: Anthony Agustin, Malucien Agustin (blind), Pressoir Appoleus.



cils, these individuals schedule and publicize outreach clinics, supervise the clinics during business hours, and monitor how patients are received and treated. Working together, the collaborators and ophthalmic assistants can establish a strong base of local support and increase public awareness about the prevention and treatment of eye problems.

CLINIC DAY AT GRAND BOUCAN

ECHOAP's Mirebalais clinic and outreach area serves about 30,000 people in 20 rural communities. Most patients are peasant farmers and their children, but in Mirebalais itself, tailors, seamstresses, teachers, and market vendors are also included.

At each clinic, the ophthalmic assistants now work alongside a physician and an auxiliary nurse as well as a record keeper. Eye Care Haiti decided to broaden its clinical team because patients often had severe and multiple health problems and because the local population wanted and needed wider services. There are plans to expand treatment similarly in other parts of the country.

Grand Boucan is one of the outlying communities served by the Mirebalais team. The monthly clinics held there are publicized by the local collaborator, who also sets up chairs and benches when the team arrives, assists the physician, and cleans up afterward. Most patients on the day of my visit were women and children who had walked or been carried in from the bare and hilly countryside. Sev-

eral of the infants showed the thin reddish hair, the swollen bellies, and the listlessness that are telltale signs of malnutrition. Some came with their grandmothers, suggesting that their mothers had left the area to work.

By the time we arrived, two lines of people had formed. One was waiting to see the physician (a Haitian general practitioner), while the other waited for the ophthalmic assistants. Madame Joseph, an elderly glaucoma patient, was returning to have her eye pressure checked. On her first visit, the clinic had prescribed eyedrops, which she took three times a day. She had refused an operation for fear it might prevent her from working. A widow, Madame Joseph was still supporting her small household by growing and selling vegetables.

Another patient, a small boy named Miguel Bazile, had been brought to Grand Boucan by his mother because his eyes were red and teary (symptoms of conjunctivitis). At first she had kept him at home to see if his eyes would clear up. Then she fell ill. Now, even though Miguel's eyes were better, she explained, he wouldn't be able to return to school because she needed his help in the fields.

Emile Louis, a middle-aged farmer with 10 dependents, was here because a sliver had struck him in the eye while he was chopping wood. With his eye itching, watering, aching, he had to curtail his work, and his crops were being neglected.

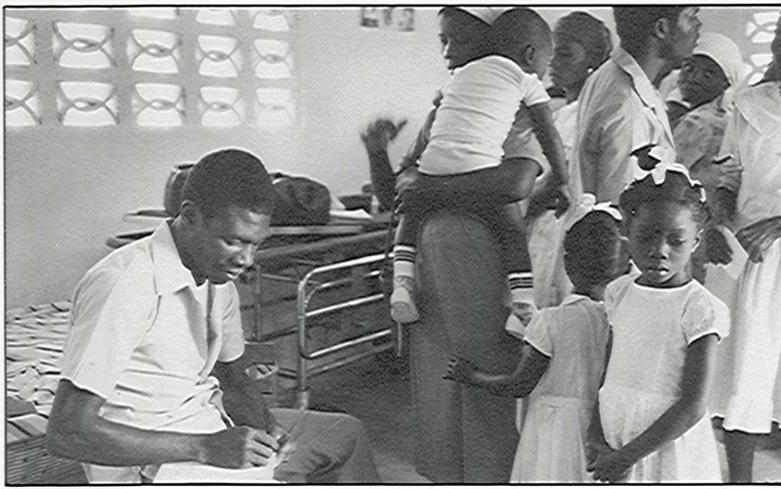
All of the people who received treatment on the day of my visit were charged either minimal fees or nothing at all. Patients who saw the physician

paid two *gourdes* (US\$.40). Medicines, the services of the auxiliary nurse, and eye examinations and treatment were free. To keep down costs, patients brought their own containers (usually beer bottles) for liquid medication. Eye Care Haiti also tries to economize by holding its clinics in vacant buildings whenever possible, and it recycles eyeglass frames donated by service organizations in the United States.

Eye Care Haiti seeks to reduce long-term costs through preventive medicine and early screening. Patients who come to the clinic for medical care, for instance, also must have their eyes examined. In Grand Boucan, these examinations took place in a large room outfitted with a chair, a bed, and eye charts. For each patient, the ophthalmic assistants recorded ability to see near and far, intraocular pressure, and the external appearance of the eyes. Patients with serious problems were referred to the regional clinic in Mirebalais.

Another example of preventive medicine explains why so many small children were present. Malnourishment is, in fact, common in the area, and mothers have been encouraged to bring their children to the clinic each month for weighing and screening. During these sessions the health team also gives educational talks on diarrhea, breastfeeding, nutrition, maternal/child health, and immunization. Since few of the attending adults are literate, these oral presentations are vital to reducing the incidence of communicable diseases.

The lectures I heard were informal, and the audiences attentive. In fact—when compared with the more formal-



Barefoot ophthalmologist taking case history at Grand Boucan clinic.

Faith Mitchell



Grandmothers and mothers are encouraged to bring malnourished children to clinic monthly for weighing and screening.

ized provider-client relationships that I have seen elsewhere in the Caribbean—most activities at the Grand Boucan and other Eye Care Haiti clinics seemed relaxed and comfortable. The ophthalmic assistants were neither authoritarian nor patronizing, even when tasks required exceptional patience and tact. For example, the test for intraocular pressure can be frightening because it involves putting something directly on the eyeball, but most patients remained trusting, calm, and responsive. Even such relatively simple exercises as the *E* test for visual acuity can be drawn out and taxing here, yet the ophthalmic assistants carefully explained to illiterate patients that the *E*'s were “forks” or “bushes” that changed directions. The ability of local people to provide this kind of consideration for each other makes the community-based outreach clinics especially effective.

ECHOAP'S IMPACT

In 1984 I conducted an evaluation for the Inter-American Foundation to assess how well ECHOAP is meeting its goal of reducing the social and economic burdens of blindness and illness. The study focused on the ability of former patients to work productively before and after treatment by the ophthalmic assistants. A total of 643 people in Mirebalais, Léogâne, and Jacmel were randomly selected from ECHOAP's files and interviewed. Fourteen percent of the sample were under 20 years of age; 57 percent were between 20 and 60; and 29 percent were over 60.

In response to one question—“When

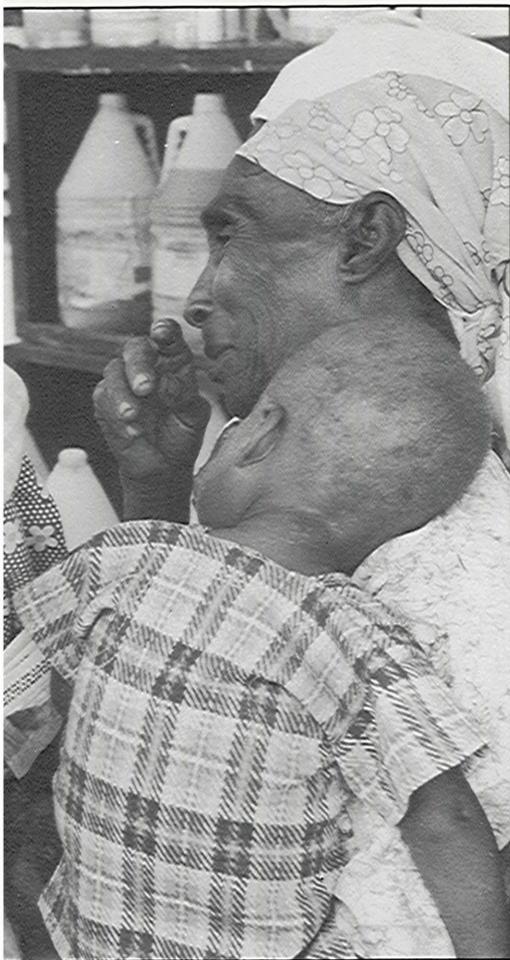
you were having eye problems, were you able to work?”—30 percent of all patients replied that they had been forced to stop (see table). Elderly persons were generally more affected than younger ones. Activities were limited by such problems as blurred vision, cataracts, glaucoma, recurrent infections, headaches, and other pain. Many people emphasized that, despite an inability to do their regular work, they were not idle. For example, a six-year-old stopped going to school when her eyes became too painful, but at home she carried water and swept. A 65-year-old woman with cataracts could not help in the fields before her operation; nevertheless, she continued to wash clothes and cook.

Changes in ability to work were assessed by two questions: “Can you work now (that you've been treated)?” and “Can you work *better* (since treatment by ECHOAP)?” After treatment, the number of people able to work at all increased by seven percent. The largest improvements were among younger people, those most able to contribute economically.

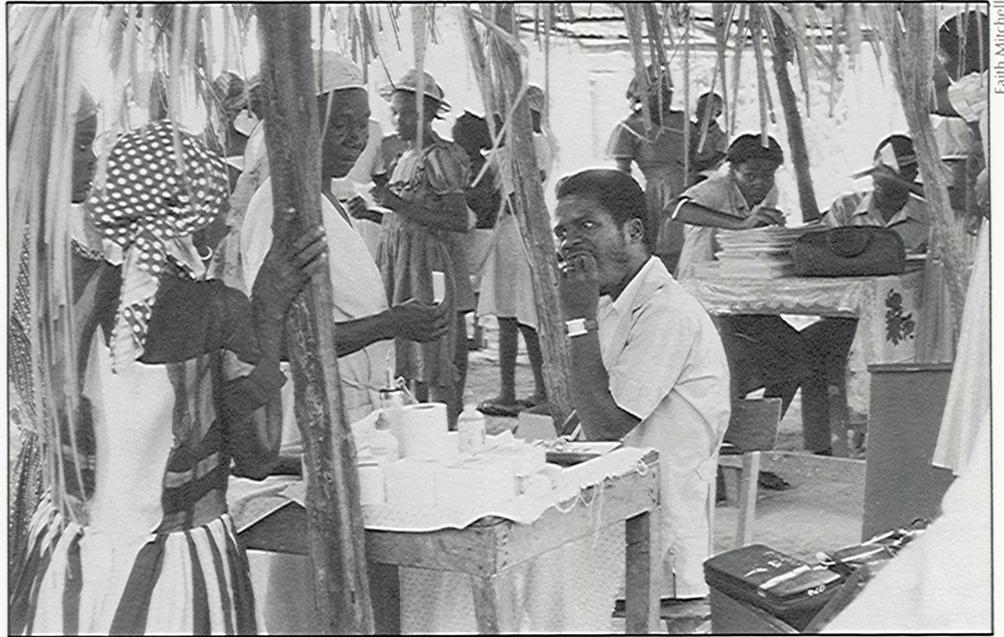
A striking finding of the study was how many patients—like the shoemaker and Madame Joseph described earlier—put off treatment despite serious visual problems. ECHOAP must deal with this reality of peasant life: poor people will often try learning how to make do and live with an illness rather than exhaust their small savings to try to find a cure. Choices are especially hard for those patients who are not screened early enough and who now require surgery. Surgery may stave off eventual blindness, but it may also mean an immediate

reduction in the ability to work productively. Since life is often hand-to-mouth, many patients are unwilling to assume that risk.

For this reason, it is especially significant that 69 percent of patients said they could work *better* after treatment. (Three-quarters of the patients under 60 reported they could work more, compared to slightly over half of the elderly.) These ex-patients also expressed enormous personal gains in the *quality* of their lives, making comments such as the following: “I had difficulty at first with glasses, but now I work without problems (person aged 51).” “I can't work in the fields anymore because of my other illnesses, but the medication allows me to work around the house (person aged 55).” “Since my treatment, I can work more because the pain in my eye is down (person aged 25).” “Before I got my glasses from ECHOAP, business was impossible because I couldn't even see the money to count change (person aged 71).” “Getting glasses let me go back to school (person aged 13).”



Faith Mitchell



Faith Mitchell

Dispensing medicine at Grand Boucan clinic.

LONG-TERM INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

Despite solid accomplishments, ECHOAP faces long-term institutional dilemmas that make its future uncertain. First, it must accommodate the rising professional expectations of the ophthalmic assistants *while* maintaining the generalist, "barefoot" character of the outreach program. Second, it must confront the environmental and economic conditions that perpetuate eye diseases, *without* dissipating its resources and losing its comparative advantage as a provider of eye care. And finally, it must work toward financial self-sufficiency *without* charging unrealistic fees to its impoverished constituency.

Professionalization of the ophthalmic assistants: Most medical programs in developing countries are administered by highly trained professionals based in cities. By stressing the use of ophthalmic assistants and community collaborators,

ECHOAP has tried to extend service to the countryside. And as those assistants and collaborators have developed strong professional identities in the communities where they work, local support for and input to ECHOAP has increased.

Yet ECHOAP has found it difficult to steer away from the traditional model of physician-dominated medical care. Ophthalmic assistants and collaborators *do* organize and run the outreach clinics, but this independence creates ambiguity about, and some tension over, professional status, especially in the clinics where the ophthalmologists and the paramedics work side by side.

This friction surfaced in the study I conducted. In response to one question—"Is there anything you don't do now that you would like to do?"—over half of the ophthalmic assistants said they would like to perform more technical tasks, such as refraction tests and laboratory work. These activities imply greater responsibility and represent a break from routine work. The ophthalmologists were generally opposed, say-

ing that ophthalmic assistants do not have the education or technical training to perform these tasks without risking patients' health. They argued that the paramedics should master their present responsibilities instead of trying to acquire new ones.

The ECHOAP board is considering introducing more advanced levels of training and responsibility to challenge those ophthalmic assistants who want to do more. Yet ironically, most of the new responsibilities will take the paramedics away from personal contact with patients and into the laboratory, and make them more like physicians. The more physician-like they become, the more they replicate the shortcomings of a top-down health care system.

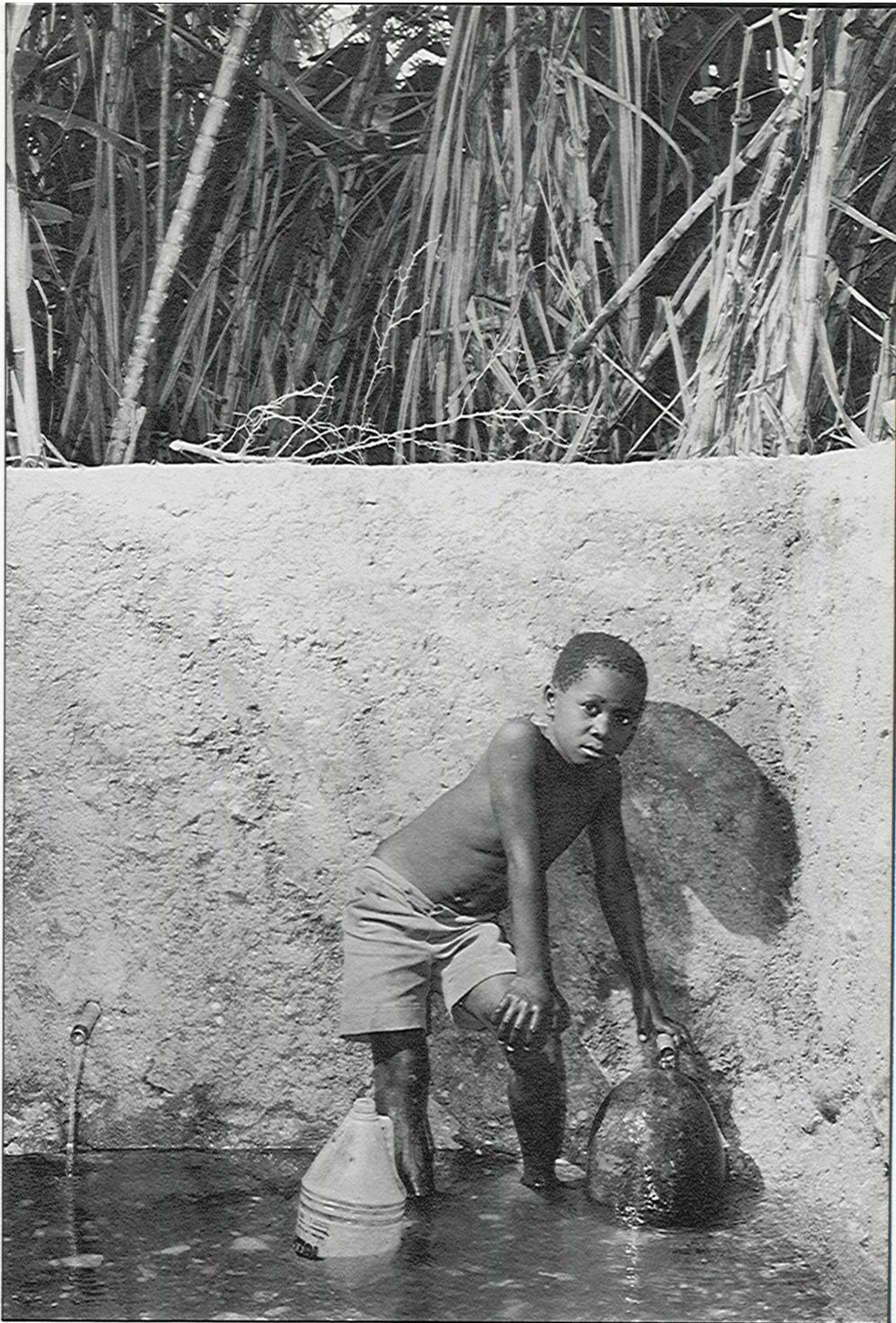
The issues are both how authoritarian the health system is and how much it will cost. Will career advancement increase salaries? How would that affect the number of people who can be reached? Can the system grow fast enough to provide middle-level slots and also raise the money needed to sup-

port itself? The danger is that it cannot—that it will become top-heavy, causing contraction of service.

How much preventive medicine? ECHOAP also faces the challenge of combating, with limited resources, the general environmental conditions that affect public health. Patients receive little if any health education other than that provided periodically by the collaborators, the ophthalmic assistants, or a health team (for now, only in Mirebalais). People who are treated in the clinics return to homes and communities where the risk of reinfection is high. That is, they will reenter rather than break the disease cycle unless they can better understand and control the surrounding conditions of their lives.

Breaking the disease cycle is not only a question of providing information. It is hard to convince people that improved personal hygiene will lead to better health when they lack the material resources to attack the underlying conditions that promote disease. For example, the use of river water for bathing promotes eye infections, and daily exposure to dust on unpaved roads leads to chronic irritations. Yet, a medical eye-care program can realistically do little to directly provide clean water or pave roads.

Even within these limitations though, effective public health measures can be encouraged. People need to be taught to use the freshest water possible for washing cups and dishes and for bathing, to urinate and defecate away from public areas, and to wash after handling someone who is sick and before cooking and



Spring-fed captivation tank that offers source of clean water.

	Were you able to work when you were sick? (percent)	Were you able to work after treat- ment by the OAs? (percent)	Were you able to work better after treatment? (percent)
YES	63	70	69
NO	30	24	25
NOT APPLICABLE	6	6	6
TOTAL	100*	100	100

*Total is less than 100 percent because of rounding.

eating. With some assistance, village groups could be encouraged to develop songs and skits about disease treatment and prevention. They can then share these materials with neighboring communities and work with them to pool resources. Such activities would supplement the educational activities of the ophthalmic assistants and collaborators and provide new avenues for translating information into action.

Some projects might be encouraged that would improve the general health and economic well-being of the community as well as reduce eye disease. For instance, a village irrigation project could also improve the supply of "good" water. Nevertheless, an eye care program must understand its own limits as a rural development agency, being careful not to end up doing nothing by trying to do too much. It must keep a delicate balance: resources should be focused on what it does best (eye care) without ignoring the overriding conditions that can make service limited to eye care ultimately futile.

Financial self-sufficiency: In Haiti, as in other poor countries, most rural assistance programs provide free services. This policy often boomerangs. Free services provide short-term savings for peasants, but the services provided may be equally brief. Typically, external donors want and intend programs to become self-sufficient, and as their support dwindles, clients eventually will be asked to pay. The longer unrealistic expectations are nurtured, the greater the danger that resentment or even boycotts will follow. Many programs founder

when the transition is too abrupt.

Thus ECHOAP needs to consider billing patients now in order to decrease its dependency on outside donors. And there is evidence that its clients can afford limited fees. Family expenditures on health, even in very poor countries, are often already substantial. In Haiti, people are willing to pay for drugs from pharmacies—and willing to pay a voodoo priest for medical treatment. If ECHOAP offers a comparative advantage in effective treatment, it should be able to attract some of that money.

But realistically, fees from poor patients can only take up some of the revenue slack. Thus ECHOAP's board has begun discussing other ways to finance future services. These alternatives include incorporating the ophthalmic assistants and collaborators into the government's national health program (which has not yet agreed to accept them) and collecting small annual fees, on a prepaid basis, from participating communities.

* * *

During the past decade, the *idea* of community-based health care has been planted, taken root, and sprouted in one country after another. Haiti's "barefoot ophthalmologists" are, in effect, cousins to China's "barefoot doctors," half a world away, and to the primary health care technicians who now work in virtually every country of Latin America. ECHOAP has delivered high-quality services without relying on scarce specialists, expensive equipment, and centralized facilities. It has trained poor Haitians to become more self-sufficient in

health services and, in doing so, has provided young people with the opportunity to serve their communities and strengthen local organizations.

Programs like ECHOAP have the potential to provide cheaper, more broadly accessible, and possibly more humane health care in countries that lack hospital beds and highly trained physicians. But as ECHOAP has learned, a simple commitment to the ideals of "community participation" does not wish away the structure of poverty or erase fundamental institutional limitations.

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In the previous issue of *Grassroots Development*, the Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman took a look at the small number of IAF projects directed at enriching cultural forms and expressions among the poor. His six-country assignment took him to Bogotá, Colombia and the rehabilitation program called Bosconia-La Florida. Known as "Father Javier's program" to some, in recognition of the Salesian priest who is its founding director and guiding force, Bosconia-La Florida is fighting an innovative campaign to enable Bogotá's *gamines* (street children) to become productive members of Colombian society.

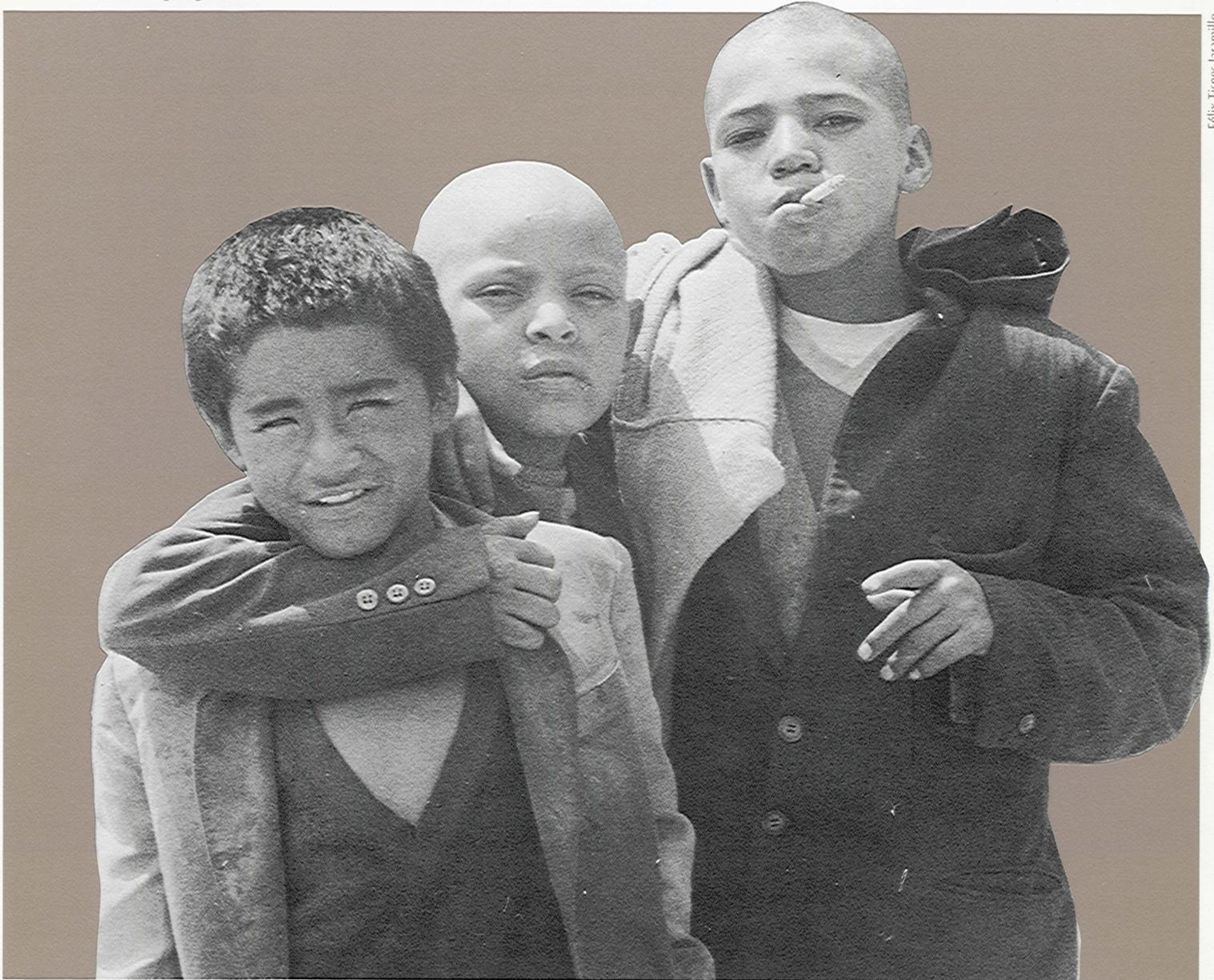
Over the past dozen years, Javier de Nicoló's efforts have evolved into four successive and complementary stages, each designed to serve a specific purpose—from providing meals and medical attention to thousands of younger boys to housing and educating some 500 high school students. A final stage is now being planned that will emphasize technical

training and will be completely self-supporting. Moving from principles of self-motivation to self-discipline to community responsibility to financial independence, the guiding belief throughout has been Father de Nicoló's view that "to be effective in taking care of the child, you must respect his freedom."

Bosconia-La Florida, of course, does not rescue most of Bogotá's *gamines*, many of whom never escape the harsh street life. Others spend their lives going in and out of the revolving door between crime and jail. Some die by drugs or are killed.

On a visit in December 1984 to the Bogotá program, Michael Shifter, a sociologist with IAF's office of research and evaluation, spent several days with two rare individuals—former *gamines* from different generations—who managed to beat the odds.

Gamines standing outside El Patio, first stage of "Father Javier's program."



Félix Tisnes Jaramillo

MAJITO AND CARLOS ALBERTO: THE GAMIN LEGACY

MICHAEL SHIFTER

Scarcely a gamin in Bogotá, it seems, doesn't know Majito. As Bosconia-La Florida's blue van makes its nightly rounds from barrio to barrio, the street children become animated—Majito is inside. We pass a grassy area and spot a large sheet of plastic. To me, it appears lifeless; Majito's instincts tell him otherwise. After a quick glance, he steps out of the van and strides confidently forward. Eight young boys—ranging in age from 7 to 12—spring to their feet and throw off the cover, shouting exuberantly, "Majito! Majito!"

In a world marked by terror, where survival is an overriding impulse, Majito has for 25 years offered a measure of security, however fleeting, to Bogotá's gamines. A bearded man, around 50, he knows the gamin subculture as well as anyone. "I was one myself in the early 1950s," he explains, "but then we were known as *muchachos de la calle* (boys of the street). The term *gamin* didn't become fashionable until the late 1950s, the early 1960s."

Majito is now the director of El Patio, first stage of the Bosconia-La Florida program, a place where the gamines can bathe, receive medical attention, and get something to eat. He joined the program at its inception in 1973, when Cinerama (another organization that fed the gamines and gave them temporary lodging) folded. "Cinerama," he says, "had no sequence, no philosophy behind it. There were no stages: all we had to offer was some food and perhaps a brief stay. Bosconia-La Florida has a progression, there's something to aim for. Nothing else is like it, either in the old days or now. It is special."

In his work with Cinerama some 15 years ago, Majito met Carlos and Eduardo when both were gamines. Carlos is now a charismatic 22-year-old who is the *alcalde* (mayor) of the program's last stage, La Florida; Eduardo is a 26-year-old graduate of La Florida who has studied in the Soviet Union and now works as an *educador* in El Patio. Tonight both have joined Majito in the van for Operación Amistad (Operation Friendship). The three will approach scores of *galladas* (bands of gamines) during the next few hours, talking to the boys, asking them how they've been, suggesting they drop by El Patio during the day. Majito, Carlos, and Eduardo are all strangers to the hard sell—their approach is easygoing, almost nonchalant, devoid of moralizing.

The gamines are excited as they board the van. They know they will be treated to a cup of coffee, a bowl of soup, some bread at one of the outdoor food stands that dot the city. When we stop, the boys, far from foolish, ask the man at the window for chicken and hamburgers; but Majito has a limited budget, and there are many hungry mouths to feed. Still, the gamines wait patiently in line, thanking Majito as they receive their food.

Carlos and Eduardo look up to Majito and strive to follow his example. They play with the gamines, roughhousing with them, chasing them around. When Carlos asks a 10-year-old for his knife, the boy hands it over. Carlos inspects it briefly, then returns it. Almost half of the boys carry containers of glue, often partially concealed in the sleeves of their oversized coats. Carlos and Eduardo show an interest in the boys' containers,

but they do not confiscate them.

As soon as all the gamines have been taken care of, Majito brings them back to the doorways, street corners, and grassy areas where he found them. Inside the van on the return trip, the smell of glue hangs in the air. After the group of 15 boys gets out, Carlos turns to me and asks, "How do you like the sweet fragrance of gamin life?"

Many of the gamines we picked up, according to Majito, have already been to the first stage of Bosconia-La Florida. How many will make it to the community where Carlos is now *alcalde*? With most of the boys, Majito claims, "you can look into their eyes and tell who will go through the program and who will end up back on the streets or in jail. You're a sociologist, you say? You must be able to tell, can't you?"

I make a few wild guesses, but my graduate training and fieldwork are no match for his 25 years of experience with Bogotá's gamines. Majito can predict even their physical movements and facial expressions.

In southern Bogotá at 1 a.m., we spot a young boy walking alone. Majito tells me the boy is a *pregamin* who has just left his home, probably for the first or second or third time. The boy is terrified, and Majito predicts, with astonishing precision, how many steps he will take, which way he will turn and look. It is almost as if Majito has him programmed. Overcome with fear, the boy eventually approaches the van; Majito and Carlos have told him that we are "friends of the boys of the street" and have coaxed him to get in. Trembling, he climbs aboard and somehow manages to tell us his fa-



Majito, director of this facility, and gamines outside of El Patio.

ther has beaten him. The boy has strayed far from home, so Majito promises him lodging for the night. The next day the boy will be returned to his parents.

Carlos is visibly moved. Seeing this frightened child evokes memories of his own initiation into Bogotá's street life—that first week without sleep, the constant fears for his life. Victim of many robberies, Carlos was forced to join a gallada for his own protection. This pattern—this process of becoming a gamín—has long been the same.

Obviously street-smart, Majito is also highly analytic about the world he knows so well. Describing changes in Bogotá's street culture over the past 25 years, he focuses on the progressive strength and intensity of the dominant *vicios* (vices). When he was a gamín, he remarks, drugs were unknown; now *bazuka* (a mixture of cocaine paste, gasoline, and a variety of acids) is a staple. For former gamines like Carlos and Eduardo—now in their 20s—marijuana was the most widely used drug; *bazuka* today is more prevalent still.

Majito and Carlos tell me that the widespread use of *bazuka* has dramatically transformed Bogotá's street scene. Highly toxic, it has inflicted significant physiological damage on many gamines. "For them," Majito laments, "we have no solution." Further, the high cost of *bazuka* relative to marijuana—and the natural impulse to consume it in ever-increasing quantities—has led the gamines into more serious, organized crime. Carlos notes that petty larcenies such as watch- and hubcap-snatching are on the decline in Bogotá; instead, victims are well targeted, and the crimes

are more vicious and better planned. The period of being a gamín (as commonly conceived) is thus becoming shorter and shorter as many of the boys quickly become full-fledged, sophisticated criminals.

Majito ponders a host of subjects bearing on Bogotá's street life, and he has a penchant for typologies. He talks with authority about the three discrete stages of *gaminismo*—the *pregamín*, the gamín of the barrio, and the full gamín who gravitates to the *centro* (center of Bogotá). He knows where the children go and how they are distributed throughout the city. He can discuss the gamines of the North, the South, and the *centro* according to the intensity and prevalence of their drug use and the aggressiveness of their behavior. He notes that fewer and fewer girls are seen on Bogotá's streets, a trend he attributes to their abrupt initiation into prostitution.

Perhaps one of the most salient divisions in Bogotá's street life exists between the *largos* (the older boys) and the *chinchés* (the younger boys). Each tends to go its separate way, though it is not uncommon for the *largos* to prey on the *chinchés*. The *chinchés* thus must seek protection and are apt to locate in an area patrolled by the police since police treatment—by no means benign—generally seems preferable to the more predictable brutality of the *largos*. In contrast, the *largos* deliberately assemble in places far removed from where the police are stationed. Their long criminal records and dangerous behavior make them prime police targets.

The police are known to harass street children and throw them in jail. Yet they

can provide an evening's shelter and, for the *chinchés* particularly, protection against the city's perils. This evening of Operación Amistad is marked by several police attempts to round up the gamines. The police back off, however, when Majito, Carlos, and Eduardo explain they are working for "the program of Father Javier."

By the time we decide to call it a night, we have visited numerous galladas in various parts of Bogotá. The van has carried roughly 70 or 80 gamines, and Majito has helped nourish them all with food and with his friendship. At 3 a.m., Carlos, Eduardo, and I return Majito to his home, to his wife and three daughters.

* * *

As we continue on our way, I recall the previous morning. Carlos, who has "custody" of me for the day, is telling me about his own childhood, an all-too-familiar one among the gamines: a family life of extreme poverty, alcoholism, relentless beatings, and abandonment that was followed by a street life of drugs, crime, and violence. Despite Majito's comforting street visits—and even after joining Javier's program at the age of 11—Carlos kept returning to drugs and thievery. As we retrace the steps of his extraordinary life—from the 12th Street doorways in which he slept to the progressive phases of Bosconia-La Florida—Carlos is reflective, never bitter or sorry.

As we walk along, I ask him, "Do you think you'll ever see your father again?" "I think I will," Carlos replies, "though I'm not sure when."

BOSCONIA



Félix Tiscas Jaramillo

Courtyard of El Patio where gamines can get something to eat. Inside are facilities for bathing and medical care.

Carlos Alberto Palacios, *alcalde* of La Florida.

"What will you say to him?"

Carlos responds without hesitation: "I'm going to help him out. I'll offer everything I have. It wasn't his fault that he beat me. He couldn't read or write and he had a miserable job. I'll tell him I now understand why he did what he did."

When we arrive at El Patio, Eduardo is telling some 50 or 60 young boys what Bosconia-La Florida is all about. He is articulate, his delivery impassioned yet controlled. Though the boys are attentive, few will be sufficiently motivated to go on to the next phase—Liberia and Camarín, places where they stay for 30 days and agree to give up drugs and to participate in a range of activities throughout the city. Most of the gamines will go back to the streets after washing and eating. Life is too painful for them to give up drugs entirely.

Carlos guides me through these facilities, as well as the next phases of Bosconia—Chibchalá, a manual-arts workshop, and Arcadia, the program's school. We then briefly visit and have lunch at La 78, a program for girls, most of whom also have brothers at Bosconia-La Florida. Indeed, the creation of La 78 was a response to the boys' concern about the strong pull of prostitution on their sisters.

At each place, I look at the classrooms, the workshops, the dining rooms. In the dormitories the beds are lined up, sometimes 40 or 50 in a room, each one tidy and proper, everything in its place. The girls are a bit timid, but the boys are generally more gregarious, eager to welcome a stranger. They are deeply proud of their work, their paintings, their vari-

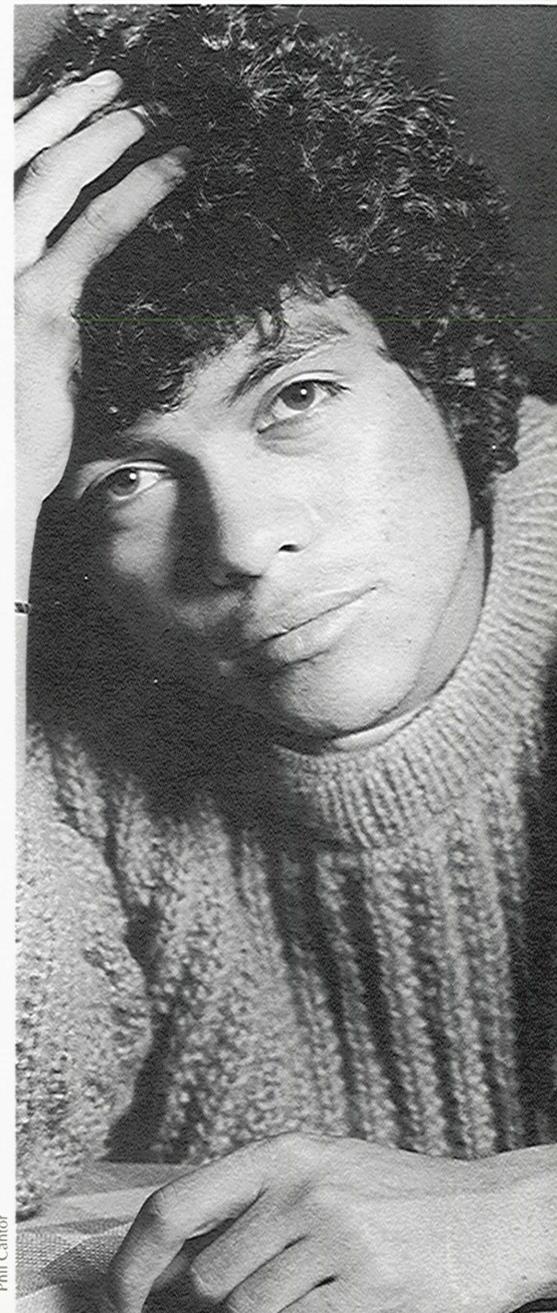
ous small projects.

Carlos shows me around La Industria, where he will soon complete his studies for a high school degree. There are no dormitories here, only classrooms and workshops for carpentry, mechanical repair, and the like. The equipment is advanced, and the boys are thoroughly immersed in their work. They greet us warmly, but are highly disciplined and quickly return to their tasks. In an office there, Carlos shows me his diploma that has just been printed, which he will soon receive; pride is written all over his face as he holds it tightly in his hands.

Throughout Bosconia-La Florida, Carlos is well known, both to children and staff. He moves about briskly and gracefully, exhibiting concern for others and an easy wit. He makes his presence felt from Operación Amistad to La Industria, but it is at La Florida that he is most plainly in charge.

For the past year, Carlos has been the mayor of this self-governing community of 500 former gamines. Many of the boys of La Florida address him as "alcalde" and treat him with deference. As Carlos and I pass through the modern complex—its plant, at least, comparable to that of a small liberal arts college in the U.S.—many of the boys rush up to ask him a favor, to ask advice about a medical or family problem, to complain about some decision or policy. The concerns of La Florida's residents are nearly inexhaustible, and Carlos addresses them all with efficiency and self-assurance.

Carlos governs with a firm hand. He regularly applies sanctions for such transgressions as stealing and drug use. One boy known for his talent as an artist



Phil Cantor

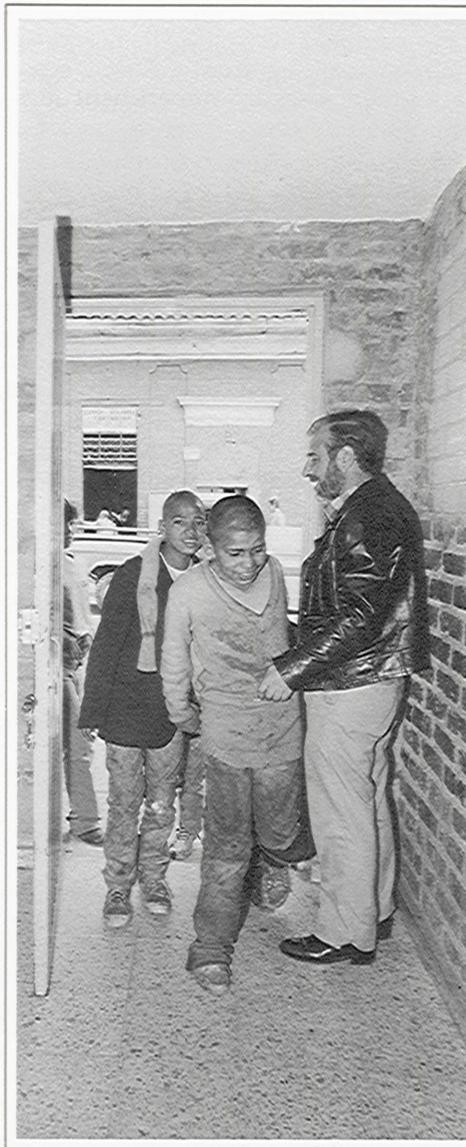


was caught smoking marijuana; Carlos suspended him from the community. Several boys mention that Carlos is perhaps too tough and has gotten carried away. Yet he is widely liked and respected, despite the severity of his penalties. The boys may take issue with a particular decision he has made, but their alcalde's authority is unquestioned.

The most common problem for the boys at La Florida is a return to drugs. This is most likely to occur during holiday breaks, Carlos observes, when the boys leave the community and return to their families and the streets. Many have brothers and sisters in jail, mothers working as prostitutes, fathers who are alcoholics and hardened criminals. The temptation to call it quits and revert to old, familiar ways is great.

Carlos believes that having no family will help him get ahead in life. He claims he is "more privileged than the rest," that he can focus on his own development without being dragged down by hopeless family circumstances or lured astray by Bogotá's street culture.

La Florida bears all the features of a showcase, which seems entirely fitting for such accomplished showmen as its residents. Carlos is more keenly aware of this than most—before becoming alcalde he headed La Florida's public relations office. The boys have spoken with reporters from the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and *Chicago Tribune*, not to mention scores of distinguished visitors from Europe and Latin America. Moreover, La Florida is a regular feature of Colombian newspapers and television.



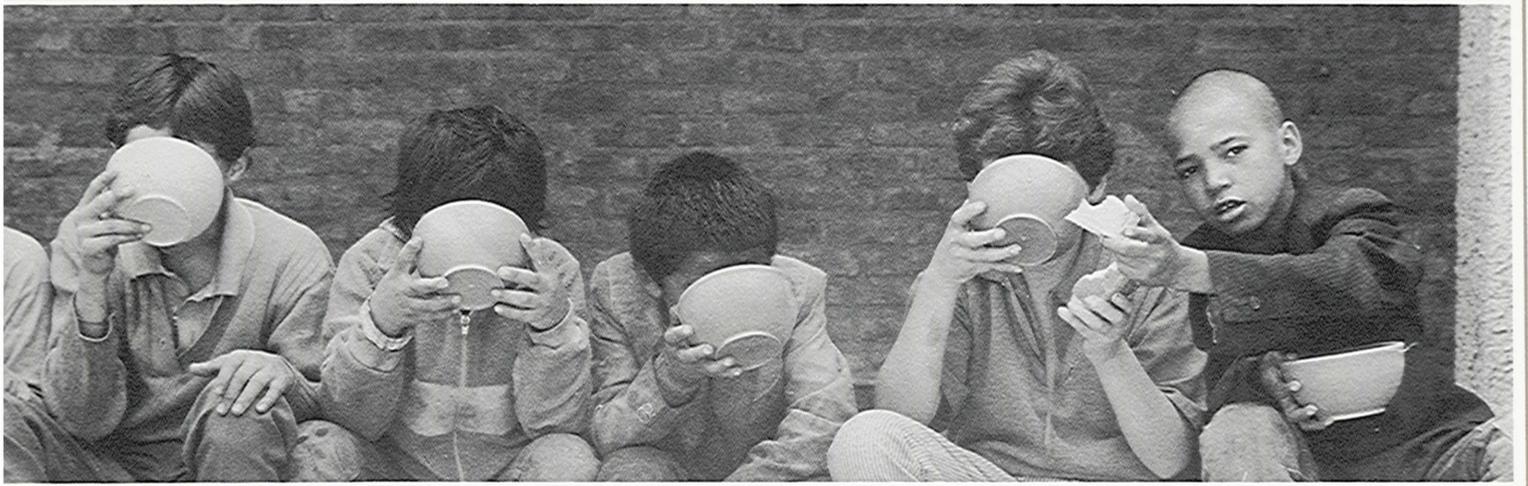
Majito and gamines at street entrance of El Patio.

Félix Tisnes Jaramillo

Could these boys have ever looked like the gamines I saw on the streets during Operación Amistad? They are, by and large, polished, quick, disciplined. They thrive on entertaining visitors and can fire questions on every imaginable subject—from the latest fashions in New York to the famine in Ethiopia. I taught an English class at La Florida one morning, and the boys—unlike Latin Americans to whom I've taught English in the United States—soaked up information on everything under the sun and wanted more.

While it may seem perplexing that these boys were steeped in Bogotá's seamy street culture not so long ago, perhaps their present behavior should not seem so surprising. They ought to be accustomed to adhering to a strict code of behavior, exercising and relying on their wits, pursuing a goal with dogged determination, working with others, and demonstrating a profound understanding of liberation and freedom. Is there, perhaps, a central thread linking the agreeable community of La Florida to the harsh world I saw during Operación Amistad? Maybe the key to the program is *precisely* its ability to cultivate and redirect the qualities endemic to gamín subculture.

All of the boys I meet at La Florida are impressive in some way; Carlos is exceptional. Perhaps this is only because I spend enough time with him, get to know him better than the others. When we visit the music room at La Florida, Carlos plays Beethoven and Mozart on the piano, modern jazz on the saxophone, Andean folk music on the guitar. His versatility seems inexhaustible. He



Gamines eating bread and hot soup outside El Patio.

has a keen eye for art, a talent for dance and athletics. He has given talks at two highly respected Colombian universities—Javariana and Los Andes—on the philosophical underpinnings of Bosconia-La Florida. To such subjects as North American culture, Latin American literature, and the mores of Colombia's upper-class youth, he brings irony and shrewd insight.

Carlos is an avid reader with a special interest in literature and political philosophy. He comes close to being the most widely read 22-year-old I've ever met, including the many students I encountered during my four years of teaching at Harvard. It is not that he invokes the names of Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Cervantes, Machiavelli, Nietzsche, García Marquez, Fuentes, and Vargas Llosa—it is that he discusses their works with such sophistication and zeal. His notebook is packed with reflections, original poetry, and quotations, especially from Nietzsche and Machiavelli. These plainly inspire his life and guide his personal philosophy. The alcalde of La Florida is engaged in what the American sociologist C. Wright Mills called "intellectual craftsmanship."

I again notice these qualities while Carlos and I have a beer together at Unicentro, a North American-style mall in northern Bogotá. I ask him how long Unicentro has been open. (I knew it wasn't here when I lived in Bogotá eight years ago.) "I think about four or five years," he replies. Carlos pauses for a moment, then begins to grin. "I wish this place had been here when I was a gamín," he says. "Just think of all the possibilities for a good thief . . . look at all

those rich people!"

We continue to chat, glancing at the shoppers rushing from store to store. Carlos then poses an "impertinent question," the one that hits at the heart of what I am doing in Colombia. "You know," he remarks, "I bet that as a sociologist you could study *these* people, the ones who spend all their time in this mall. I think it would be important to say something about *their* lives." He makes his point with great effect: my assignment is another instance of the sociologist looking at the poor, analyzing the "problem," and trying to figure out some "solution." Open your eyes, he is suggesting: there are problems and solutions at *both* ends of Colombia's socioeconomic spectrum.

The conversation moves to other subjects and then becomes somewhat personal. Carlos tells me that the parents of his girlfriend—a woman from a wealthy background who shops at Unicentro—strongly disapprove of her relationship with him because of his past. "They keep telling her that one day all of the terrible qualities I had as a gamín will surface, and I'll be stealing and taking drugs once again," he says with a laugh. "They keep telling her she should find a guy with a diploma in hand. So I told her that to make her parents happy I would get a diploma that says: 'I hereby certify that Carlos Alberto Palacios is a GAMIN.'"

I ask Carlos how he plans to handle his background as a gamín when he comes to the United States next month on a full scholarship, a move that coincides with the end of his second and final, six-month term as alcalde of La

Florida. "I'll tell them I'm a gamín and proud of it," he responds. "After all, most Americans probably won't know what a gamín is. They might think it refers to some kind of royalty."

They just might be right.

MICHAEL SHIFTER is evaluation officer in the Office of Research and Evaluation at the Foundation.

Research Report

Lending a Hand to Caribbean Entrepreneurs

—Jan R. Van Orman and Julie Sutphen

Small businesses play a large part in the national economies of the Caribbean region, accounting for one-third of all urban employment in some countries. These ventures usually have one or two owner-operators, few assets, and often no fixed place of operation. They are usually unlicensed, untaxed, and unregulated. Their owners, generally un-schooled, must compete with established enterprises, so business failures are common.

This tradition of self-employment has produced abundant street vendors, furniture makers, food processors, and craftsmen. These small enterprises provide the poor with work, income, and an alternative to high-priced commercial goods. Called the "informal" sector by economists, these businesses are attractive to government and entrepreneur alike because they employ unskilled workers under conditions that are more personal, labor intensive, and flexible than those in shops and industry, yet they require little capital or technical training. As the economies of Caribbean nations have faltered over the past few years, small business has remained one of the few avenues open to the urban poor for earning a living, acquiring skills, and participating in the economy.

The proliferation of small businesses has created a new clientele for government and service agencies. It has encouraged the creation of small business associations, management training organizations, and national development foundations. In addition, small businesses have become appealing to foreign assistance programs (including the Inter-American Foundation, which has awarded some \$3 million to programs that assist these enterprises in the Caribbean).

Recently, the IAF was faced with a request from a Caribbean agency to fund the second round of a small business training program. In considering that request, IAF asked several broader questions. How is the small business sector evolving in the Caribbean? Are local and regional support organizations working with entrepreneurs and with each other?

What kind of framework should be used to analyze how future grant monies should be spent on small business development?

IAF commissioned Michael White—a Dominican economist and the former head of a major small business assistance agency in the Caribbean—to investigate. He traveled to six countries and interviewed more than 60 organizations and individuals during the 60-day project. Hampered by the lack of hard information on the performance of Caribbean small businesses—and by their failure to keep records on other aspects of their activities—White was nonetheless able to show how small business assistance organizations grapple with similar issues.

His study summarizes how loans and business counseling—the two principal services offered to small businesses—are delivered. White also uncovered some misapprehensions. While access to credit is often considered to be the most critical small business need, long-term success is more likely to hinge on access to training in critical skills. In fact, White cautions that the commonly used definitions for "success" and "failure" often distort both our understanding of what *really* happens to entrepreneurs in the Caribbean and our ability to learn which interventions would be most beneficial. He notes that a business itself may fail, but its entrepreneur frequently succeeds. One business activity ends, but another picks up where the first left off, with the individual entrepreneur gaining experience and resources that can be applied to the new venture.

White recommends ways to increase the flow of private institutional investment funds to the high-risk small business sector. For instance, commercial credit could be mixed with development assistance. He also points out that small businesses would profit from reform of neglectful or adverse national policies. Moreover, the organizations White interviewed generally agree that *national* governments and economic institutions, not overseas agencies, must bear the risks of small business development.

For their part, international agencies

have shown considerable interest in supporting small-scale entrepreneurial activity, but they have formed no consensus on what constitutes a small business, what criteria should be used to evaluate success and failure, and how best to coordinate resources for rational and effective assistance to these enterprises.

Because many local organizations believe that small businesses with direct overseas funding have a high failure rate, White recommends using third parties to monitor and support fledgling enterprises. The region, he says, should articulate its own needs and plans for the development of this sector. To this end, White urges the formation of a regional institute of small business development that would serve as a central planning, coordinating, and communications network to assist organizations already in place and guide international agencies in the funding of deserving entrepreneurs.

White, Michael G. *Small Business in the Caribbean, A Study of Programs Supporting Small Business Development and Entrepreneurship*. Inter-American Foundation, March 1984.

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