



# Compas Magazine

for endogenous development



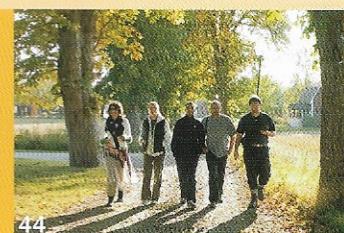
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July 2006

Learning from within



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#### MORE SUBSCRIPTIONS

The six-monthly Compas Magazine is free of charge for those individuals or organisations interested in endogenous development. If you know others who would like to receive the Compas Magazine please ask them to send their name and complete address to [compas@etcnl.nl](mailto:compas@etcnl.nl)



#### What is endogenous development?

Endogenous development can be defined as 'development from within' or 'development based mainly (though not exclusively) on local strategies, knowledge, institutions and resources'. It is a continuous process of 'healing', adaptation and innovation, starting from within the local community. A key criterion for endogenous development is that it is controlled by local actors. It aims at the strengthening of local resources for the benefit of local populations, and enhancing the ability to integrate selected elements from outside into local practices. Endogenous development is not a uniform or a linear process. It has many expressions and is based on different dynamics, depending on the starting position and characteristics of the local community or ethnic group. These characteristics include the type and availability of local resources, their values and ways of knowing, the internal dynamics, as well as the interactions with the 'outside world' or the wider society. Supporting endogenous development is therefore quite a complicated process, which goes much further than conventional development strategies of enhancing certain production technologies, supplying credit, or modifying marketing systems. Enhancing the endogenous development process involves the material, social, as well as spiritual dimensions of the people in the area.



Gowtham Shankar of Compas partner IDEA celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Compas programme, February 2006, Araku, Andhra Pradesh, India.

*Photo front page: Boys play melodies to accompany the sowing of maize near the educational institute of Chachapoyas (see page 23).*

# Welcome...

The partners within the Compas network are engaged in a continuous process of action-research, with important learning and training components. Learning stands at the heart of endogenous development. Learning is a cultural process; it can take the form of formal education (classroom teaching), non-formal education (e.g. evening schools, the shepherd schools of Ghana or various other forms of organised pedagogy) as well as a wide variety of informal learning situations (e.g. at home, from family members, learning by doing, observation and unconscious learning). Over the past ten years, important lessons related to learning have emerged within the Compas network, which have been documented, systematised and published in this magazine as well as in other publications.

During 2005 and 2006 the Compas network in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe has organised regional workshops on worldviews and sciences, in a systematic effort to assess the ways of knowing and learning in each of the continents. During 2005, LENDEV (Learning for Endogenous Development) workshops were organised, in which the various ways of 'Learning from within' were analysed and documented. Later in 2006, we will publish the LENDEV Resource Guide, which describes in more operational terms how the work of field staff in supporting endogenous development can be enhanced (see back page).

This issue, Compas Magazine 10, presents experiences of learning and education within endogenous development, both from within the Compas network as well as from like-minded organisations. The articles present examples and practical experiences of how local ways of learning can be strengthened, and where possible and relevant, be complemented by conventional ways of learning. We hope the examples may inspire you to take them into account in your own situation. It is quite possible that you will need to re-invent the methodologies presented, in order to find your own appropriate ways to learn and work towards endogenous development.

The editors

## How do you see the future of the Compas Magazine?

Compas Magazine 11 will mark the end of this programme phase (2003-2006). During this phase, Compas partners have developed operational methodologies for supporting endogenous development, with financial support from a number of sources including the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The regional Compas networks have developed proposals for the period beyond 2006. Interestingly, each phase builds on the insights gained in the previous phase. 1996-1998: documentation of case studies in a few countries; 1999-2003: deepening understanding by engaging in practical fieldwork on endogenous development; 2003-2006: developing operational methods for supporting endogenous development and engaging universities; 2007-beyond: mainstreaming the approach of endogenous development through national multi-stakeholder platforms, policy dialogue, education and regional networking. From 2007, the Compas Magazine will also report on the mainstreaming experiences in addition to the more familiar topics.

We are interested to know how you see the future of the Compas Magazine, and we therefore invite you to fill in the Reader's Survey and send it back to Compas.

Compas partners will meet in September 2006 in Poland to 'peer review' their learning experiences and document the findings. From 3-5 October 2006 an international conference 'Endogenous Development and Biocultural Diversity - The interplay of worldviews, globalisation and locality' will take place in Geneva. It is being organised by Compas and the University of Berne together with a number of international organisations. On the website [www.bioculturaldiversity.net](http://www.bioculturaldiversity.net) you can find more information on the programme and organisers. Workshops will address nine different themes, and if you are interested in contributing a paper related to one of the themes, please let us know: [haverkort@etcnl.nl](mailto:haverkort@etcnl.nl) and [compas@etcnl.nl](mailto:compas@etcnl.nl).

Compas Magazine 11 will summarise the main lessons from the Poland Compas partner meeting and the Geneva International Conference. We look forward to receiving your views on the Compas Magazine!

[www.compasnet.org](http://www.compasnet.org)



## Compas Magazine

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Compas (Comparing and Supporting Endogenous Development) is an international network, designed to understand the diversity of rural peoples' knowledge, encourage local experimentation within farmers' worldviews, and enhance inter-cultural dialogues on farmers' knowledge and indigenous learning. The Compas Magazine hopes to stimulate development agencies and individuals to take indigenous knowledge seriously and support endogenous development. The magazine aims to be a forum for exchange on testing field methods, on-farm research and participatory approaches, based on farmers' own concepts, indigenous institutions and cosmovision. Compas presently works with 26 partner organisations in 12 countries and is funded by DGIS, the Netherlands.

### SUBSCRIPTION

The six-monthly Compas Magazine is free of charge for those individuals and organisations interested in the role of culture, indigenous knowledge and cosmovision in agriculture and rural development. Active participation in the form of articles that document experiences, reactions to publications, opinions, theoretical reflections and suggestions for future initiatives are welcomed.

A Spanish version of the Compas Magazine can be ordered from AGRUCO, Casilla 3392, Cochabamba, Bolivia, E-mail: [agrucog@agrucog.org](mailto:agrucog@agrucog.org)

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The Compas website is available in English and Spanish for reading about the Compas partner organisations, their field activities, Compas publications, regional and international events, as well as articles of Compas Magazine and books.

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# Learning from within

## Editorial

example, everything is relation. Thus, learning is often done in relationship to and through dialogues with the surrounding world, especially with *Pacha Mama*, or Mother Earth. In traditional sub-Saharan Africa, the worldview includes communication with the ancestors, the living and the not yet born. Learning implies being in tune with the teachings of these entities, and reading the signals of the spiritual world

expressed in nature.

In the classical Vedic notion in India, reality is perceived as a continuum of matter, mind and consciousness. Hence, in this worldview learning takes place through sensorial perception and intuition, as well as teaching of *gurus*, or wise persons. In the conventional Western worldview, the world is perceived as consisting of separate identities, such as humans, trees, animals, with characteristics that are inherently part of their being. Thus, one has to study the characteristics of each separate identity, which only subsequently have a relation, in order to understand the whole.

## Inspiration and identity

In the process of endogenous development, which builds on local reality and worldviews, learning is more than a physical and mental exercise of knowledge acquisition. Endogenous development involves activities based on local resources and potential. This often requires moving away from the more conventional concept of development, which is based on the notion that for true development to take place, innovations need to 'come from outside'. The learning process in endogenous development, therefore, requires reassurance of the potential of own initiative and ideas, both at the level of local people and at the level of the organisations that aim to support them.

This kind of learning can take place when the connection is made with our identity, with the stage in our life-cycle or of our community, and with the needs we feel and questions we ask ourselves. A connection with inspiration and motivation on a personal level is established, which initiates and sustains the learning process. Thus, a core element of this kind of learning is 'getting in touch with the essence of existence', which can be called your 'identity', or your 'deeper self'.

## Informal education

At very young age children in different cultures learn from life itself, the upbringing we receive at home or from our family. It includes learning by doing and by observation, as well as unconscious learning. Pardo and Achahui Quenti (p.23), for example, describes how in rural Andean communities in Peru the children learn from their parents, grandparents, older brothers, uncles and other people from the community. In this way elements of the worldview, such as respect for *Pacha Mama*, are gradually introduced or experienced.

Nketsia (p.10) explains how name giving, social parentage, dance, greetings, healing, song, tales and festivals were all part of the education he received as a child in a community in southern Ghana. This kind of learning, in which it is assumed that the learner is intrinsically a part of a greater whole, is also called a 'non-dualist notion of learning' (Box 1). Later on in life, being in touch with the wider sources of learning often remains

### Box 1 Non-dualist and dualist learning perspectives

A fundamental distinction can be made between the more conventional or dualist notion of learning, dominant in societies oriented towards western culture, and the more holistic or non-dualist ways of learning, dominant in societies oriented towards more indigenous cultures.

The *non-dualist notion of learning*, often found in traditional worldviews, assumes that the learner is intrinsically a part of a greater whole. Learning thus results from communication or communion with other living creatures and nature. It is based on the use of senses, but also includes elements of learning from within, such as 'in-tuition', which literally means 'teaching from inside'. Thus, it may seek connection to supra-natural sources of knowing. In many of these traditional approaches and also in holistic modern science, the question of the 'why' is more important than the 'how': why does a certain situation occur? Why do we perceive it as a problem? In this way moral and ethical dimensions become part of the learning process.

In the *conventional or dualist notion of learning*, a deliberate separation is made between the learner and its environment. This notion of learning, which is often included in the formal schooling system, sees the learner (subject) as separated from its environment (object). One makes a distinction between 'me' and 'the other', between humankind and nature, between mind and matter, between object and subject. New knowledge is only accepted as true and valuable if it is the result of quantifiable and objectively verifiable perception by the senses. In conventional learning the emphasis is on the 'how' of things: how to define the problem; how to explain things in terms of cause-effect; and how to solve the problem.

In most societies, both ways of thinking and learning co-exist. They can exist separately as parallel systems or they can merge. They can complement, but can also contradict each other. As the values and criteria for decision making in the two ways of learning may be different, the co-existence of the two ways of learning can lead to confusion and tension.

a central element in informal indigenous education, although different forms are seen within different cultures. In sub-Saharan Africa, answers to complicated questions are sought in the communication between the living, the ancestors and the yet-unborn (Nketsia, p.10; Guri and Millar, p.39). In Maya indigenous learning, the deeper self is sought by consulting the Maya calendar, the elders, and in the quest to find the specific role of each person (Gómez Gómez, p.12).

### Formal education

When children begin their formal, classroom type schooling, they enter a different world. Many parents make a great effort so that their children can learn to read and write and use computers, in order to prepare themselves for the challenges they are facing. This schooling is an important asset for finding ways to live within a continuously changing society, but at the same time there is also another side to the coin of formal education.

Several authors in this issue (Pardo and Achahui Quenti, p.23; Burford and Ngila p.17; Vargas and Delgado p.20) show the dominance of dualism in formal education. In most cases the educational methods are top-down and do not create skills and attitudes that allow children to support endogenous development in their lives. Moreover, the mathematics, physics, economics and religion taught are often based on the Western value system. The textbooks highlight an urban or modern lifestyle, with models that devalue the principles on which peasant or traditional knowledge is based. Formal education is based on the conventional or dualist notion of learning, in which a deliberate separation between the learner and his or her environment is made.

Most school-related education is not given in the local language, and local knowledge, values and practices are not often study subjects. The former Ghanaian prime minister, Kofi Abrefa Busia, concluded: '*Over the years, as I went through college and university, I felt increasingly that the education I received taught me more and more about Europe and less and less about my own society*' (Nketsia, p.10).

### Identity crisis

Formal classroom type schooling mostly alienates children and students from their indigenous knowledge, values and skills, from their own culture. This can have serious effects on their identity development, both at personal level and for society as a whole. Moreover,



*A learning, sharing and assessing session: a traditional form of evaluation, in which one community evaluates another community about development progress (southern Ghana).*

formal education without including the indigenous reality inculcates a notion that, for true development to take place, things need to 'come from outside'. This can be observed both in development workers as well as in rural and urban people. This concept of education, in combination with the loss of traditional knowledge and cultural identity, may well constitute the major obstacle for sustained development actions, which build on local strengths, resources, values and culture.

Several authors in this issue (Burford and Ngila p.15, Pardo and Achahui Quenti p.23, Gómez Gómez p.12) present examples of the problems that arise as a result of the missing links in formal education and conventional development programmes: biological and cultural diversity are affected, (potential) local resources under-utilised, and livelihoods threatened. Moreover, they result in loss of practical skills that people require to make a living in their own environment, as well as a generation gap and increased rural-urban migration.

### Searching for complementarity

A second lesson learned in the Compas network is that for enhancing endogenous development, we need to find ways in which the traditional or local ways of learning can be strengthened and - where possible and relevant - be complemented by outside practices and conventional ways of learning (Box 2). Endogenous development can possibly bridge the gap between indigenous identity and forms of learning and con-

ventional ones, by consciously taking local identity and potential as the starting point. This process requires intra- and inter-cultural communication (Vargas and Delgado, p.20).

This is by no means a new idea: although they do not use the term, endogenous educational practices and theories have been developed throughout the years. Perhaps the most influential one was the 'pedagogy of the oppressed' of the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paolo Freire. Freire emphasised the need for a reversal from regarding the student as a 'passive trainee' to seeing the student as an 'active learner'. He also insisted on the need for continuous exchange between action and reflection within the learning process. Escobar (p.34) calls for a similar approach when he describes the training of fieldworkers for endogenous development in Agruco, Bolivia.

More recently, the Earth Charter Initiative, which includes many world leaders as well as organisations promoting ecological sustainability, called for an education based on eco-pedagogy or earth-pedagogy. This implies re-directing formal curricula to incorporate values and principles of the culture of peace and sustainability. This pedagogy includes peoples' culture, respect for identity and diversity, and looks at the human as a being in continuous development, interacting with others and the world (Corcoran et al., 2005).

### Social learning

A third lesson learned in the Compas network is, that for endogenous devel-

## Box 2 Some methods for enhancing learning

In endogenous development we look for methods to strengthen the local ways of learning, and where possible and relevant, complement them with conventional ways of learning. There is continuous exchange between local learning and elements from outside (intra- and inter-cultural dialogue).

- Joint action research: bringing together local and external actors in a learning environment, which must form part of daily life in the communities.
- The methods that can be applied are likely to include participatory rural appraisal methods, such as transects, participatory mapping, Venn diagrams, role-playing and storytelling.
- Include elders and traditional leaders in the learning process.
- Participation in community activities, festivities and rituals is a means of learning and communication.
- Include a reflection on underlying notions of development: how do people look at 'development from outside' and 'development from within'? Encourage joint reflection on patterns of interaction between local people and outsiders, based on this notion of development.
- Create space for a process of personal development for all involved, which takes time. Make connection with in-tuition and 'role in life'.
- Continuous iteration between practical fieldwork, analysis and reflection.

opment learning takes place in daily life as much as during formal training sessions. Learning takes place in a 'community of practice'; it is a social process that is experienced by the different actors involved.

Escobar (p.34) indicates: "*In social learning it is no longer the aim for support organisations to analyse the 'problems' with an outsider perspective, and seek 'appropriate solutions' according to the expert knowledge. Instead, we aim to understand the positive forces and potentials existing within a society, searching for ways to stimulate these in a joint learning process between local community members and outside support organisations.*"

An important consequence of perceiving endogenous development as a social learning process is that it is clear that all actors involved collectively construct their knowledge, values and skills. All actors are as much students as they are teachers. Another consequence is the close inter-relationship between cognitive, social and emotional competencies, which is connected to the cultural background of all involved.

### Personal development

The fourth important lesson learned in the Compas network is that perceiving development as a social learning process requires a process of personal development. Though true for all involved, this is especially the case for formally trained fieldworkers. Therefore, besides including communication and practical skills, the training process to prepare fieldworkers for supporting endogenous development may also include a process of personal development.

This can imply, for example, a search into ways in which traditional beliefs can be reconciled with

Methodist-Christian faith (Mwadiwa, p. 9). Personal development is also highlighted by Escobar (p.34) who describes the importance of developing the capacity to engage in a dialogue between Western and Andean cultures in the preparation of field workers. The main objectives include permanent and autonomous learning after the training has finished, and the awakening of a permanent motivation to be committed to the situation of the local population.

### Sources of inspiration

A fifth lesson learned in the Compas network is that, though social learning is a consistent approach towards endogenous development, it is impossible to present a blueprint of methodological tools that can be applied and copied anywhere. The cases presented in this issue of the Compas Magazine present examples of methodologies that have proven effective under the local circumstances and with the population involved. We hope they inspire readers to re-invent these methodologies, and find their own appropriate ways to learn and work towards endogenous development.

This issue presents various inspirational examples of local initiatives and methodologies, which build on local knowledge systems and, where necessary and possible, are complemented by modern western practices (Box 2). Shankar (p.36) presents the process of 'reviving Gothul dormitory education' with tribal youths in southern India; Blake and Pitakthepsombut (p.27) present an example of joint research in wetland management in Thailand; Attanayake et al. (p.30) describe the joint research in Sri Lanka on snakebite healing and traditional architecture; Guri and Millar (p.39) present their work with traditional Queens in south-

ern Ghana.

This issue presents several initiatives that focus on reforming existing educational systems. Pardo and Achahui Quenti (p.23) give an inspiring example in primary education in Peruvian communities, while Burford and Ngila (p.15) describe a secondary school for Masai nomad youths in Tanzania. Hettjärn-Swaling and Joseffson (p.44) present the Swedish Folk College, in which adult learning is enhanced and international exchange stimulated. Vargas and Delgado (p.20) indicate how the state university (UMSS) in Cochabamba, Bolivia was transformed to include the concept of intra-cultural and inter-cultural education.

### Possible ways forward

Endogenous development and joint learning is not only relevant in the South. Proost and Van Weperen (p.18) show how Dutch dairy farmers that were members of farmers' learning groups joined together to make the intensive production system more sustainable. Moreover, endogenous development can also embrace the potential of modern technologies whenever appropriate and adapted to the local context. Balasubramanian (p.42) explains the use of internet kiosks in rural areas in India.

One of the major objectives of learning for endogenous development is to strengthen self-awareness in communities so that development is possible which is based on the community's own potential, and without losing the valuable assets of their own cultural identity. The examples in this issue indicate that energies generated through collective learning can trigger important technical, social and political changes. These can lead, for example to more local initiatives involving under-utilised resources, increased biological and cultural diversity, and more livelihood options in the rural areas.

In this way, it is possible to make feasible contributions to solving major problems, such as degrading resources, increasing poverty, increased ethnic and inter-generational conflicts, and migration to urban areas. Learning that is based on identity and worldview can be the foundation for sustainable development efforts.

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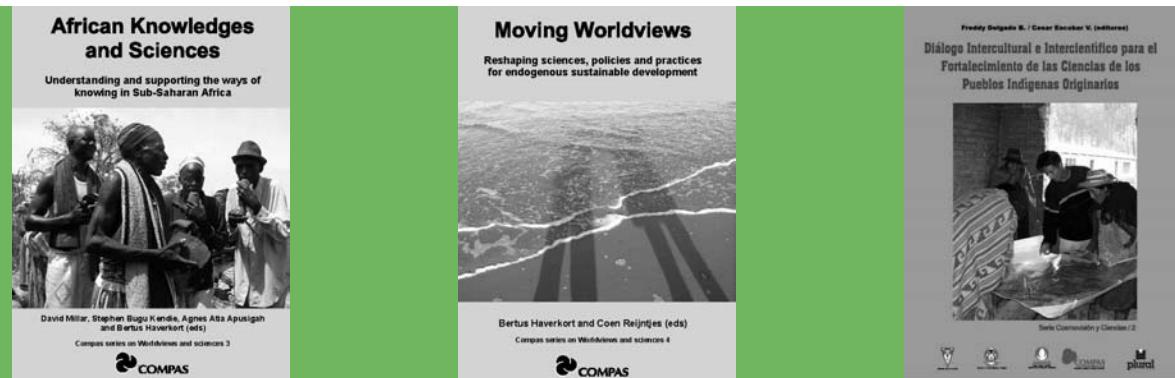


# Compas regional workshops on worldviews and sciences

## Dialogues within and between different ways of knowing

Bertus Haverkort

During 2005 and 2006 the regional units of Compas in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe have been making a systematic effort to assess the worldviews and ways of knowing in each of the continents. Regional conferences have been held in Latin America, Asia and Europe. The Indian conference will be held in July 2006. A finalising global conference will conclude the series in October 2006.



Over the past ten years, Compas has been learning through community-based studies about worldviews and the ways of learning and knowing of the people in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe, with the aim of developing approaches for endogenous development. This has been a very interesting endeavour. It has led to the conclusion that local processes of learning, experimenting, and teaching are rich, diverse and considered highly relevant by people.

### Local views

To a large degree, worldviews determine the way people make sense of their lives. They condition the way people organise themselves, relate to the natural environment, make health care decisions, produce, process and consume food. These traditional views and notions have strengths and weaknesses. They can be used as starting points for development. In this process, however, it is important to use the strengths while modifying the weaknesses. This can be done through internal reflection as well as through dialogues with outside sources.

Knowledge in different cultures is not just a random compilation of subjective facts and culturally bound skills and practices. Knowledge within a culture implies a more or less coherent set of views, perceptions and concepts and, in that sense, can be considered a science. These views, perceptions and concepts have been documented within

some cultures and have been modified through transparent processes of research, testing, publication and dialogues. Scientists, spiritual leaders, policy makers and the public, as carriers and users of the knowledge, all play their role in these interactive processes of learning, testing and dialoguing.

In other cultures the dynamics of views, perceptions and concepts are less transparent, less open or less interactive. Not all cultures have a written tradition, some knowledge is kept secret, and many cultures have been overpowered by others. As a result in many cases the indigenous views, perceptions and concepts have been marginalised or replaced.

### Series of conferences

The Compas partner organisations have concluded that many traditional worldviews and practices are weakening under the influences of dominant cultures. They observe that this creates serious problems for sustainable development and cultural diversity. They experience the economic and cultural influences from the West as particularly threatening. For Compas, this raised the need to analyse further the inter-relations between worldviews, different sciences and sustainable development. Hence, regional conferences on worldviews and sciences were organised.

So far, three regional conferences have been held. In August 2005, Compas Latin America organised the conference 'Intra- and inter-science

dialogues for strengthening the sciences of the indigenous peoples in America'. In October 2005, Compas Africa organised a conference entitled 'African Sciences'. In November 2005, the European conference 'Moving Worldviews - reshaping sciences, policies and practices for sustainable endogenous development' was organised in the Netherlands.

In July 2006, a similar conference will be held in India, while in October 2006 an international conference will be held, in which the conclusions of the four regional conferences will be brought together and where an inter-cultural and inter-scientific dialogue will take place ([www.bioculturaldiversity.net](http://www.bioculturaldiversity.net)). The proceedings of these conferences will be published in a five-volume series of Worldviews and Sciences.

### Latin American sciences

The Latin American conference was attended by indigenous leaders, university professors, students, schoolteachers and NGO staff. In total about 80 participants from different Latin American countries were present.

Participants stressed the importance of intra-cultural dialogues, especially within the communities, to revitalise indigenous cultures and knowledge. Education plays a fundamental role in this. Communities are eager to learn from and with other cultures, especially from the West, in the process of increasing productivity and reducing poverty. But economic development

should respect ecological balances, social harmony and local concepts, such as reciprocity.

Discussions focused on how to reform the public universities within Bolivia and other Latin American countries. The rector of the University of Cochabamba in Bolivia indicated the necessity to re-direct higher education to include intra- and inter-cultural dialogue. This requires new research approaches, and participation of other social actors within the university has to increase. The reform should be a social learning process leading to a transformation of the conventional university into an inter-cultural university, which offers both western and Latin American notions in education and research.

However, unless the indigenous cultures are strengthened and revitalised, and unless the indigenous languages and traditional notions of nature, social cohesion and spirituality are taught at schools, this inter-culturality cannot be achieved.

### African sciences

The conference on African sciences welcomed participants from all parts of sub-Saharan Africa, including traditional leaders, people from universities, NGOs and government bodies. The conference made an effort to construct the African way of knowing, by revisiting traditional knowledge and learning systems.

The African conference acknowledged the need to strengthen intra-cultural dialogues. Many African cultures have to a large extent lost the tradition of self-reflection and internal discussion on identity, knowledge, systems of governance, justice and the accountability of traditional leaders. Identifying the strong and weak points of our own culture and traditional knowledge, and identifying ways to improve them, are necessary steps for endogenous development.

The importance of strengthening South - South relationships was stressed, though relationships with the North should be maintained as well. A policy report was formulated in which it

### Box 1 Worldview of indigenous societies in the Americas

The traditional worldviews of the indigenous societies in the Americas are based on intricate relationships between the spiritual, social and natural domains of life. Indigenous peoples do not see the world as separate entities. Science is not a combination of individual disciplines, but integrates the natural, the social and the spiritual aspects as one inseparable whole. The traditional economy is based on reciprocity between man, nature and the divine beings. Redistribution of wealth generally takes place through a variety of mechanisms. These notions may provide an alternative to the capitalist economy that is based on individualism, exploitation and accumulation of power.

is stated that in Africa at the material level, poverty is widespread. Yet at the social and spiritual levels, Africa is strong and has something to offer to the other southern as well as northern regions. It recommends that the participating universities strengthen their own curricula with a focus on African sciences.

### Moving Worldviews in Europe

The participants at the European conference agreed that the conventional western worldview is dominated by dualist and materialist notions. It separates mind and matter, humans and nature, the creator and the created, object and subject. This dominant western worldview is at least partly responsible for the poly-crisis in the world: ecological crises, persisting poverty, social tensions and insecurity, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This worldview is being challenged from several angles. The conventional, materialist and science-based approaches to development are being questioned increasingly.

Innovative individuals, citizen groups, scientists and policy makers are presenting new ideas on how things can be done.

Conference participants made the following recommendations: (1) Look at our history and reconnect with our historic identity: study the era prior to the introduction of duality. Germanic and Celtic roots of Europe can be source of insights about the roots of Western culture and ontology (nature of being). (2) Go beyond the reductionist views of disciplinary science and include insights from quantum physics, chaos theories and transdisciplinarity. Include insights

from complementary sciences, for example in health, agriculture and education.

(3) Build on the wisdom of different social actors: NGOs, social movements, scientists, religious and spiritual leaders. Respect the possible differences and complementarities of gender perspectives. Explore complementarity between science, morality and religions. Strengthen links with artists: visual artists, painters, poets, musicians. (4) Learn from non-Western cultures: their non-dualistic worldviews and epistemologies.

Each of these domains requires different methodological tools. In order to ensure that western forms of science reach deeper levels of knowing, a number of participants proposed building a new western way of knowing (epistemology). This can be based on a combination of rationality, intuition, imagination and sensibility, and attaches value to dialogues across ideologies, sciences, religions, economies and policies.

### Summing up

The increasing awareness of the importance of culture and cultural diversity is leading to renewed interest in the potential of intra- and inter-cultural education. Innovative initiatives can be found in the South in these domains, and culturally based educational systems, systems of governance and local resource management are receiving increasing attention.

These voices from the South feel challenged to revitalise their own knowledge, to reconnect to their own culture, and to bring about a development path that is not just an imitation of the western model, but that takes advantage of the strengths of their own values, worldviews and expertise. They do not claim isolationism, but expect benefits from South-South cooperation as well as from North-South exchange.

*The English publications can be downloaded from [www.compasnet.org](http://www.compasnet.org). The Spanish publication can be ordered at [agrucu@agrucu.org](mailto:agrucu@agrucu.org)*

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### Box 2 Worldview of indigenous societies in Africa

In many parts of Africa, traditional worldviews centre around the relationship between people and their ancestors. The spiritual, human and natural worlds are all inter-linked. The cycle of life and death involves the living, the dead, the ancestors and those yet to be born. The transitions from one stage to the other coincide with a number of practices and rituals, for each of which trained and initiated traditional specialists perform certain functions. The processes involve knowledge and skills that are handed on orally, and these make up an important part of African sciences. In many African societies people have a totemic relationship with an animal or plant, entailing an obligation to protect that animal or plant. People with the same totem have a special relationship with each other that crosscuts ethnic, social or professional boundaries.





# Between Christianity and African Spirituality

How does a minister of the Methodist Christian church relate to traditional indigenous spirituality? In this article Abraham Mwadiwa from Zimbabwe describes his personal religious experiences and explains his involvement in endogenous development activities in Southern Africa. Presently he is the co-ordinator of the Southern African Endogenous Development Programme (SAEDP).

*"As a child, I grew up in a rural Zimbabwean community with a strong Methodist Christian tradition. I attended church every Sunday and my deeply religious family taught me to pray and read the scriptures. I was baptised into the Methodist community and as an adolescent committed myself to the church in the rite of confirmation. I was still a very young man when, as a youth leader, I felt called to become a preacher. Before the Methodist community accepted me, however, I had to explain why I wanted to become a preacher. This required reflection and self-searching and in the process I became more aware of why I wanted to commit myself in this way.*

## Encounter

Since then, as a Methodist minister, I have served on many local, national and international organisations, including the World Methodist Council, the Christian Council of Zimbabwe and the World Council of Churches. In 1991, my work brought me in contact with the Association of Zimbabwe Traditional Environmentalists (AZTREC). Suddenly I found myself working with chiefs, spirit mediums and villagers in Masvingo. AZTREC is an association of traditional institutions working to conserve the rich biodiversity of sacred shrines and groves.

The AZTREC approach to conservation immediately appealed to my heart and to my mind. Like an eager young child I wanted to learn more of this knowledge, with its values and concepts of humanity that were new to me. My experience with AZTREC marked a turning point in my life: the beginning of a conscious process that would lead to an understanding of the essential nature and vitality of endogenous development.

As I reflected on the impact my contact with traditional ways and thinking were having on me, I became aware that, as a preacher and professional, I had reached a cross roads. I had embarked on a new journey that

challenged my strict adherence to Christian principals. I risked losing my position in the church and being separated from the only religious environment I had ever known. But, I also could not ignore these experiences that offered me a more natural learning and living environment. I wanted to resolve the seeming antagonism between Christianity and African religions: did they repel each other or could they strengthen and enrich each other? The moment of truth had come: I am an African. I thus accepted this challenge in the full self awareness of being an African.

## African spirituality

The gift of life in the African context is celebrated in many rituals and festivals. These vary from family to family, and from clan to clan. God is the spiritual focus and this awareness determines the practice of rites and ceremonies. The spirits of the forefathers form the ancestral domain, the lower gods with whom human beings and the yet unborn interact. In a spiritual sense, human beings are the stewards of the biodiversity found within God's natural universe. As I watched spirit mediums and rainmakers perform rituals, and traditional healers bring the sick back to health, I realised that God was being recognised as the ultimate giver of life, and the source from which we derive our talent for living life to the full.

In 1997, I travelled with AZTREC to Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, South Africa and Zambia. I was introduced to many traditional leaders, and observed an overwhelming degree of commonality in religious considerations, structures and practices. There seemed to be five distinct but overlapping hierarchies bound by an intuitive, instinctive connectivity (see figure 1).

## Notable changes

In the Methodist church, notable changes continue to occur. I am glad to see the traditional practices of African drumming and other instruments integrated into acts of worship in church.

Africans are a music loving people. Christianity becomes more relevant when it encompasses the experiential perspective of the African belief.

My ancestors have never let me down. As a Christian originating from my African ancestry, I believe there is a symbiotic relationship between the ancestry and Christ. I realised that the Book of Genesis gives a description of God's creation in the Old Testament similar to the ones I had distilled from traditional leaders. I knew that within Judaism there were examples of God intervening through prophets and priests, who mediated the laws of ancestors such as Abraham and Isaac, when communities were in trouble. In the New Testament, Christ himself refers to his ancestors and uses examples drawn from the cultural and natural world to reach his listeners.

Granted this background I argue against the demonisation of African religion and try to explain my position to my wife, my family, my church and my employers. Traditional and religious institutions are the cornerstone of African peoples' humanity. They are the carriers of the indigenous knowledge essential to endogenous development."

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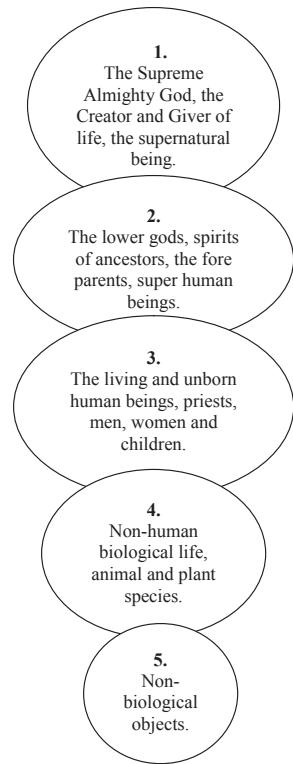


Figure 1  
Five hierarchies in traditional spirituality. Circles 1 and 2 form the Spiritual worldview. Circle 3 forms the Human worldview. Circles 4 and 5 form the Natural worldview.

# Education for endogenous development



## Visions of a Paramount Chief

Nana Kobina Nketsia V

In this article Nana Kobina Nketsia, Paramount Chief of Essikado Traditional Area in southern Ghana, described his own education, as well as his views on education for endogenous development. He presents a roadmap to reform formal education so that it includes African values and knowledge. In this way children can develop a strong sense of identity, a mission and a purpose, and respond to the call of Africa. It is only when African students develop empathy with their indigenous milieu that they can engage with the needs and interests of the population.

I believe that education is relevant if, and only if, it leads to endogenous development. Any form of education that takes a people or an individual away from their cultural universe, is mis-education. However, when one scans through the curricula of the citadels of learning within contemporary Ghana, one sees that the various syllabi have little or nothing to do with the Ghanaian cultural space. Formal education seems to lead to exogenous preoccupations and modes of existence.

This exogenous focus of formal education has a profound impact. For example, the Ghanaian former prime minister, Kofi Abrefa Busia, confessed that: 'Over the years, as I went through college and university, I felt increasingly that the education I received taught me more and more about Europe and less and less about my own society'. In other words, his education was progressing him into an African abstracted from his indigenous reality.

### My indigenous Akan education

Similar to other African traditions, among the Akan a person is 'cultured', which implies 'impressing the path of the Ancestors into a child'. Many years ago I came into the world and was named in the early morning hours on the 8th day after my birth - a full cycle in the Akan weekly calendar. My father gave me a sacred name, underlining my sacred individuality, responsibilities and obligations within the community.

As I grew up I saw that, besides my parents, the whole community was responsible for me. My social parentage was unbelievable! Responsibility for the family and the community was enshrined wherever I turned. To understand responsibility properly, I first needed to learn that it went together with obligation and duty. Only then did I firmly understand that trust and responsibility for the group welfare pervaded every social position, thus implying transparency and accountability.

### Everything is educational

I observed that in order to minimise conflicts, the whole society is structured around permanent mediation through inheritance, marriage and relationships. Relations are constantly being developed and refined, and every form of relationship is accompanied by obligations, duties and responsibilities. As I participated in the sacred conventions of Akan marriage and funeral ceremonies, my understanding deepened about the sacred relationships of families, groups and communities.

As respect for elders was inculcated I learnt to respect authority, knowing that one day I would also be an elder who would be respected so that the society can function. I also knew that eldership was not just grey hair but was attained through exhibiting the core values of the society. The experience of the elders was richer - '*what a seated elder sees, the young standing up do not see*' - yet my youth was also valued, as I was being tutored to 'wash' my hands so that I might eat with my elders.

Every situation was educational. I heard various forms of greetings which depict the values of the community. The one that I most enjoy hearing is *edwuma o* (work o), with the hearty response *edwuma yie* (work is good!). This expresses the social and spiritual value of work. Laziness was frowned upon! Other learning elements included song, healing rituals, dance, tales and festivals. Whenever a member of the community returned from a journey in unknown lands, the question put to him was '*what have you brought?*' Within this culture anything that will enhance the way of life and creativity is to be consciously adopted and owned by the community.

### Becoming a Nana

When I became a chief (Nana) the all-

#### Box 1 African roadmap to reform education

1. The school must integrate the African worldview and indigenous relationships. The learning process must include transmitting these values and traditions at an early stage, along with the knowledge of why such activities must be sustained.
2. The teachers must be those who live by and have experienced the form of knowledge they are transmitting. Teachers themselves urgently need a programme to unlearn, in order to re-learn their cultural selves.
3. It is necessary to teach how Europe has been imbibed as 'education' and in the process has unravelled Africa. Without understanding the colonising culture, it may be very difficult, if not impossible, for the African to teach about Africa. Un-learning must be a special subject.
4. Ownership of the school system is vital. Endogenous development can only materialise when there is constant community responsibility for the institutions of learning.
5. The language of transmission must embody the meaning and culture of the society within which the knowledge is being transmitted. African dictionaries of English, French, Spanish or Portuguese need to be created.
6. Assessment of students should include the level of culture and depth of socialisation of the individual achieved. There must be a strong social and cultural basis for evaluating the level of knowledge gained.
7. Modern technological innovation is not antithetical to endogenous development, but should be integrated in a manner that is based on the way of life and creativity of the community. This process needs to be part of formal education.

embracing nature of the position of traditional leadership became clear. First they ‘killed’ me. Having passed through the dark night of the soul I was strongly cautioned not to touch any of my old things again. I was a new person and had assumed a new sacred identity. The title Nana enshrines humility because I am simply a servant of my people; a servant has a doormat or submissive attitude. I wallow in taboos, all necessary as a persistent reminder of the nature of my being and the spirituality of my position.

This does not mean that all is perfect. The contemporary Akan chieftaincy institution is very different from the original nature of the institution. Many of us are galaxies away from the thoughts and philosophy of the ancestors. We, the chiefs, are often power grabbing, money-loving, materialist, egocentric and arrogant individuals who are far from being the embodiment of humility. Moreover, unfortunately, we tend to infect the unlettered ones.

### The Akan worldview

The application of a worldview is what reveals a person’s identity. Therefore it is the application of an African worldview that makes one African. The general theme of this worldview is that the ‘universe is a spiritual and material whole in which all beings are organisationally interrelated and interdependent’. This worldview makes life itself as well as relationships sacred, and permeates every facet of African existence.

The past is the only reality from which the present selects for the future. My Ancestors knew the value of the past and they guarded it jealously. The question on the lips of the elders whenever they were engaged in deliberations was: ‘what are we leaving behind for those coming after us?’ They embodied a responsibility and obligation for the future in thought and deed. They did not want the future generations to blame them for being useless Ancestors, therefore there is a culture of maintenance and preservation, based on an omnipresence of the Ancestors and the unborn in the living. It is out of this concept that David Millar (2005) has described the African philosophy of ‘ancestorism’, which connotes sacredness, identity, and personality.

It is within such a context that an African can appreciate the strengths that can become the foundations of endogenous development and technological innovation. It may be very difficult for a person who has gone through the mill of western education to appreciate this because conventional science and education de-contextualise and



*Nana Kobina Nketsia (second on the left) in dialogue with other traditional authorities on endogenous development in Ghana, and Bern Guri of Compas partner CIKOD (right).*

compartmentalise knowledge. I believe, however, that it is the uncritical and wholesale adoption and transmission of western worldviews that appears to be strangling contemporary Africa.

### Escalation of conflicts

An interesting observation I have made from all forms of English literature is that an Englishman is an Englishman without any classification. One does not hear or read of the ‘traditional’ or ‘indigenous’ Englishman. However, the African has classifications. The use of ‘traditional African’ suggests that there are Africans who are ‘untraditional’. The ‘untraditional Africans’ look at Africa through the spectacles of Europe. They analyse the ‘backwardness’ or ‘traditionality’ of structures, laws and customs as major factors creating conflicts within African societies.

In this way, many of Africa’s present problems, such as ethnic conflicts, exploitation of natural resources, growing criminality, increasing poverty, HIV/AIDS, and the inequity of the position of women, are considered the result of outmoded customs, laws and institutions. What most analysts fail to point out, however, is the fact that many African conflicts arise out of a different worldview being imposed on the continent.

Ghana as a state, for example, has been written and invented according to the dictates of the western mindset. The elite are simply carrying on as a neo-colonial elite, and conventional western worldviews are being used to analyse the situation and provide the best solutions to solve the problems of the indigenous African.

### African roadmap

The only road Ghana and Africa have not travelled in contemporary times is the path of culture. African culture, and the education it embodies, has been silenced mainly because of the history of contemporary education in Africa. Formal schooling has ignored the accumulated knowledge and values of various African societies, and the continent is paying a heavy price for this mis-education. The forms and contents of contemporary education have compounded Africa’s developmental problems.

We must have a vision to revolutionise education, to bring in the human qualities of the African, and ensure that African culture becomes the vehicle of education (Box 1). The African youth who pass through formal education structured on an African-centred curriculum, will be unburdened of the hypocrisy of the double life. Rather, they will develop a strong sense of identity, a mission and a purpose, and respond to the call of Africa. This will help our children to believe in themselves as creators and not just mere consumers of modern products.

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# The Mayan system of learning

Felipe Gómez Gómez



The Guatemalan indigenous organisation Oxlajuj Ajpop supports groups of spiritual leaders and elders in whom the ancestral knowledge of the Mayan culture resides. Oxlajuj Ajpop encourages peaceful coexistence and collective development in a multicultural society. One of the main objectives of Oxlajuj Ajpop is to enhance education based on Mayan principles and values. Experiential learning, consulting with spiritual leaders and the use of the Mayan calendar are the main elements in the Mayan system of learning.

Oxlajuj Ajpop, the National Conference of Ministers of the Mayan Spirituality, was founded in 1991 by three Mayan spiritual leaders, when about 1100 elders came together to begin a process of reconstruction of the social relationships in their indigenous Mayan communities. The name *Oxlajuj Ajpop* means 'spiritual leaders' or 'leaders who give guidance'. According to ancient Mayan texts, Oxlajuj Ajpop means 'highest authority among the

people'.

Oxlajuj Ajpop promotes the organisation of traditional leaders in Guatemala and the expression of their views. The organisation assists them in their duties leading to sustainable development of their communities, and to the strengthening of Mayan culture and spirituality in general. Oxlajuj Ajpop is currently working in 11 regions in Guatemala, including the capital city. The aim is to be active in all 23 linguis-

tic groups of Guatemala, promoting integrated development which respects nature, human dignity, justice and peace. Oxlajuj Ajpop has been a member of the Compas Network since 2001.

## Mayan principles and values

Nothing can be achieved in this world if we forget the great strength that resides in our peoples: spiritual experience. This spiritual experience is fundamental for the people to begin to re-energise themselves, to build their future on the basis of their own identity.

In the Mayan view of the world, each human being has special gifts: particular roles to be discovered, developed and fulfilled in family and community life. Happiness lies in knowing which roles should be undertaken in one's existence. People must recognise their qualities and limitations, and the mission they should take on, in order to fulfil themselves as human beings and serve their community. A person's mission could include becoming, for example, a spiritual leader, farmer, doctor, midwife, astronomer, diplomat, counsellor, or artist.

The Mayan principles and values, on the basis of which Oxlajuj Ajpop facili-

### Box 1 Examples of Mayan values related to learning

- Wisdom is not the property of one person; it is the collective property of the community. For this reason I cannot say, for example '*I am wise*'; no one can claim personal wisdom. The old people say: '*We shouldn't say if we know something*.' This, however, can be a difficulty when we have to explain aspects of our culture publicly.
- There are many things which are sacred and it is not our position to talk about them. As we say in our language '*You are not worthy of getting involved in that discussion*'.
- When we share experience, we show that it is an experience of many years and many centuries. Normally the old people say: '*Well then, speak, pass it on*' and we say: '*We will borrow your hand, your foot, your mouth, your eyes and your ears to share this experience with others*'.
- Talking is one thing and living is another. So, before beginning a meeting we generally say: '*For sure and certain, much of what we are going to say we will say with interesting words, but we won't manage to fully realise in our lives*'.
- A key recommendation for when we want to share our experience is to seek permission to do so from the elders, because it is important not only to want to do something, but also to know from the elders whether it is your vocation to do so; whether this is what you should do.

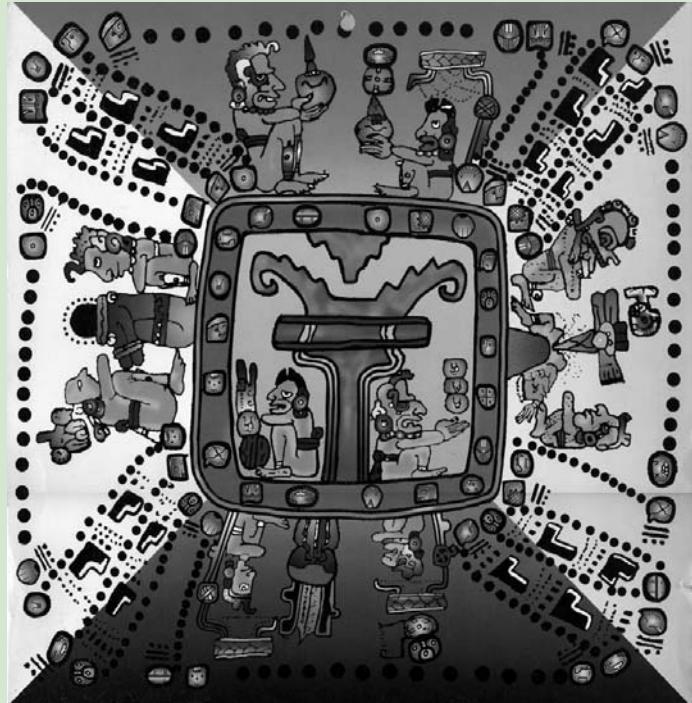
## Box 2 Mayan calendar as a guide

The Mayan calendar is based on two separate pairs of wheels, together known as the Calendar Round, both tied to a linear count of days, called the Long Count, whose zero point is an unknown mythical event that occurred on August 13, 3114 BC. The first calendar round sequence, the *Tzolk'in*, is made up of two cycles: one of 13 day numbers, and the other of 20 gods (or day names). In this way, every day is represented by a number and a god. This 260-day *Tzolk'in* or 'distribution of days' is still of great ritual significance in the Guatemalan highlands.

The second Calendar Round sequence, the vague year or *Haab*, is 365 days long and consists of 18 months of 20 days each and one month of 5 days.

The full Calendar Round for a particular day is the combination of the two: the *Tzolk'in* sacred calendar of 260 days, with a solar *Haab* calendar of 365 days, containing a number-name combination. The reoccurrence of this combination occurs every 52 years.

The Mayan calendar was built up comprehensively and systematically over many generations. It is a calendar which synthesises different fields of ancient science with those of the present and the future. It is a guide which reveals information about spirituality, mathematics, astronomy, medical treatments, the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and it predicts natural and supernatural phenomena. The calendar is an instrument which guides people from the day of their birth and throughout the whole of their existence.



tates education in sustainable development, are different from the values commonly used in formal education. The principal elements in the Mayan system of education include experiential learning, consulting with spiritual leaders, and the use of the Mayan calendar. Within this system there are certain rules and restrictions concerning the exchange of experiences and knowledge (Box 1).

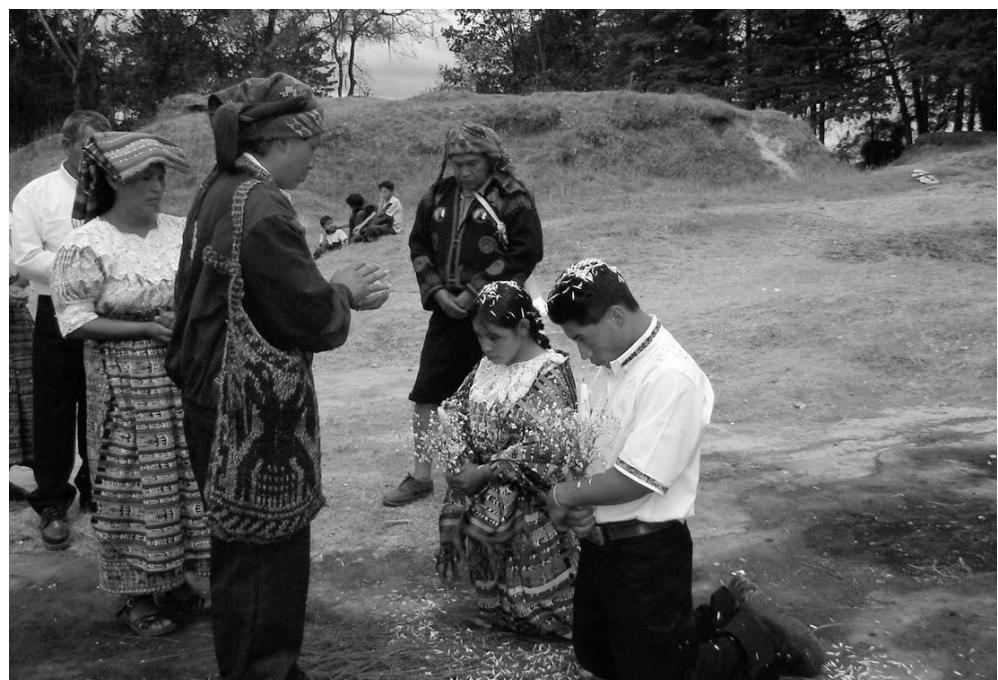
The learning of sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters begins from a very early age, so that they discover their gifts and qualities, and are trained for the role they must undertake in their personal and community life. The elders give advice on personal and collective responsibilities, to ensure the future of their children and grandchildren. This includes lessons, such as: don't disturb the balance, har-

mony, unity and complementarity which exist between humans, nature, the cosmos and the spirits; don't destroy natural resources because they are a fundamental element of life; listen to and respect older people (fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers); fulfil the mission or role that you have in life; and safeguard the future of the generations to come.

## We have a vocation

All human beings can discover their possibilities for fulfilment by means of the Mayan calendar (Box 2). When a child is born, the day is immediately looked up in the Mayan calendar and the possibilities for fulfilment that the day offers are revealed, together with the day's weaknesses. The Mayan calendar is also a guide for couples who are planning to have a child, as to the speciality and roles which the unborn child will be able to develop.

Within Mayan society, the elders are the people who must guide their children and grandchildren, so that they may have a completely fulfilled life. The elder who has the mission to accompany the newborn, performs sacred rites both during pregnancy and on the day of birth, to ask for the baby's health, fulfilment and well-being in life. The rituals are performed on altars, on the summit of a volcano or mountain, or in other ceremonial centres.



*Spiritual leaders and elders play a central role in Mayan forms of learning. They must guide their children and grandchildren, so they may have a completely fulfilled life.*



## Focus of Oxlajuj Ajpop

In the search for the transformation of the state dominated by a single culture into one which is truly multicultural, the spiritual leaders united in Oxlajuj Ajpop work in six main areas. One of them is Mayan spirituality and religion, which includes the workings of the Mayan calendar. Two other areas are sacred ceremonies and holy places, and the investigation of violations of the right to freedom of religion and beliefs.

Oxlajuj Ajpop also works on the Mayan legal system within the framework of judicial pluralism, strengthening the traditional authorities in relation to the prevention and resolution of community conflicts. The work on traditional medicine and therapeutic resources includes the systematisation of traditional medical knowledge and supporting traditional Mayan doctors.

This work includes the dissemination of the experiences of the traditional leaders by means of radio programmes, videos and written articles. It also encourages cultural creativity, by promoting traditional musical instruments, such as the chirimilla, the tambo and the marimba.

## The endogenous pathway

For more than fifteen years Oxlajuj Ajpop has been working on endogenous development without identifying it as such: safeguarding traditional rights and the promotion of indigenous values. On becoming part of the Compas network, Oxlajuj Ajpop started to employ the term endogenous development.

The endogenous development programme is located in two indigenous communities in the department of Santa Cruz del Quiche. Oxlajuj Ajpop



*Women play essential roles in Mayan culture and learning. Rituals permit community members to meet not only spiritually, but also socially and institutionally, when support organisations that practice Maya spirituality also offer candles for health and well-being.*

promotes experimentation with and systematisation of ancient wisdom, leading to development based on the Mayan worldview. For example, in the work with agriculture and biodiversity, space has been created for community members to reflect on the importance of caring for Mother Earth, protecting and conserving natural resources, the diversification of crops, and the use of organic fertilizers.

The work also includes strengthening the organisation of women, reducing the risks of natural disasters, and seeking solutions to problems which arise in the communities, such as the planned construction of cemeteries in sacred places. Support for education includes school vegetable gardens, as well as ceremonies in accordance with the Mayan calendar: baptisms, marriages, and confirmations.

## Inter-cultural dialogue

These activities oblige us to fully live up to the values of our Mayan culture. Moreover, to strengthen communities and train human resources, we need to develop the capacity to engage in dialogue with scientific thinkers, world religious leaders and governments. As one of the ways to establish an intercultural dialogue, research students from the agronomy faculty of the University of San Carlos of Guatemala participate in our work. They learn in the field and include these experiences in their studies.

In recent years, Oxlajuj Ajpop has also been able to exert influence at various higher levels of decision-making, including that of the government. Currently Mayan leaders are participating in a number of national commissions: the Government Justice Commission; the Commission on Holy Sites; the Inter-Religious Dialogue for Development in Guatemala (DIROD); and the Commission on the International Rights of Indigenous Territories (CITI). In this way Oxlajuj Ajpop aims to support the spiritual leaders in their duties leading to sustainable development of their communities, and to strengthen Mayan culture and spirituality in Guatemala.



*Traditional leaders and government representatives participate in the dialogue on the role of Mayan juridical systems for the prevention and solution of conflicts, during a conference organised by Oxlajuj Ajpop.*



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# Intercultural education in a Tanzanian secondary school

Gemma Burford and Lesikar Ole Ngila

The Tanzanian NGO Aang Serian is developing a pilot intercultural education programme for a rural secondary school in Monduli District. Its aim is to empower young people to document and research the indigenous knowledge of their own societies. The programme intends to sustain biological and cultural diversity, on the one hand, and to bridge the 'generation gap' that often arises from formal education, on the other. The model described in this article could also be applied in adult education, or at the upper-primary school level, and has the potential for transfer to other indigenous communities, both in East Africa and elsewhere.



Form 1 student Judith Malaki shows off her photograph of local medicinal trees.

Elizabeth Barbusch

In traditional Maasai society, education was almost exclusively the responsibility of parents and older siblings. In formal education, this responsibility has been taken out of their hands and given to professional teachers from other ethnic groups, often enhancing the 'generation gap' as well as the out-migration of young Maasai to urban areas. These negative consequences was what led the Aang Serian leaders to seek a positive intervention that would develop the self-esteem, cultural identity and practical skills of youth at the village level. This they felt could offer a feasible alternative to urban migration, a journey that often ends in unemployment or in low-status, poorly paid jobs as domestic servants or watchmen.

The Maasai in Tanzania are at a crossroads, with challenges such as drought, livestock diseases and land alienation threatening to destroy their traditional way of life. Education that combines the best of the indigenous with the best of the modern may be the only way to ensure the long-term sustainability and adaptation of their pastoralist culture.

## Noonkondin Secondary School

Today the Noonkondin Secondary School is located in the predominantly Maasai village of Eluwai in the Monduli District. Most of the 36 students are aged between 15 and 17, although there is a significant number of mature students

returning to full-time education. Before this school was opened, there were no opportunities for post-primary education in the entire ward, consisting of four villages with a total population of over 10,000. Primary school leavers were forced to move to Monduli town if they wanted to further their studies.

This increased the migration problem, as very few of the youth were keen to return to the villages once they had left. It was felt that a village secondary school emphasising the indigenous knowledge approach, and offering a structured co-curricular programme in parallel to the national curriculum, would be a more attractive option for students than a community college in the town.

## Intercultural education

Aang Serian, or 'House of Peace' in Maasai language, is an independent non-profit organisation founded in March 1999 by us - a group of diverse young people in Arusha, North Tanzania, working with schools, colleges and community groups. We dare to believe that: '*by refusing to be labelled underdeveloped we can build our self-esteem*'; *by rediscovering our traditions we can build our identity*; *by using skills and knowledge of our ancestors we can build our economy*'; and *by promoting dialogues between ethnic groups, we can build a peaceful society*'.

The four central principles of the

inter-cultural education programme are: student-centred learning; developing critical thinking; learning from community elders; and combining theory and practice. Its aim is to empower young people to document and research the indigenous knowledge of their own societies by interviewing elders in their home communities, with a particular focus on traditional environmental and health-related knowledge. The programme has a dual function of sustaining biological and cultural diversity, on the one hand, and helping to bridge the generation gap that often arises from formal education, on the other.

## Urban pilot phase

During the pilot phase, we developed the initial Aang Serian Foundation Certificate programme in Indigenous Knowledge for use in an urban 'tutorial college' setting by young people aged 16-25. It was offered free of charge to young people who were already enrolled in an educational programme of English and/or computer literacy, as an optional extra that would help them to explore their identity and to find new opportunities for self-employment as artisans or in the cultural tourism sector.

Each participant was required to complete a workbook of questions, by interviewing parents or other elders of their particular ethnic group, and to discuss the responses in multi-cultural





*Maasai herd boy with cattle. Students interview their parents or other community elders and discuss the responses in multi-cultural seminars at school.*

seminars conducted weekly in the classroom. While the programme was well received by the youth who participated in it, and some were successful in boosting their income by leading cultural tours for expatriates, there was some concern that locating it in an urban area would exacerbate rather than reduce the problem of rural-urban migration.

In 2002 a plot of land was donated by community leaders in the Maasai village of Eluwai for a 'community college'. This school would offer the indigenous knowledge programme alongside basic literacy and numeracy classes, short vocational courses, such as livestock management, sustainable agriculture and bee-keeping, as well as English and Swahili language tuition. Through discussions with local leaders at the village, ward and district levels, the concept was further developed to encompass the full national secondary curriculum.

### Foundation module

To adapt the initial indigenous knowledge foundation module of the pilot phase to a rural setting, it was felt that two components needed further emphasis: environment and health. These sections were removed from the basic course and developed into two separate, full-year modules. The four remaining sections - history; language and oral literature; daily life in tradi-

tional societies; and rituals and ceremonies - were extensively revised. This created a detailed co-curricular programme to be taught over a period of 26 weeks.

Practical activities such as building a traditional house, making tools and utensils, cooking, story-telling and singing complete the 38 weeks of a normal academic year. In 2006, we will run this revised foundation module for first year students for the first time.

### Environment and Society

The 12-month environment and society module has three major elements: traditional environmental knowledge and research methods, which are part of the ethnobiology course, and ecology and conservation. The environment and society module was launched in January 2005, and is intended to be taken by second year students after successful completion of the foundation module. We have introduced a 'pre-form 1' year to bridge the gap between Swahili-medium primary and English-medium secondary education. This means that the environment and society course is taken by students in form 1, alongside the first year of the national secondary curriculum.

The course begins with a structured 12-week programme of community research, similar in style to the foundation module, focusing on traditional environmental knowledge. Wherever

possible, students are encouraged to compare knowledge across three generations - their grandparents, their parents, and their peers - and to track environmental changes occurring in the lifetime of each generation. This is followed by an eight-week section on research methods, adapted from the MSc course in Ethnobiology offered at the University of Kent at Canterbury, United Kingdom (Box 1).

### Cultural domain analysis

Cultural domain analysis is the study of how systems are classified by the local population. Free-listing and ranking are commonly used methodologies. Free-listing, or asking community members to list items in a named category, such as 'edible animals' or 'medicinal plants', is one of the tools used which can be used to identify the most prominent organisms encountered. Ranking is a tool for comparing plants or animals along different dimensions, depending on the research question: which plant provides the best treatment for malaria? which fruit is the tastiest?

On successful completion of the ethnobiology sections, students move on to the third section of the environment & society course, ecology and conservation. This part of the course aims to relate global environmental problems such as deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion and pollution to the students' life experiences, through classroom discussions, field trips and practical activities.

### Integrated health care

The integrated healthcare programme will be launched in 2006 for third year (form 2) students. It builds on the two previous modules by creating a framework for students to conduct their own research in the field of rural health care. It encourages students to compare the advantages and disadvantages of both traditional and biomedical

#### Box 1 Topics included in the course on ethnobiology research methods, adapted from MSc course Ethnobiology University of Kent (UK)

- Week 1: Introduction to the aims of ethnobiology research
- Week 2: Sampling techniques
- Week 3: Semi-structured interviews
- Week 4: Practical research methods: community maps, seasonal calendars, historical timelines and forest trails
- Week 5: Cultural domain analysis (1): free-listing
- Week 6: Cultural domain analysis (2): ranking
- Week 7: Ethnobotanical specimen collection
- Week 8: Research ethics and project planning

(modern) health care, and introduces the concept of evidence-based integration in an attempt to combine the advantages of both systems.

A discussion of general concepts of health, illness and healing is followed by a free-listing exercise to identify common and serious illnesses in local communities. There are sessions on traditional health practitioners and ritual contexts of healing, a practical class on medicinal plant identification, and a discussion of particular categories of health problems - such as digestive disorders, respiratory problems and skin conditions. The aim is to determine the utilisation of traditional and biomedical health care by different generations, as well as to document traditional treatment approaches in detail.

The formal programme concludes with a discussion of medicinal plant conservation and the dynamic nature of ethnobotanical knowledge. Students will also have the opportunity to participate in community-based research projects as with the environment & society module.

### Home-school connection

The students enjoy participating in the programme, and a few have taken the initiative to ask for extra classes on the subject of traditional medicine. Their major concern is accreditation: the modules are not a recognised part of the national secondary curriculum and are classed as co-curricular activities. This problem still has to be resolved.

The concept of intercultural education has also been well received at the village and district levels of government, and in particular, by the parents of students taking part in the programme. Some parents are now represented on the school's Board of Governors. Community elders have commented that the modular indigenous knowledge programme provides a way for them to remain involved in their children's education. Maintaining a strong connection between home and school enables them to feel that they still have an active role to play, and that their children are not entirely 'lost' to them.

### Ethnic differences discussed

One of the advantages of the Aang Serian model is that it is not culture-specific. The focus is on empowering students to document and research their own culture, rather than teaching them about Maasai culture or that of any other ethnic group. In this way the sensitive topic of inter-ethnic differences can be safely discussed in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Thus,

the preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity, and perhaps ultimately biological diversity, can be separated from the troublesome politics of tribalism and ethnic superiority.

This model has the potential to be adapted for use almost anywhere in Africa, provided that indigenous knowledge has not yet disappeared altogether, and that young people still maintain some connection to the land and to older generations.

### Challenges

We are planning to develop similar co-curricular activities about integrated livestock management in 2007. This programme, aimed particularly at the Maasai and other East African pastoralist groups, intends to document and preserve ethnoveterinary knowledge relating to the appropriate feeding and treatment of livestock, specifically cattle, sheep, goats and chickens. We also aim to offer more vocational courses in subjects such as sustainable agriculture, appropriate technology and rural economics, to complement the indigenous knowledge programme.

The greatest challenge encountered so far in implementing the programme, predictably enough, is a lack of funds. No substantial grant funding has yet been secured, except for the construction of buildings, and the school remains largely reliant on the generosity of individuals - particularly those in the UK, USA and Australia as well as contributions from the students themselves.

### Intercultural education network

In the Regional Report for Africa prepared for the Third Meeting of the Ad Hoc Inter-Sessional Working Group on Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Aang Serian approach was cited as a potential model for 'appropriate education and training for indigenous and local communities that can enable sustainable development while being compatible with their traditions' (UNEP, 2003).

This recognition is based on increasing international awareness of the fact that the loss of languages, the disappearance of traditional cultures, and the extinction of species are all interrelated (Maffi, 2001). Intergovernmental organisations, such as the World Bank,



Elizabeth Barbusch

Form 1 student George Oltira, a Maasai warrior, taking photographs as part of an Environment and Society Project.

the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, UNESCO and the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation), are increasingly realising the urgent need to develop multidisciplinary approaches to the preservation of linguistic, cultural and biological diversity.

Yet there is a remarkable lack of creative approaches to education aiming to address these problems at their roots. The Aang Serian model has great potential to change the future of rural secondary education, both in our small village in Tanzania and elsewhere in Africa. We are very keen to hear from other individuals and organisations active in educational reform and curriculum development in Africa and elsewhere, and to launch an International Network on Intercultural Education for exchange of experiences, curricula and reading materials. Our curricula are freely available to non-profit organisations in Africa, provided that adequate acknowledgement is given.

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# Creating space for change: farmers' learning groups in the Netherlands

Jet Proost and Willem van Weperen



Photo: Jet Proost

Farmers' learning groups are proving to be very successful in many regions all over the world, including Europe. Known under names like study clubs (Denmark), farmer networks (France), study circles (Sweden) and farmer field schools (Indonesia), the concept is simple and effective. What happens in these groups that makes them so effective? This article presents some answers to this question, illustrated by two examples of study groups of Dutch dairy farmers.

There is a long tradition of farmer study groups in the Netherlands. In the late nineteenth century, it was popular for farmers to meet in the pub after the church service on Sundays, where they would sit together and exchange news, season related-affairs and experi-

ences on their farm. For example, this was the way that maize growing was introduced in the Netherlands. Some farmers experimented with the new crop and then told their fellow farmers about the advantages. Farmers formed local groups often around new tech-

niques, such as the use of fertilisers, improved ploughs and animal breeds.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Dutch horticulture sector developed prosperously thanks to the free flow of information between growers. Farmers' study groups generated knowledge and

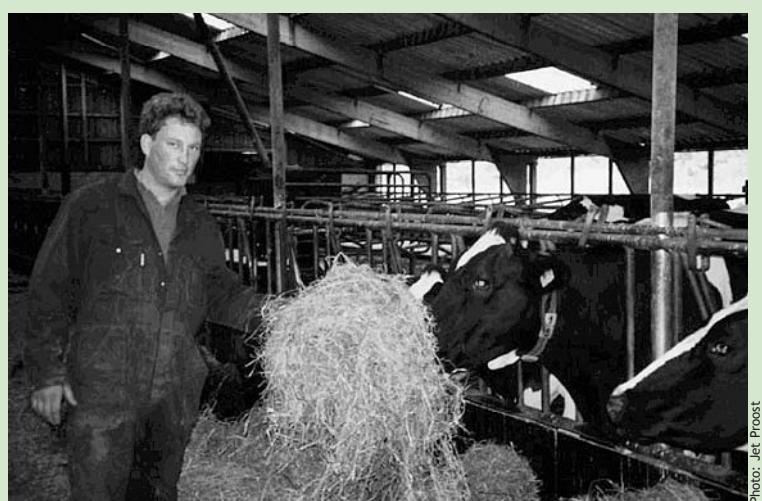
## Box 1 PMOV platform of experimenting dairy farmers

In the Netherlands intensive fertilisation practices for pastures combined with the high-protein and low-fibre feed used for dairy cattle pose a pressing problem for Dutch intensive dairy farms. The high-input system not only creates health problems in the cattle and increased veterinary costs, there are also serious consequences for the environment: the quality of drinking water is affected, and the high emission of ammonia affects the natural environment.

In the 1980s the Ministry of Agriculture introduced a series of restrictive measures to ensure that dairy farmers would meet the environmental targets set by the European Union. It became compulsory, for example, to inject the manure as slurry into the soil, and a mineral bookkeeping system for dairy farmers was introduced. This bookkeeping revealed that the efficiency of nitrogen use in intensive dairy production had become very low.

During this period, groups of farmers in the north of the country began to experiment with reducing the amount of protein and increasing the amount of roughage in the diet of their dairy cattle, with the aim of optimising the interactions between soil, plants and animals on their farm. An essential notion in this holistic approach is that a change in one part of the farming system has consequences for other parts. Over the years, other farmers have taken up this approach and, together with researchers, they founded the PMOV platform to promote 'eco-technical' dairy farming.

Around 40 experimenting farmers in the province of Drenthe initiated study groups. Their aim was to improve the feeding of their cattle in a way that would also have a positive effect on both the farmers' income and the environment. Two years later, the initiative had grown to 100 farmers in 11 groups. The provincial authorities financed this project as part of their sustainability policy. After five years, the results are clearly visible. The system has resulted in lower ammonia emissions and improved efficiency in nitrogen use. It has also resulted in better soil quality, water quality, improved animal health and reduced veterinary costs. The farmers have been able to maintain the milk yield with lower costs. Both humans and animals experience less stress, and it is possible to comply with the environmental norms imposed by EU regulations.



Jurjen de Jong from Oostermeer, member of the environmental cooperative Friesche Wouden, feeding his cows more fibre and less protein, to reduce ammonia volatilisation and improve soil life.

information faster than formal research institutions. Nowadays farmers' learning groups are still popular as spontaneous self-organised gatherings, while agricultural advisors and researchers use them as an efficient way to reach farmers.

### Potential for innovation

In many conventional projects, the researchers and advisors take the initiative for establishing farmers' groups. The underlying assumption is that research institutes generate knowledge, which provides 'solid evidence' from the technical sciences as the basis for innovations. Advisors are needed to lead the discussions, as a means to get the message about the innovation across to the farmers.

However, over time it has become clear that different approaches to learning may be required. A group of international scholars (LEARNgroupt, 2005) has shown, for example, that for processes of innovation in the management of complex ecosystems, social issues often play a far more dominant role than technical knowledge. Moreover, if more players come into the picture, different kinds of knowledge have to be taken into account.

We have now learned that farmers' groups have an enormous potential for innovation. Learning, and more specifically group-based learning, is recognised as a means to realise change at farmer level for more sustainable production, in the environmental and economic, as well as social perspectives. Learning is more than the result of reflection on accumulated data. One example of this in the Dutch dairy farming sector is the PMOV farmer study groups, which have been able to seek their own solutions to environmental problems (Box 1).

### Co-constructors of knowledge

But what activities in a group trigger learning? What ingredients make the group members say '*aha*' and enable them to reconsider ideas and beliefs they have taken for granted so far? It is widely recognised that changes for sustainable agriculture require shared commitment and collective action. In groups, farmers build new relationships over time, and create a vocabulary to discuss the issues that are of importance to them. Operational issues may be popular at the start, but gradually they find words and expressions that make their implicit or tacit knowledge explicit. This is where innovations start to pop up.

It is the friendship among group members that allows an atmosphere to develop where both failures and suc-

### Box 2 Bioveem farmers' groups

Farmers in the Bioveem project and their colleagues welcomed information from researchers, but did so on their own terms. They used the information to test the validity of their own findings and to support their ideas. In the group they shared information, which they had acquired from various sources, and this gave them a fairly good insight into what was available and useful. It was not the advisor who set the agenda for the meetings, but the group members. Following the line of their conversation, the advisor produced the information the farmers asked for. Themes discussed were particularly important to the farmers, such as 100% organic feed for the animals.

Instead of preparing a presentation with slides, the advisor would bring his laptop computer to the meetings on which he had data from the project. However, he replaced some of the figures and tables from the project with pictures of the farmers in the group, providing points of recognition and also setting the context clearly. The group also introduced 'the talk of the day': at each meeting one of the participants would tell about one aspect at his or her farm where the results were better than the group's average. The advisor would prepare this talk beforehand together with the farmer. This resulted in very lively discussions, an atmosphere of opening up to one another, and co-constructing knowledge that was adapted to their farming. Bioveem, also because of the good fit between advisors and farmers involved, became an example of farmers successfully creating innovations for organic dairy farming.

cesses can be communicated, and cutting-edge ideas can be experimented with. If this social part of the process is neglected, the group's conversation seldom goes beyond short-term, everyday technological issues. In order to create connectivity between farmers, researchers and advisors, it is necessary that the participants see each other as co-constructors of knowledge. This includes reflexive self-understanding of the (institutional) culture and of the identity of all involved.

We would like to illustrate this with another Dutch example from a long-term project in organic dairy farming, called Bioveem. Here the so-called novelty-approach is used, a methodology which includes farmer study groups, on-farm research on themes identified in conversations between farmers, researchers and advisors, and communication to the farming community at large (Box 2).

### Set of basics

Supporting group learning requires the creation of an environment that is conducive to learning, and is based on two crucial concepts: constructive learning and contextual learning. The underlying notion of constructive learning is that a farmer is regarded as an active constructor of knowledge. People's experiences are point of departure, rather than theories or models. New knowledge is combined with what a person already knows. Contextual learning is about the circumstances in which we pick up new information: the more that happens in a group session, the more context is created, which enhances learning.

For groups to be effective there are also other 'basics' to need to be taken into account, like group size (maximum 12-15 members), composition (some

heterogeneity), locality (keep it practical), meeting place (at farms), frequency of gatherings (balance between purpose and continuity), coordination (farmers themselves) and facilitation (by preference). Activities can vary and might include trips to experimental farms, visiting each other's farm, inviting advisors or other experts, information evenings, and comparing farm results and on-farm experiments.

Participants report that they like the groups for various reasons, for instance the way topics are discussed, the moral support from colleagues, and testing of ideas and opinions. Moreover, the group meetings provide an excuse to visit other people's farms and see unexpected examples of innovation. These experiences show that there is potential in farmers' groups: farmers are quite capable of analysing and resolving their own problems. Strengthened with appropriate support, they can find innovative solutions that are adapted to the local conditions and opportunities.

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# Transforming university education

## Intra- and interculturality in higher education in Latin America

Franz Vargas and Freddy Delgado

Higher education in Latin America contains a contradiction: although universities and countries in general have a population of mixed cultural background, the curriculum content only encompasses the modern western view. Agruco at the San Simon Municipal University (UMSS) in Cochabamba, Bolivia, is transforming university education, now basing it on two fundamental pillars: western scientific knowledge and the wisdom of the native people. In this way Agruco aims to produce professionals with the skills necessary to further the endogenous development process of the increasingly impoverished population.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the population grew from 166 million people in 1950 to 513 million in 2000, and is expected to increase to over 800 million by 2050. The majority of this popu-

lation is from indigenous and mestizo, or mixed-race, cultural background. Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru are the countries with the highest population of indigenous natives. In addition to

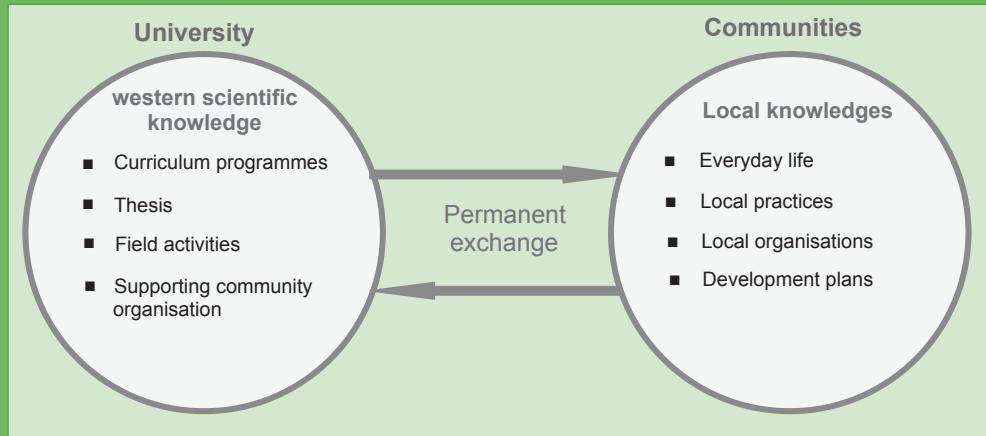
Spanish and Portuguese, a range of languages and dialects are spoken, such as Quechua and Aymara in the Andes, the Mayan languages in Central America, Mapuche (Chile) and Guarani (Amazon region).

Latin America is one of the regions of the world with the worst distribution of income: 5% of the population get 25% of the national income - in contrast to 16% in South-East Asia or 13% in developed countries. The poorest 20% in Latin America receive only 4.5% of the national income. Twenty million Latin Americans live outside their country of origin and, of these, 15 million reside in the US. While funding is being reduced, the number of students in public universities is increasing. In the state university of San Simon (UMSS) in Cochabamba, student numbers have now reached 55,000. Of these students, 65% come from medium-sized towns and 35% from rural areas.



Bolivia needs professionals with the skills necessary to further the process of endogenous development of the increasingly impoverished population. These skills include being able to do joint action research together with farmers, based on local resources and local knowledge and - where necessary and appropriate - complement these with resources from outside.

**The public university crisis**  
In Latin America the globalisation development model, which has prioritised the rapid accumulation of capital without an equitable redistribution, is in crisis. The indigenous population in particular is experiencing increased material poverty. At the same time within the system of higher education a fundamental contradiction exists:



**Figure 1**  
Complementarity between university and communities in intra-and intercultural higher education.

although public universities in Latin America, and in Bolivia in particular, have a multicultural population, their strategies, objectives and curriculum content are based on the globalisation development model. This implies a marginalisation of intra- and intercultural aspects within the curriculum.

Consequently, the knowledge generated in the university is limited by the exclusion of knowledge inherent in native cultures. There is an excessive specialisation in areas which are not strategic within the Latin American context. The university gives priority to the market economy and business-university links, reducing openness towards universal knowledge and agricultural diversity. Interculturality is limited to North-South exchanges, with the South being the recipient of western culture.

Education has thus become internationalised, with programmes in which the content is removed from the reality of the majority of the local population. It is obvious that the present poverty crisis cannot be resolved through a university-business paradigm, nor by means of a conceptual model which prioritises the market economy.

### Intra- and intercultural education

In the UMSS, and since the formation of AGRUCO, the principal objective is 'to identify and implement actions for change within Latin American public universities, which rebuild the educational process through the inclusion of a new paradigm - re-evaluating the cultures of the native peoples and the dialogue between the knowledge systems involved (South-South, South-North), from an intra- and intercultural and trans-disciplinary perspective'.

In this process the concept *intraculturality* is conceived of as 'the re-evaluation of local knowledge systems, especially the wisdom of native indigenous peoples which have maintained a humane and sustainable way of life'. It is considered the first indispensable step in the process of strengthening

cultural identity, and transforming the knowledge system within the university. *Interculturality* implies an exchange between knowledge systems, of which modern western knowledge is but one among others. It refers above all to the attitudes and social relationships between different cultural groups within society.

*Trans-disciplinarity* is understood as 'a process of education and applied research based on the complexity of every situation, which transcends the knowledge of individual disciplines by using a range of methodologies'. It is the most advanced stage of interdisciplinarity. It provides insights for social and societal learning. It transcends the individual disciplines without rejecting them, in order to enrich understanding and seek permanent synergy in which the disciplines strengthen the applied research for development actions.

### Fundamental aspects

Adopting intra- and intercultural education within the university implies an internal process of reflection. For this process it is essential to consider the following three aspects: (1) the re-evaluation of local native knowledge; (2) autonomy and self-determination in the education of the individual and the

community; and (3) dialogue between knowledge systems - between the wisdom of the indigenous peoples and western scientific knowledge.

Figure 1 illustrates the University, the social elements and people in its surroundings, each with their own roles, contributions and complementarities. The dialogue between these elements aims to transform the knowledge systems and sciences, in order to further endogenous development and eradicate material, social and spiritual poverty.

### The UMSS experience

The San Simon Municipal University (UMSS) in Cochabamba, principally through the faculty of agriculture and AGRUCO, has developed an education system which includes a continuous interaction between the university and the various social elements around it. This includes, for example, joint undertakings with the Cochabamba peasant workers trade union, with 44 town councils within Cochabamba department, as well as small businesses, neighbourhood councils and the Cochabamba federation of private businessmen.

Based on this interaction - and with the co-operation of universities from

#### Box 1 Forms of inter- and intracultural education

The objective of the education within the UMSS, principally through Agruco is to train students to have an interdisciplinary understanding and interpretation of the rural situation, in order to support solutions which improve the quality of life within the framework of sustainable development. This process includes three major elements:

- **Understand the situation:** carry out field studies, which include the vision of development from the perspective of the farmers. Analyse the technologies and customs of the community and its members in everyday life - with its material, social and spiritual elements - as seen from within the community itself.
- **Strengthen and rebuild local knowledge** by means of participatory documentation: produce records of 'The Re-evaluation of Local Knowledge for Sustainable Development' which may then be returned to the community and passed on to other communities and organisations.
- **Formulate projects** based on the technologies compiled, for the sustainable management of natural resources and the revitalisation of local knowledge. The projects elaborated in conjunction with the communities are submitted to municipal programmes for financing their execution.





Europe and North America - pilot projects have been developed, including undergraduate training programmes, programmes of research and development, and postgraduate projects, all linked to integrated community development. These projects have been generated in areas such as agroecology, agroforestry, fodder and forest crops, agricultural mechanisation, protected areas, interculturality, municipal administration and government processes (Agruco, Sefo-CIF, Cifema, Basfor, Centro Aguas Agroquímico, Alimentos, Aguas, Ceplag).

The research and social interaction have generated important lessons, which in turn have transformed undergraduate academic education. In this way between 1990 and 2004, 4500 students trained in AGRUCO; and 65 post-graduate professionals were trained in agroecology, culture and sustainable development between 1998 and 2005.

### Advances in methodology

In relation to the methodological concepts of the education process from an intra/intercultural and transdisciplinary perspective, the following points should be emphasised (see Box 1, previous page). Firstly: the research work is active and participatory, with emphasis on methodologies from different scientific disciplines. The transdisciplinary character of the research emphasises qualitative methodologies and process analysis.

Secondly, the methodology is building on the relationship between education and the community: requests for research and integrated development arise from participatory community studies. The outcomes of these studies make a significant contribution to municipal development plans. In this way, research priorities are based on the needs of the communities, of the region and of the country as a whole.

### Actions for change

In the UMSS we believe that the institutional development of the public uni-

versities depends fundamentally on their willingness to accept a greater participation by civil society. The universities must offer programmes which satisfy the needs and desires of society as a whole. From this perspective the reform of the universities must include changes in their organic structure and decision-making bodies.

For example, the Honourable University Council (HCU) presently upholds the principles of autonomy and joint-government, with the participation of student and staff representatives. Subsequently it is proposed to create a People's Participation Council, which will be responsible for proposing policies and strategies which will allow the social, cultural, economic and political needs of society to be met. Participants in this council will include representatives of the peasant workers organisations, the federation of private business, and the regional government.

Likewise it is proposed to create a 'Council of the Wise', who will advise on the development of university programmes for education, scientific research and social interaction. Participants in this council will be worthy individuals from civil society, including leaders from native indigenous peoples and intellectual circles, of national and international standing.

The University is establishing research and social interaction centres with functions in the areas of postgraduate courses, scientific research and social interaction. Their role is to actively promote greater participation by the general population

### A new research fund

The UMSS experience of transforming education is producing attractive examples for universities within Bolivia as well as other Latin American countries. An agreement has been reached between the UMSS and the Ministry of Agriculture for the creation of a new research fund. This fund aims 'to propose general guidelines for an intracultural, intercultural and transdisciplinary

reform in the public universities of Bolivia and Latin America'. International co-operating partners from Switzerland and the Netherlands (including Compas) are supporting these efforts.

The fund aims to promote active, participatory, transdisciplinary and intra- and intercultural research in the different faculties of the UMSS. It also aims at the establishment of intra- and intercultural training programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level (diploma, masters and doctorate). Furthermore, 300 lecturers will specialise in participatory, transdisciplinary and intra- and intercultural research. Undergraduate and postgraduate training programmes will be modified with flexible curriculum matrices which encompass both modern western scientific knowledge and the wisdom of the native peoples.

In this way the San Simon University (UMSS) is working to change itself in the next few years, fulfilling its mission to be a multicultural and multilingual public university at the service of all the whole Bolivian population. We hope that this will support the population of Bolivia to strengthen their cultural identity, and overcome their situation of poverty and marginalisation.

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# Integrating local wisdom into primary schools

Elena Pardo and Roció Achahui Quenti

In Cusco, in the southern Peruvian Andes, local communities are protected by Apu Ausangate, the sacred mountain. For thousands of years people have lived in relationships of care and respect for Pacha Mama or Mother Nature and the richness of her biodiversity. Families grow many different types of potato, corn, sweet tubers, quinoa and medicinal plants and their biodiversity is sustained by the cosmovision of native cultures. Communities 'raise' rather than 'manage', 'respect' rather than 'exploit' the natural world around them and nurture its diversity rather than impose homogeneity.

In our culture, we learn from our families - parents, grandparents, older brothers and sisters and from others in the community. Children "help" their parents, imitating playfully their mothers and fathers work. The child learns through living experience. Life is seen as a process of continuous learning. There is a popular saying, '*One learns from life*'. We absorb knowledge in our body and so we say '*You have a hand for plants*', or '*You have a hand for weaving*' or '*You have healing hands*'.

## Formal education

When children start school, they enter a different world. Their education is not a reflection of their reality. They are taught in Spanish and what they learn has a western, homogenising bias. Text books describe urban lifestyle and use models that devalue the principles on which peasant knowledge is based. Often teachers fail to take into account the children's culture, language and local knowledge. Young pupils undergo a process of de-personalisation: their socialisation is interrupted and they are re-socialised in a way that de-structures the way they have learned to see the world. They become frustrated and start to feel that - personally and culturally - they are being underestimated.

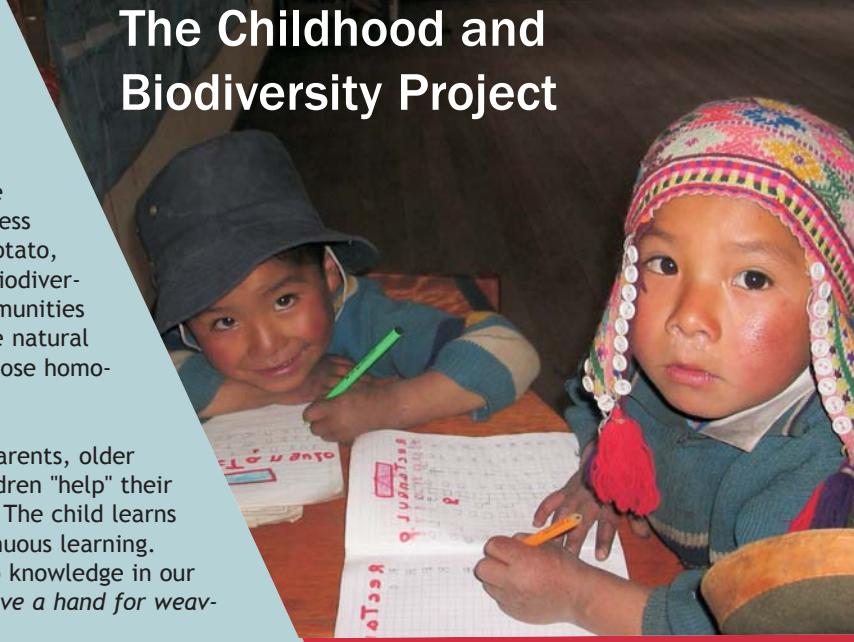
For rural populations, this process of collective un-learning has resulted in a loss of knowledge and values. At school this is reinforced by teachers who tell children: 'If you do not learn to read and write you will have to scratch the soil like your father'. Children are encouraged to reject the work of their parents, their cultural roots and the ancestral values of the community. This has meant that new generations grow up without learning the importance of biodiversity.

As teachers, we too went through a similar educational process. At school and college we were taught to reject what we had learned from our parents and we acquired prejudices. Ninety percent of teachers have lost their cultural identity and are unable to connect with peasants. The curricula, materials, methods and tools of formal education are such that the majority of parents have little interest in sending their children to school.

## Intercultural and bilingual education

In recent years, Peru's Ministry of Education has put greater emphasis on the intercultural aspect of formal education. The *National Bilingual Education Board (DINEBI)* is responsible for diversifying the curriculum, teaching Spanish as a second language in bilingual contexts and encouraging community participation. Reversing the tendency of formal education to undermine traditional culture, however, is not an easy task. In rural societies, knowledge is passed on through oral traditions in the Quechua language. In addition there is a lack of basic reference texts relating to and incorporating Andean cosmovision. Simply translating Spanish material into local languages is not enough to ensure that the richness of collective knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation.

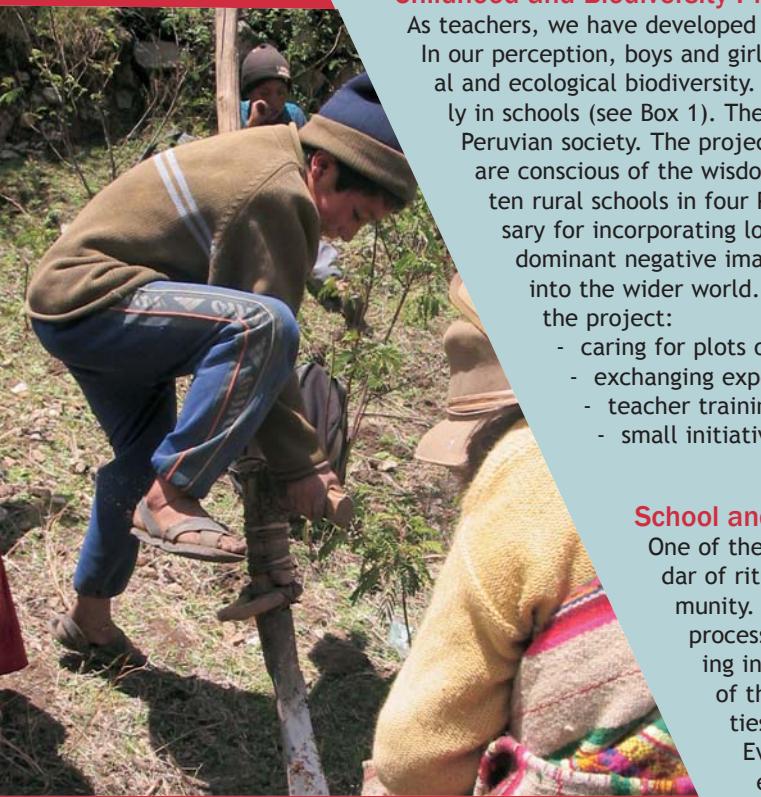
## The Childhood and Biodiversity Project





#### Box 1 Characteristics of a school according to our culture

- A school that is kind and culturally diverse, that respects the wisdom of children and community elders.
- An education that allows children to know the modern without forgetting and practising what is their legacy. This legacy is included in the curricula and it is balanced with modern scientific knowledge.
- The teacher must assume his/her role as cultural mediator.
- Parents must participate in the children's learning processes. Spaces for re-learning amongst children, teenagers and parents must be created and include aspects of Andean culture that reflect communal wisdom. Parents must begin to feel that the school is a space where children are taught to value what their parents and community have taught them.
- It is a place where children learn to read and write but also retain their ability to draw knowledge from the signs given by nature. Children must be able to learn science and intellectual abstraction and combine this with knowledge derived from tradition and their senses.
- School, children and parents must work together to regenerate biological diversity.



#### Childhood and Biodiversity Project

As teachers, we have developed the '*Childhood and Biodiversity Project*' to deal with this problem. In our perception, boys and girls from local communities are the agents who will regenerate cultural and ecological biodiversity. The project does not undermine the knowledge transmitted regularly in schools (see Box 1). The children must be fluent in Spanish in order to play an active role in Peruvian society. The project ensures that children also speak their native tongue fluently and are conscious of the wisdom it expresses. The project began four years ago and is being run in ten rural schools in four Peruvian provinces. The project aims to create the conditions necessary for incorporating local wisdom into school curricula and, in this way, to counter the dominant negative image of the peasant farmer as an illiterate who is unable to integrate into the wider world. Four main activities are carried out in the schools participating in the project:

- caring for plots of land belonging to the school and the community;
- exchanging experiences;
- teacher training;
- small initiatives that affirm cultural identity.

#### School and community plot

One of the ways to begin intercultural educational work is to develop a calendar of ritual and festivities related to agricultural activities within the community. This provides a strong framework around which the educational process can be organised. Each month's activities are then prioritised taking into account possibilities for children to be involved; the importance of the activity within community life; and opportunities to revive activities that are in decline or have disappeared.

Every school has its own field (plots) and children grow a large variety of crops. The parents and the Yayaq (elders) support these activities with the teacher taking on the role of student (see Box 2).

Children participate in clearing the land, sowing, harvesting and organising storage. Reciprocity - *ayni* (mutual help) and *minka* (payment in produce) - plays an important part in their work.



#### Box 2 The parents' experience

Mr Bonifacio Copara Rojos: "Mr Fausto teaches at the Huito community school and it is going very well. I would like both languages to be taught, Spanish and Quechua. If they only teach Quechua, the children will just speak Quechua and will not be able to defend themselves when they go to the cities. If they only speak Spanish, they will not be able to understand the community. Thus it is a good thing that they learn both languages and that the teachers include lessons on ancient customs. Our young people have forgotten to practise their customs. Today they sow without carrying out their ch'uyas (rituals). When the teacher and parents cultivate the land together, the children can see how their elders work and learn from how things should be done."

## Exchanging experiences

In addition to cultivating the plots, the school also organises other activities. Community gatherings are arranged to reflect on what is being done and there are visits to other communities to exchange experiences. Opportunities for communication are created to remind those involved of the wisdom of Andean cosmovision and the need for it to be strengthened and recreated. Children and teachers as well as community members and authorities exchange knowledge, seeds, experiences and traditional foods. We have seen that these exchanges play an important role in changing teachers' attitudes. Friendships are created and knowledge is discussed freely as we rediscover together the ways of our grandparents.



Girls from Karwi school produce posters on the meaning of colour and symbols in their clothing.

## Initiatives of cultural affirmation

Children also carry out small cultural projects: weaving, ceramics, music, dance and preparing traditional foods. During these activities, grandparents and parents frequently assume the role of the schoolteacher. Through these small initiatives and cultural activities, the ways of Andean culture become clearer to the children and their sense of initiative is stimulated. They learn to make suggestions, to disagree and to find ways of contributing to community activities. Children find these activities easier if they are encouraged from an early age in an environment of cordiality and confidence (see Box 3).

Ceprosi works in six districts of Cusco, Peru on intercultural education. Teachers are supported to be open to Andean knowledge and cosmovision and to develop Quechua reading and writing skills among the children. Ceprosi aims to contribute to the democratic values and actions like mutual respect, justice and peace in the daily lives of the villagers and children.

### Box 3 The children's experience

Lunar Cardeña from Huito community: "I can work the land, clear the ground, turn the soil. My father teaches me and I learn just by looking. I also help with sowing. During carnival we throw potato, corn and bean flowers on our land. In November we sow potatoes and in September we plant sweet and smooth potatoes. Sometimes my mother teaches me to choose the seeds. I like to work the land and I do it happily."

## Teacher training

In the beginning, the attitudes and prejudices of some teachers made it difficult to establish schools that were positive about incorporating local knowledge. Therefore, it was important to include activities designed to stimulate new and creative relationships within the school. We try to develop attitudes that are open and enable an education system to be built up that is based on the knowledge children bring from their homes. We try to enable teachers to understand and support the agricultural knowledge of the communities and help them establish an intercultural environment in school. This can be difficult because many teachers have little respect for the traditional knowledge and see it as being inferior to 'modern' knowledge (see Box 4).

### Box 4 Teacher's experience

*"When I began work in the educational centre, my life was the school and my house. I never participated in community activities. I was a foreigner to the community. When I began to participate in the Project for Childhood and Biodiversity, I remembered many experiences from my own childhood and I felt that I had not been doing the right thing. Since I was a teacher, I had power. I was the one who knew. But now I have learned to be more humble and be like the people of the community sharing their food and experiences. One day I planned to work on the plot and I did so using the rituals the community members themselves used. Afterwards the parents told me 'Now you are invited, because you are doing as we do'. Since that day, I felt happy and now when I need information about how something should be taught at school I go to the community and ask for help. I take coca or chicha, corn beer with me because this is how one must ask a favour from community dwellers. I used to order them like: 'Tomorrow we have work and you must come'. I realise now that this was a cold way of doing things. That has all changed now and I am happy with what I teach and learn from my students, parents and community dwellers. I am in a process of continuous learning."* (Federico Tunque)



Boys play melodies to accompany the sowing of maize near the educational institute of Chachapoyas.

## Promising results

Project results have been promising. The children's role in the regeneration of biodiversity is clearly visible both in the school grounds and on the family plots. Parents are proud of the fact that they were invited as teachers by the schools and they increasingly ask us for courses on rural as well as urban life. They tell us that they agree with the focus of our programme because it stimulates their children's respect for culture and the community's way of life.

Teachers - male as well as female - have reoriented their professional practice. Many of them have found that this project has allowed them to rediscover and appreciate the value of their own roots. The teachers that participate in the project have developed an educational network. The National Board for Rural Bilingual Intercultural Education, dependent on the Education Ministry, has also shown interest in our project and has provided economic support for many activities as well as for publishing some of our material. Little by little, the Childhood and Biodiversity Project is generating contributions that flow between local and national as well as regional levels of education.

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# The *Tai Baan* village-researchers of the Lower Mekong Basin

## Improving wetland management through participatory learning strategies

David J.H. Blake and Rattaphon Pitakthepsombut

In several river-based communities of Northeast Thailand, *Tai Baan* or villager-centred participatory research has proven to be an effective tool in monitoring natural resources and conceptualising livelihood linkages. Local people draw on their extensive knowledge of local natural resources to document bio-cultural diversity, thereby offering alternatives to the conventional approaches to natural resources management, in particular water management strategies. The *Tai Baan* Research is helping fishers, farmers and other wetland resource users to identify ways of improving the use of the fragile wetlands on which their livelihoods and culture depend.

The Pak Mun Dam in Northeast Thailand was built as a 136 megawatt capacity hydropower project between from 1990-94, near the confluence of the Mun and Mekong Rivers. The controversial dam decimated what had been one of the most productive river fishery sites in the region, blocking fish migrations and drowning out rapids, while producing far less power than anticipated. Even before the dam was built, local villagers and NGOs predicted it would have far-reaching negative environmental and socio-economic impacts.

### Expert environmental studies

Their concerns were brushed aside by state officials and experts hired to conduct environmental studies. It took the accumulated evidence of seven years of cultural, social and environmental degradation, plus prolonged protests by villagers both locally and in the capital, before the Thai government eventually agreed to experimentally allow the river to run freely for a year. The water gates were opened, and a regional university was hired to conduct an official impact assessment and future options study.

Wary of externally generated official studies, villagers in the Pak Mun area enlisted the support of the Southeast Asian Rivers Network (SEARIN), a regional NGO, to help prepare their own parallel study. It was named 'Tai Baan Research' (Tai Baan means 'village people' in the local Lao dialect) and was initiated in 2001. Using this locally appropriate, villager-centred approach, the villagers documented local fish biodiversity and demonstrated that once the river was able to flow freely again the riverine ecosystem was resilient enough to par-

tially recover. The results and experience gained also contributed to validating *Tai Baan* as a valuable research instrument.

In spite of the lessons gained from Pak Mun, government agencies concerned with water management continue to make plans to build various top-down water management schemes (often termed 'mega-projects') across Northeast Thailand. Such schemes would risk altering the flow and flood regimes of the river and associated wetlands, putting at risk the livelihoods of many thousands of households who depend on the natural fisheries and aquatic biodiversity of the lower river floodplains.

### Demonstration site

In 1999, the seasonal and permanent wetland habitats in the Lower Songkhram River Basin were identified as wetlands of international significance by Thailand's Office of Natural Resources and Environment Policy and Planning. The area was later selected as the Thailand Demonstration Site for the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP)<sup>1</sup>, as an important wetland site to pilot conservation-based activities focusing on capacity building of local institutions. Within the context of this programme, local communities are being assisted and empowered to participate in the assessment and monitoring of wetland resources.

One of the aims of the MWBP Lower Songkhram Basin Demonstration Site is to obtain relevant data about past and present aquatic resources use as a means to better understanding wetlands-based livelihoods. It is also concerned with ensuring higher grassroots



Paw Sanit, a fisher and *Tai Baan* Researcher, holds up a pba kae (*Bagarius yarelli*) catfish, caught in a net harvesting downstream migrating fish.

Photo: David Blake

participation in decision-making for improved river basin management. The process was supported by the earlier SEARIN experiences gained with *Tai Baan* Research with communities on the Mun River.

### Tai Baan experiences

For many villagers the *Tai Baan* Research approach was at first difficult to accept as they were more accustomed to a culture of top-down planning and scant local participation. Therefore, the idea of participating in local studies whose outcome could be used to potentially influence government policy was a challenging concept. In addition, they would be taking part in a study which offered no immediate material advantage. In fact, it would cost them time and required resource users to share specialised knowledge about such things as fish species and fishing gears with outsiders, something they were initially cautious about, as some of these gears are considered illegal by the state.

Moreover, local people are often unaccustomed to talking about their everyday livelihood activities to relative strangers in a research context. They instinctively know the local names of habitat types, fish, other aquatic organ-





Photo: David Blake

*A group of Tai Baan Researchers and MWBP staff from Thailand and Cambodia gather together whilst collecting riverine vegetation samples next to the Mekong River in Stung Treng Province, Cambodia during an exchange visit between Demonstration Sites.*

isms and numerous beneficial plants consumed daily, but rarely think that this knowledge could be of interest to outsiders.

Despite the initial scepticism, some 240 villagers decided to join what came to be known as the Lower Songkhrum River Basin Tai Baan Research Network, and took part in the programme as participating researchers and co-learners.

### Research steps

To succeed, Tai Baan research requires time, patience and flexibility on the part of both village researchers and external facilitators, who are known as 'Research Assistants'. A first important step is generating interest in the approach and the way it can be used to understand and sustain natural and cultural diversity. Because it involves participatory processes of co-learning, those taking part must feel confident that they are the owners of the information they collect.

Then steps were taken to train the research assistants to support villager research activities. Together with village researchers they identified local needs and interests, and formulated specific research objectives. Tai Baan researchers from the four communities met in a workshop and agreed that there were six priority issues that needed to be addressed: fish species and ecology, fishing gear, flooded forest vegetation, agricultural systems including riverbank agriculture, raising of large livestock, and local habitats/ecosystems.

The village researchers split into sub-groups and refined the specific research topics within each issue, for example livelihood importance, past trends versus current use and availabilities

of resources, economic importance, and cultural and social significance of the identified resources. The Tai Baan researchers started to collect and exchange necessary background information.

### Closely involved

In four Lower Songkhrum River Basin communities, a large body of data was assembled on the seasonal variations in the villagers' wetlands resource-based economy, and its complex ecological setting. From June 2003 onwards, the MWBP Research Assistants organised informal village meetings, arranged exchange visits between communities, and consulted key stakeholders in the locality. During these visits, villagers were able to study examples of different approaches to conservation, including fish conservation pools and community-managed forests.

By becoming closely involved in village activities and building up relationships of trust, friendship and a sense of common purpose, the outside Research Assistants not only played an important role in helping develop the Tai Baan process, they also helped sustain it together with the Researchers. They were frequently in the villages, ate and drank with the families, helped with household tasks and participated in religious, cultural and social events.

### Identification and study

Villagers would meet regularly in their own villages to study and discuss the different research topics. From time to time results would be exchanged with other villages during meetings arranged for this purpose. The amount of data collected grew quickly and was consolidated, summarised and presented during periodic Progress Workshops. These

workshops were attended by Tai Baan researchers, local and provincial government officials, NGO stakeholders, MWBP staff from across the region, as well as civil society representatives. Presenting their results to outsiders and dealing with questions and comments increased the confidence, capacity and determination of the villager researchers. It ensured that they were profiled as the owners of the Tai Baan research results. It also provided them with an opportunity to learn from the experience of other villagers, made it possible to evaluate their findings, and incorporate suggestions in their adaptive research plans.

### Sri Songkhrum fish festival

The actual research phase of the programme lasted about 18 months. During that time the Tai Baan researchers patiently went on gathering data relating to the priorities they themselves had set, and exchanged results between villages in their own native dialect. At the same time, the Tai Baan Research Network formed in the four villages was encouraged to take part in other environment-related events. Villagers took part, for example, in various activities organised by the MWBP Demonstration Site, including annual World Wetlands Day events, as well as the Sri Songkhrum Fish Festival, a two-day celebration of the ethnically diverse local culture and traditions, with an emphasis on fish and fisheries.

The Tai Baan Research Network took advantage of these events to present their results to the general public. Using posters, displays and stage presentations, they graphically highlighted the links between local ecosystems, in particular the unique seasonally inundated riverine forest or *paa bung paa thaam*, and village livelihoods. This brought villagers into contact with new ideas and practices, including ways of adding value to wetlands products, such as improved processing and cooperative marketing.

During the second and third phases of the Tai Baan Research, further information was collected and gaps filled. Each phase ended with its own workshop and reports, while outside agencies continued to be invited to share and comment on findings. In the final progress report researchers presented their detailed findings on all the issues covered by the research.

### Strengthening local regulations

Their experience with the Tai Baan Research Network made villagers more secure about the way in which the research findings could help them to

understand and improve the management of their local natural resource base. The information that went into the final Tai Baan Research report became the basis for discussing local natural resource management and conservation, both within the village and at higher levels. Already some villages have begun to strengthen the rules and regulations relating to the wetland areas within their communities.

In Ban Tha Bor village, for example, Researchers are planning to expand their community forest area and have entered into negotiations with a local agribusiness company for the return of a disputed area of common land and are questioning the value of expanding mono-crop eucalyptus plantations locally.

While the Lower Songkram Basin Tai Baan Research Network concentrates on expanding research activities to four new villages, the original village research groups contemplate their next focal research topics. Fishers would like to learn more about local freshwater mollusc diversity, for example, and they want to show how irrigation weirs have affected the flow and ecology of the Nam Yam River to the detriment of the size and diversity of their catch. They are also keen to build up evidence to support their case for authorities concerned with adopting locally appropriate water management methods with minimal ecological impacts.

### Local language publications

In April 2005 a book - 'The Ecology and History of the paa bung paa thaam in the Lower Songkram River Basin' - was published in Thai with an executive summary in English. It presented a summary of the Tai Baan Research findings and delved into the special significance of the seasonally inundated forest for

local livelihoods.

All the villagers who had taken part in the programme were credited and received a copy of the book. To increase awareness of the effectiveness of the Tai Baan approach the book was also distributed to local schools and educational institutes as well as stakeholders in both government and the private sector. A second book has recently been published on the fish biodiversity of the Lower Songkram Basin, based on the indigenous knowledge collected by Tai Baan researchers, with detailed photos by the research assistants.

### Tai Baan replication

As a result of the project, various State institutions at the sub-district, district and provincial levels have also become interested in Tai Baan Research and in finding ways to adapt it to their needs. The Nakhon Phanom Provincial Natural Resources and Environment Office, which has been involved with the MWBP Thailand Demonstration Site as a partner organisation from the start, is considering promoting the approach in other parts of the province.

Areas where Tai Baan research is currently being introduced include some of the most critically threatened natural riverine sites in Northern Thailand, including the Upper Mekong in Chiang Rai Province, the Salween River in Mae Hong Son Province opposite Burma, and the Yom River in Phrae Province. As Thailand's process of decentralisation proceeds, it is hoped that Sub-district Administration Organisations will begin to include a Tai Baan component when considering local development projects.

### Beyond Thailand

Despite differences in social and political organisation, the four riparian gov-

ernments of the Lower Mekong Basin - Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam - face similar problems as far as the conservation of fragile wetland ecosystems are concerned. Researchers and Research Assistants involved in the Tai Baan programme have gone on to help spread the approach to communities along the braided mainstream of the Mekong River in Stung Treng Province, northeastern Cambodia, also a MWBP Demonstration Site.

Similar efforts are also being made to include a similar component in Attapeu Province in Southern Lao DPR, and in the Plain of Reeds in the Northern Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. The Tai Baan Research approach has demonstrated that local communities in the Lower Mekong Basin can contribute significantly to understanding and conserving fragile wetland habitats.

The active involvement of villagers at all stages of the research process provides a concrete way of ensuring that adequate attention is given to livelihood concerns, as well as traditions and practices that define local culture and conservation practices. As new sites of Tai Baan Research are established and exchanges are facilitated, knowledge networks amongst local wetland resource users are strengthened. They provide important alternative voices for improving the utilisation and ecological management of the threatened Mekong Basin wetlands, which underpin the livelihoods of countless households that depend on the continued health of the natural fisheries and wetland resource base.

Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP<sup>2</sup>)  
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1, 2 MWBP is a joint programme of the four riparian governments of the Lower Mekong Basin - Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam - managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), The World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), in collaboration with and other key stakeholders. With core funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the programme aims to address the most critical issues for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources of the Mekong wetlands.

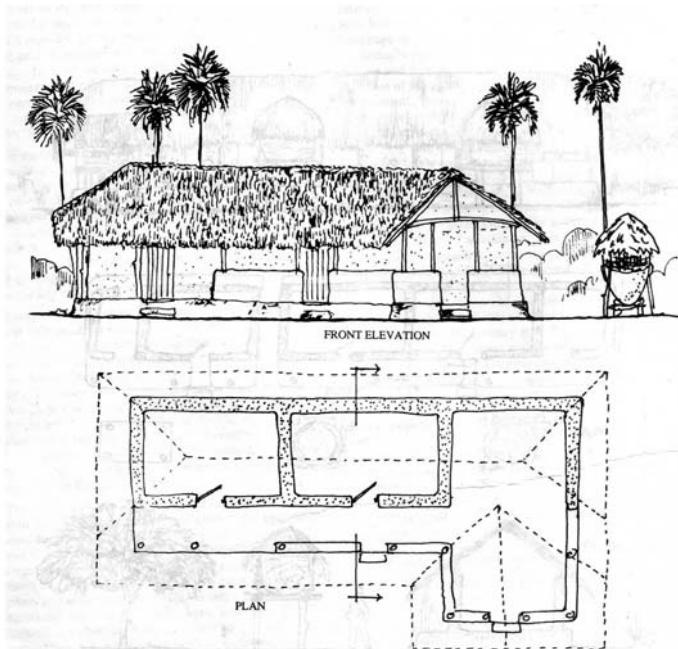


Paw Gee, a Tai Baan Researcher from Ban Tha Bor village, explains to project visitors about the ecology and habitat of pba bueg or the giant Mekong catfish (*Pangasianodon gigas*) on a map of the riverine ecosystem he drew himself.

# Unveiling hidden treasures

## Joint learning to revitalise traditional knowledge

Sirisena Attanayake, Nimal Hewanila and Chesha Wettasinha



In 2003 the Compas Network in Sri Lanka invited several new organisations to join the network. Among them were Biodiversity Research Information and Training Centre (BRIT) and Friends of Lanka (FOL). Both organisations are involved in a broad range of rural development activities and have a special interest in traditional knowledge. This article presents the experiences of these two NGOs in revitalising traditional knowledge: BRIT, which has taken up the challenge to research *Vaastu*, or traditional architecture, and FOL, which is focusing on traditional snake bite treatments.

Biodiversity Research Information and Training Centre (BRIT) in Badulla, Uva Province, and Friends of Lanka (FOL) in Kegalle, Sabaragamuwa Province, are both experienced development organisations. Still, aspects of traditional knowledge and the endogenous development approach as a whole, were quite new to the fieldworkers.

Every step in the processes described here has been a learning experience on how to unveil and revitalise traditional knowledge for endogenous development. This article describes the approach followed and insights gained by these groups over the past two years.

### BRIT re-discovering *Vaastu*

BRIT was set up on June 5, 1994 - World Environment Day. This was a fitting and auspicious start for an organisation that had restoration of the degrading environment as a key goal. This goal was embedded in the vision of BRIT's founders - that man should live in harmony with nature and the universe, which is governed by universal powers both seen and unseen. Since its start BRIT has been involved in activities in many remote villages in the Badulla district. These activities focused on stimulating biodiversity in home gardens, non-chemical farming, renewable energy, community mobilisation, leadership

training for school children, and strengthening of civil society.

During a Compas meeting in 2003, BRIT was challenged to go into a largely uncharted area of indigenous knowledge: *Vaastu*, or the traditional architecture in Sri Lanka. Since then, researching and documenting traditional architecture related to house and kitchen construction has been the main activity within the Compas-BRIT programme. Every step in the on-going process has been a learning experience at community level, within the BRIT team, and at the level of the university (University of Moratuwa's Department of Architecture).

*Vaastu* is a broad field of science which includes the construction of houses, public and religious buildings, as well as their direct surroundings. *Vaastu* not only encompasses the design and construction of the buildings, but also the design of the home gardens, household utensils and agricultural implements. It takes into account energy flows, human health aspects, and colour combinations that have the best effects on the residents of the house.

### Learning steps

#### Step 1

#### Team getting better acquainted

Although the BRIT team had a general idea about *Vaastu*, they needed to get

more acquainted with the subject. As a first step they met with several persons well-known for their traditional knowledge on a range of subjects, including architecture. During these discussions, the BRIT team got a better insight into the breadth of knowledge embodied within *Vaastu*.

#### Step 2

#### Identification of IK resource persons

The BRIT team visited villages in the area and invited people with traditional knowledge in whatever form (architecture, medicine, handicrafts, food technology) for informal gatherings. During these open discussions, it became clear that a vast wealth of traditional knowledge was still alive among the people.

Within the next two months, 48 resource persons identified through these meetings were invited to come to BRIT's training centre for further discussions. Some of the *Vaastu* resource persons, though holders of knowledge, were not actively using it. They were enthusiastic that renewed attention was being paid to their experience.

#### Step 3

#### Creating a *Vaastu* group

The group decided to meet once a month at BRIT's training centre for a two-day workshop, with the purpose of sharing knowledge and documenting it.

Several topics related to Vaastu are discussed at each meeting. The topics are decided on in advance, so that the resource persons can prepare themselves before coming to the workshop

The information shared is thoroughly debated, after which the group decides what should be documented. In this way, the group hopes to make an inventory on Vaastu that compiles their collective knowledge. They hope the document will not only be a way of conserving this knowledge, but also a means of popularising it (see Box 1). The group has sought formal registration with the local authorities and is now known as the Uva Traditional Experts Forum.

#### Step 4 Checklist for documentation

Another important means of learning about Vaastu is to visit a house and study the various Vaastu features.

Though many of these old houses have now been demolished, several can still be studied. It was decided to identify these houses in the district and to make a short inventory. The Vaastu resource persons helped BRIT in preparing a checklist of aspects that should be recorded. BRIT's social mobilisers were given a short training in how to use this checklist to make descriptions of the houses. A total of 230 houses were identified and recorded.

#### Step 5 University research to validate Vaastu

Realising the role that validation by western science can play in reviving Vaastu knowledge, BRIT has built up contact with Prof. Nimal de Silva at the University of Moratuwa's Department of Architecture, to discuss possible collaboration. The request was received very positively and a group of post graduate students from the university visited BRIT to further document Vaastu practices under the guidance of Prof. de Silva.

The students lived for several days in the villages with selected families and did a detailed study of 30 house-



*The ancestral home of the Jayasundera Bandara family - one of the homes in the Vaastu study of BRIT.*

holds selected from the 230 houses identified by BRIT. Design of houses, instruments and implements, spiritual aspects, traditional furniture, clothing and jewellery were aspects included in the study. These data were discussed and analysed between the students, Vaastu resource persons and BRIT staff.

The outcome was compiled in a report, which can serve for future learning/teaching and lobbying purposes. Several students from the group have decided to take up postgraduate research into Vaastu knowledge.

#### Teacher – pupil transfer

In traditional Sri Lankan society, transfer of knowledge usually took place in the form of teacher - pupil transfer or *Guru-Gola Parampara*. The student was an apprentice under the teacher, and learned by watching, listening and doing. A teacher selected a student using a list of criteria which included, among others, the time of birth and constellation of stars at time of birth, attitude, lifestyle, and habits. Often it was a child from within the family.

Due to the decreasing interest of the younger generation, this transfer

has dwindled leading to a loss of knowledge whenever a teacher dies without grooming a pupil. BRIT discussed this matter with the Vaastu resource persons, and many of them who did not

#### Box 2 Experiences of owners from Vaastu homes documented

*"We were enthused by the great interest shown by the students and their eagerness to learn. They went into detail on each and every aspect, and asked us lots of questions. They were also very surprised that we had preserved so many old implements and tools. We, in turn, realised that the knowledge and resources we have are very valuable...we are immensely satisfied that we could share this with others. We were very glad that they lived with us and experienced our way of life - even for a short period. They sent us back copies of the photos they took. When I look at the photos I feel proud of my possessions. The students now maintain contact with us and promised they would return to learn more from us."*

have a pupil became eager to find one. A number of young people interested in becoming pupils were identified. Members of the forum willing to be teachers were also identified and one to two students were assigned to a teacher.

The initiative was inaugurated with a ceremony in which the teachers pledged to teach their pupils without withholding any knowledge. The pupils promised to do their best to learn and respect their teachers. Although the pupils will not live together with their teachers as was done traditionally, they will meet with each other regularly. In addition the pupils will join the monthly meetings of the forum.

#### Box 1 Experiences from the Uva Traditional Experts Forum

*"Coming together as a group has motivated us to share and pass on our knowledge. The lack of recognition for this knowledge has caused the younger generation to move away and lose interest. We hope that this forum can revive this valuable science, and attract young people to practise it again. Each one of us can recall bad situations due to faulty house constructions. This may be due to bad design, not following the auspicious times, or placing the house on the wrong site or plot of land. As a result the residents have faced many trials - sickness, unhappiness, and even death. Such ill effects can be avoided if the proper Vaastu practices are adhered to. People should once again become aware of these practices and we hope to play a role in making this happen."*





*Inauguration ceremony for the teacher-pupil transfer of knowledge initiative about Vaastu. Mr Jayatileke of BRIT offers betel leaves to one of the teachers, in a gesture of respect and of marking a good start.*

### Learning and sharing

Another activity undertaken by BRIT and the Vaastu forum is publishing a newsletter. Members of the forum contribute the articles, while eight of them form the editorial board. One thousand copies of the first 4-page issue have been distributed through various channels, resulting in increased public interest in the forum and its work. Some of the Vaastu practitioners have already been contacted by people for advice and consultation on house building.

Sharing of experiences with Vaastu also takes place through local and national NGO networks. Moreover, through one of its staff members, BRIT is now linked to community radio in Badulla on health-related topics. He intends to discuss Vaastu from a health perspective and invite some members of the forum for a panel discussion. BRIT also plans to document several case studies to illustrate the effects of Vaastu on human health and well-being. Many writings on Vaastu have been collected, some going back hundreds of years. These also help to understand the theory behind Vaastu.

### FOL revives traditional healing

According to the Sri Lankan NGO Friends of Lanka many people in the rural villages still die of snake bites. Meanwhile, traditional snake bite healers are moving away from active practice due to lack of formal recognition. As a result there is also a gradual loss in knowledge of plants used for traditional snake bite treatment. FOL initiated activities to support research on traditional snake bite treatments. They hope to use the results for policy dia-

logue to enhance recognition of traditional snake bite healing, as well as of traditional healing as a whole.

### Forum of snake bite healers

The steps followed by FOL are quite similar to those of BRIT. First, the traditional snake bite healers still working in the area were identified. They included both men and women. The number of snake bite healers (75) compared to the population in the area (8000) was amazingly high. Although their major focus is on snake bites, these healers also deal with other poisonous insects and reptiles such as scorpions, tarantulas, lizards, wasps etc. After initial meetings, the group of healers decided to meet regularly and formalise the group in the form of an association. They have appointed a committee consisting of a president, secretary and treasurer.

The monthly meetings of the snake bite healers association are dedicated

to topics agreed upon in advance. Each healer writes down the healing methods used related to the topic in advance, mainly in the form of *mantras* (chants) and prescriptions of herbal remedies. During the meeting the healers take turns in sharing this information. A lively discussion follows each presentation, in which questions are posed, disagreements are put forward, and clarifications are made. Important data is recorded by one of the healers. The write-ups of the healers are photocopied and distributed to the rest of the group. In this way, each healer has collected about 300 healing methods for poisonous bites.

### Preparation of rare medicines

During these meetings, special attention is also given to the medicinal herbs and plants used in snake bite treatment. With the loss of biodiversity, and healers moving away from active practice, many of the herbs and plants needed for snake bite treatment are gradually disappearing. The older generation of healers still have a vast knowledge of medicinal plants - both wild and cultivated.

The need to conserve the medicinal plants and related knowledge became clear during the meetings of the healers. They started bringing samples of plants to the meetings and discussing their medicinal characteristics. In addition, many of them are now propagating the plants in their home gardens, in order to build up small herbal gardens (see Box 3).

Coming together as a group has also allowed the preparation of several rare medicines which many of the healers could not afford to undertake. Sometimes this was due to lack of finances, the inability to access the necessary medicinal plants, or not being aware of the necessary mantras required for their preparation. The healer with the necessary experience

### Box 3 Experiences of traditional snake bite healer Mrs L.R. Podimenike from Kankeeriya

*"I am very happy about this association. I learnt traditional healing from my father and treat people whenever they come to me. But I had more or less given up on active practice, as I felt that traditional healers are not recognised. But now I am encouraged to continue and have started active practice again. I have learned a lot from the more experienced healers at the meetings. Access to the medicinal herbal oils and pills is of great advantage to me, as I would not have been able to prepare these on my own. I have started to propagate some medicinal plants and hope to have a small herbal garden of my own soon."*



*Child bitten by a snake.*



would invite the other healers to join him in the process of preparation of medical remedy and learn from it. These medicines were then shared among the whole group, which is experienced as a great benefit by the healers.

## Registration

According to national regulations, any person involved in alternative medicine is required to be registered with the Department of Indigenous Medicine. Unlike practitioners of recognised indigenous sciences, such as Ayurveda and Siddha, the criteria laid down by the government makes it difficult for traditional snake bite healers to receive such registration. In such cases, the healer is interviewed by an evaluator of the Department of Indigenous Medicine, who then gives a recommendation for or against registration. The social acceptance gained through registration is highly valued by traditional healers.

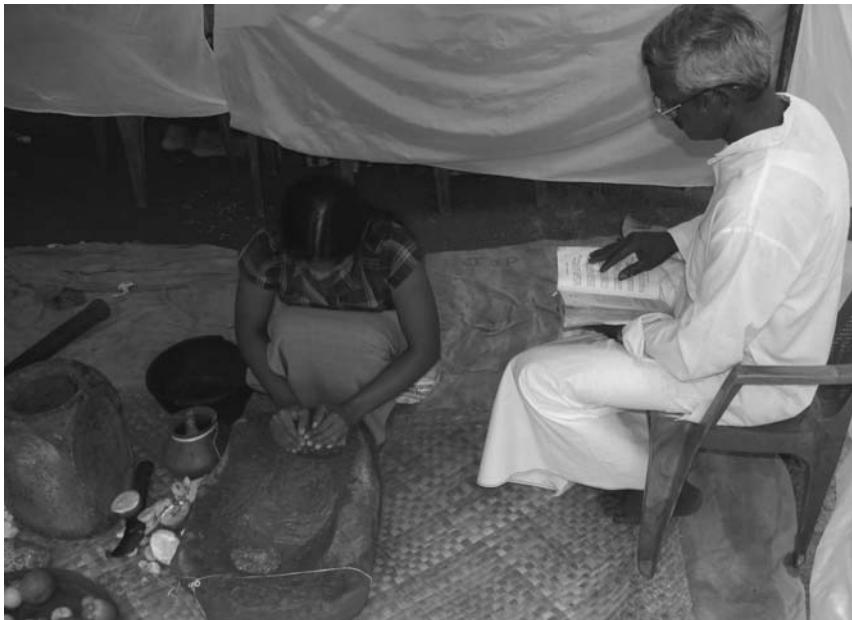
This issue of formal recognition has been discussed quite extensively within the group. FOL has held to the opinion that the healers do not need to seek formal registration at this stage. Instead they prefer to build up sufficient confidence and social recognition of the healers' group, and show their record of success. The data collected by the group provides sufficient proof for this record of success: from the approximately 33,000 persons who have sought treatment, no fatalities have been reported.

However, some of the healers in the group are strongly motivated to seek registration. The president of the association has therefore arranged for an evaluator of the Department of Indigenous Medicine to visit the group, and conduct the interviews.

## Further exchange

Joining the network has also enabled the group of traditional healers to get in touch with other healers through visits to other Compas partner organisations in Naula (in Sri Lanka) and South India. Naula Rural Development Foundation is situated in north-central Sri Lanka, the part of the country considered to be the seat of traditional knowledge in many subjects including medicine. Therefore the healers were very interested in meeting their counterparts in Naula. The trip was organised by FOL and provided an opportunity for the healers to share experiences in snakebite treatment.

In addition, they were also very interested in learning more about the spiritual aspects of crop protection used in Naula for guarding crops against



*Daughter of healer learns to prepare herbal medicine for snakebite treatment, while Buddhist mantras are recited by an experienced healer.*

attacks from elephants and other wild animals. They identified areas in which they could exchange experiences in the future. The exchange visit to South India was organised by the Regional Coordinator of the Compas Network. One member of the snake bite healers' forum took part in this exciting learning experience.

FOL has also organised two meetings between snake bite healers and people from GOs and NGOs in the area. The two main issues on the agenda were biodiversity conservation, particularly of medicinal plants, and recognition of the knowledge and skills of traditional snake bite healers. During these meetings, five healers from the association presented their first-hand experiences. One of the points that grabbed the attention of the participants was the success rates mentioned by the healers. Such events contribute to a gradual change in the attitudes of government officials and NGO staff towards the relevance and potential of indigenous practices for development.

## Interaction with university

In spite of various constraints in trying to establish contacts with a university, Prof. Nimal Fonseka from the Faculty of Agriculture in the University of Peradeniya has now shown interest in the field of indigenous knowledge in agriculture. FOL's general opinion of the university staff is that the majority look down on indigenous practices, and are not yet ready for open discussion and dialogue on the subject. Yet, FOL realises the need to undertake research that is credible also at the level of universities, and has found that it is often a question of finding the right person.

This collaborative effort with the university has resulted in joint research on 'social services through snake bite healers' which has sufficient credibility also from an academic point of view. The data for the study is being collected through household interviews by FOL volunteers. The results will be processed by FOL staff and reviewed by Prof. Nimal Fonseka.

FOL has also contacted the medical faculty of the University of Peradeniya for topical research.

## Great enthusiasm

These learning initiatives on the Vaastu traditional architecture and traditional snake bite healers have created a great deal of enthusiasm - not only amongst the traditional knowledge holders themselves, but also amongst other stakeholders. As these learning groups grow and share their knowledge more widely, the position of these traditional knowledge holders to influence policy will no doubt be strengthened. The hope is that these traditional practices will be further recognised and rejuvenated, so that they grow into important pathways towards endogenous development.

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# Training of fieldworkers for endogenous development

Cesar Escobar

The training method of the Agruco team is based on the combination of two elements: on the one hand the practical experience of learning *in and from* communities, and on the other the results of scientific research in a range of subjects. This implies a combination of both Andean and western ways of knowing. The content of the training programme, therefore, is a practical application of the way in which Andean and western ways of knowing can complement each other.

Our understanding of development

as the result of joint action, in which two opposing but complementary ways of knowing play a role, is based on shared experiences between Andean communities and the Agruco team over a period of twenty years. As an outcome of this experience, the main objective of the Agruco training programme of fieldworkers is 'developing the ability to engage in a dialogue between Andean and western ways of knowing, and transform this into practical applications which enhance endogenous development'.

## Box 1 Agruco's learning in the three spheres of endogenous development

- **Learning in the material sphere:** Agruco has moved from the perspective of organic agriculture → learning from peasant wisdom → agro-ecology based on peasant needs → to integration of the production system with other systems. Activities are initiated which support production to meet local demands, and strengthen local economic, social and spiritual activities. The results include improvements in production, higher nutritional levels of food crops, and in the value placed on local resources.
- **Learning in the social sphere:** Agruco has moved from understanding the importance of social organisation in agricultural production → organising meetings with the traditional authorities → to the full participation of students in these community events. This has resulted in the re-validation of the traditional authorities, strengthening of trade union organisations, and greater participation by the population in local government through Integrated Community Projects for Self-management and Sustainable Development. (PICADS)
- **Learning in the spiritual sphere:** Agruco has moved from understanding the relationship between material production, social organisation and spirituality to the concept of a native peasant community in whose life there is a balance between material, social and spiritual spheres of life. This has resulted in the re-evaluation of the ritual calendar and greater self-esteem regarding indigenous knowledge and the relationship between man and nature, countering the attacks of evangelical sects on these expressions of traditional ritual.

Experiences with endogenous development are based on the contextual and historical patterns of each community. It is, therefore, difficult to extract directly transferable recipes or packages from them for the training of fieldworkers elsewhere. The commonality of the experiences lies in the approach used: supporting development that is based on what people already have and know. This article describes how Agruco, the university centre in Cochabamba, Bolivia, applies social learning and participatory research in training the team of fieldworkers. It is an example of training of fieldworkers for endogenous development.

## Social learning

Social learning is one of the pillars for initiating this dialogue, and implies a joint learning process between local and external actors about specific themes relating to community development. This requires two preconditions, the first of which is a horizontal relationship between the different actors, especially between members of the community and those who come from outside. The second condition is that all involved accept that all knowledge is intrinsically valid, without the presupposition that western knowledge (generally possessed by the external actors) is superior to local knowledge.

Once these conditions have been fulfilled, it is important to approach social learning as a process. That is, a particular subject can not be considered to have been adequately and definitively dealt with, just because the students' time in the community has come to an end. Rather, the participatory research work on a particular topic is considered part of a community process which continues beyond the presence of the external actor involved.

## Research and reflection

Social learning does not only imply research, nor just the process of developing a defined project, but the combination of the two. Scientific research on a range of topics, and coordinated by a research programme, is combined with efforts to support and enhance the

capacity of the communities to formulate proposals and implement field activities and projects, known as PICADS (Integrated Community Projects for Self-management and Sustainable Development).

The training method of the Agruco team thus comprises three elements: theoretical and methodological training at a conceptual level, practical experience, and theoretical reflection. This theoretical reflection is based on the outcomes of both development projects and scientific research.

#### Four fundamental stages

Endogenous development implies understanding rural reality from the Andean worldview, which includes material, social and spiritual spheres. These three elements are also reflected in the different stages of Agruco's institutional learning process in each one of these areas (Box 1).

Since the 1980s Agruco has broadened its vision of development, starting from promoting organic agriculture in communities to the concept of promoting endogenous development as the fruit of a dialogue between Andean and western knowledge systems. This has been expressed in, for example, the curriculum content of the masters programme in Agro-ecology, Culture and Sustainable Development, which has now completed its fifth version. The experiences with these five master programmes have been fundamental in the theoretical reflection on endogenous development.

Based on the Andean worldview with the material, social and spiritual spheres, four stages in social learning within the training programme have been identified. This process is continually enriched by interaction with other actors from within and outside of Agruco:

1. the two-way sharing of information between outsiders and community members, with outsiders participating in local events;
2. joint action research based on the knowledge acquired by the community members with the support of the outsiders, aiming at improving local practices based on local criteria;
3. the exchange of experiences between local actors about the improved practices and other lessons learned; and
4. the dissemination of the lessons learned during this process to other organisations.

#### Difficulties

The training process within the Agruco

team has encountered some important difficulties, which we have gradually been able to overcome. These difficulties include, for example, the team's initial lack of knowledge of the internal rules, communication and responsibilities within the communities; the felt need to differentiate Agruco from other support organisations; the need to come up with practical and useful outcomes of the research to justify the activities within the communities; and the quest for 'legitimacy' within the faculty of agronomy of which Agruco is a part.

Overcoming these difficulties has been an important element in the training programme of the fieldworkers. To better surmount these difficulties, we also aim to work more in the following areas: coordinating activities with other support organisations working in the communities; establishing better links with spiritual leaders; and strengthening primary education and local communication media in the communities.

#### Personal commitment

The training for endogenous development can be evaluated as positive when the fieldworkers have developed a personal commitment to work for agro-ecology and endogenous development, as well as sensitivity to the situation of the local population they are working with. This does not finish at the end of the training period. Instead, the main objective of the training implies stimulating the fieldworkers to continue their learning process in a permanent and autonomous way. The key, therefore, lies in awakening the permanent motivation of the fieldworker to be committed towards the situation of the local population.

According to an evaluation carried out by Agruco in 1997, 80% of the students who had completed the undergraduate programme were working in development organisations with peasant communities, and were applying what they had learned in one way or another.

The impact which Agruco has had on other institutions has not only been achieved through its graduates, but also through means of its printed publications, video and audio materials, and the sharing of its experiences at academic events and with indigenous peasant organisations. Lately there have also been discussions with central government bodies, as well as municipal governments.

#### Constant reflection

Reflection and debate - as indicated - are fundamental to the self-training process, not just in academic circles, but also in grass-roots organisations. We also believe that the structure and content of the self-training process is not only for the field professional. Rather, it should be present constantly in all areas of the daily life of all people: in their worldview, their feelings, their thoughts and their presence in the world.

Only through this process of constant reflection and personal development can we make a real contribution to endogenous development in our own community, as well as in the indigenous peasant communities.

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*The training for endogenous development needs to awaken a personal motivation to be committed towards the situation of the local population, as well as a sensitivity to the practices and worldview other than their own.*





# Revival of tribal dormitory education

K.J.N. Gowtham Shankar

The Eastern Ghats area in India is the homeland of about 60 tribal communities with a total population of around 6.5 million people. The majority of these tribes live in hilly, forested areas. Each tribal group has a distinct lifestyle based on their belief in nature and the spiritual world. The local NGO Integrated Development through Environmental Awakening (IDEA) promotes endogenous development. This article describes how IDEA has revived a traditional form of education, the Gothul or tribal dormitory education, based on the concept of emotional integration and awakening.

The modernisation process and the influx of non-tribal cultures have influenced the life of the 60 tribal communities in the Eastern Ghats of India to a great extent. This started around 1960 and has accelerated in recent decades. Indiscriminate felling of trees for timber and the paper industry has resulted in large-scale deforestation. This rapid depletion of forest cover has disturbed the ecological balance in the region, leading to reduced rainfall and forcing a change in cropping patterns. Depleted forests, denuded soils and reduced groundwater levels have caused a severe decline in the diversity of traditional roots, herbs and tubers.

Modernisation has also entered into this remote area in the form of formal education. When attending the local

schools the tribal children have to adapt their dress and language, as well as their ways of seeking answers to their questions. Traditional ways of learning are largely ignored in this process. The changing scenario poses serious threats to the tribal societies. IDEA is supporting the tribal communities as they face these challenges, and together they are developing alternatives based on tribal strengths and culture.

## Tradition with modernity

Traditionally, tribal indigenous knowledge is preserved in a variety of forms that include songs, proverbs, folk tales, rituals, festivals and experimentation, as well as customary regulations with social control. Children and young peo-

ple observe and imitate their parents and other elders in daily life. Once they are 13-14 years of age they take part in dormitory education, known as gothul, in the community hall.

In the tribal villages there is often much debate on the relevance of modern education. Some express it as follows: "*What they learn through reading and writing will all get blown away in the wind!*" Still, most tribal people find that their children should be exposed to both systems of education - the formal and the tribal. Modern schooling is important for learning to read, write and count. Judicious blending of traditional and modern schooling is one of the philosophical principles of endogenous development. IDEA's dormitory school and training concept also aims at

## Box 1 Songs and dances

Song and dance are important means of learning in traditional education. For example, *dhimsa* is a traditional dance with about 17 steps, all of which have a specific meaning. The steps are accompanied by the following words: "*go to the forest with your father to learn about trees, caves, habitats of the tiger and other animals and also edible fruits and berries. Mother sings a song. There is a tiger with two cubs. Tiger teaches her cubs how to hunt their prey. Similar to the tiger, I train you how to go to the forest and come back safely. When the cubs try to go out from the cave, they sometimes lose their way. The tiger shows them how to come back. Similarly, you have to know the way. There is a small bush with yellow fruits, fully matured, collect some of them. When you go to the tree there is a bush, when you continue, there is a tree. Don't disturb the second tree.*" The dance shows where the tiger is. The song teaches how to go to the forest and find resources without disturbing nature.



Women and girls perform a traditional dance to welcome visitors to the community.

bridging this gap.

Initially, in IDEA we had many problems in explaining endogenous development to outsiders and even to government functionaries, as they thought we were guiding tribal people backwards in time. However, gradually they have realised our contribution is helping them to achieve self-reliance and empowerment, and to integrate into mainstream society while retaining their cultural identity. Slowly the attitude and interest of the government has changed: they understand now that we are trying to integrate tradition with modernity, thus making an alliance between the two and working towards a beautiful marriage.

### Reviving sense of identity

When I first met the Kondh tribe - one of the major tribes in the area - in the 1980s, I found that many communities were moving away from their clan totems and histories. To revive the Kondh's sense of identity, and with the special help of traditional leader and birth attendant Muvvala Muthai, IDEA documented and revived some traditional tribal songs and clan histories. We found that, besides reviving the sense of identity, these songs also



*Exchanging knowledge related to medicinal plants and leafy vegetables is a central element in education of tribal women.*

included important lessons on the environment (Box 1). We have documented and reconstructed these songs with the traditional leaders and also compose new songs in the dormitory training.

These songs have become very popular. IDEA believes that providing such emotional content makes tribal people realise their own value, which in turn

leads to emotional realisation and emotional involvement in other endogenous development activities. This in turn ensures that everybody participates in community processes and understands the problems and solutions. Emotional integration is not always easy, as there can be many doubts as well.

### Why emotional integration?

Many conventional development models focus their attention on self-help groups or community organisations, in which people come together for collective action to achieve specific targets. But often, once the physical target - such as the building of a well or the use of a new agricultural practice - is achieved, the programme is completed.

One of the elements missing in this approach is the principle of sustainability. Community members may abandon the targets once the support programme has left. This is a common feature in the conventional support programmes for tribal communities in our area.

The other key element missing is the integration of minds, or emotional integration (Box 2). For any tribal that is socially classified as such (which includes the traditional tribal, as well as the acculturated or assimilated tribal), assimilation into modernity means acquiring new socio-economic and cultural practices. However, at the same time, their emotional attachment to their customary practices and animistic religious traits remains with them in some form or other. They conserve the species and surroundings of their clan totem, such as the peacock, the barking deer or the jungle fowl. Therefore, despite influences of modernity, many tribal societies still observe community

#### Box 2 Emotional integration and awakening: 4 methodological steps

Since the well-being of any tribal society is largely dependent upon the strength of its tribal identity, it is important to ensure that all development activities are non-intrusive. Instead of threatening that sense of identity, activities should build on it. The concept of emotional integration refers to the need to participate not only with the mind, but also with the heart. This applies to tribal people as well as to the workers of the organisations that try to support them. Only on this basis can true joint learning take place. The concept of emotional integration and awakening is used in different ways during all four methodological steps:

- **Emotional content:** In the introductory phase, we build on the specific knowledge and perceptions of the tribal group, through group discussions, case studies, and exchanges with traditional leaders. The local situation is discussed through stories, songs and pictorial presentations. This attracts immediate attention and creates emotional participation and physical integration.
- **Emotional realisation:** Short simple lectures are given during group and village meetings. We try to establish relationships between customs, norms, festivals, environment and animistic religious practices. Confidence is built by becoming aware that development actions can take place that are based on the local resources. Examples and evidence from the community are cited, and explanations of the meaning of songs are sought. Emotional realisation also includes a growing awareness, that, though they are ethnic groups with different language backgrounds, their common problems can be tackled through community social action. This promotes tribal cultural identity as well as tribal solidarity.
- **Emotional edge over rationality:** The next step includes formalising the groups and setting a common agenda. This involves experimenting with sustainable technologies, documenting local practices, and reviving cultural practices. At this level the local knowledge systems interact with outside practices. There is continued involvement of minds and hearts, not only due to the common agenda, but also by using song, dance and music.
- **Emotional involvement:** Realisation of objectives with emotional content, with a focus on tribal solidarity, leadership building, networking and lobbying.





The IDEA centre serves as a resource and information centre where tribals can come for meetings and training.

controls in making use of their natural resources. This stands at the basis of endogenous development efforts.

### Dormitory education

On the edge of extinction, this system has been revived by IDEA by setting up dormitory education schools at village and institutional level. At village level, the youths stay in the dormitory school during the night and go back to their homes during the day. At institutional level they spend time at our IDEA centre, which looks like a tribal village. Sometimes boys and girls are segregated, sometimes they learn together.

Dormitory education is not compulsory during the entire year, but is open to those who are interested. In the farming season, however, it is compulsory, as young people have to learn many things. The village level dormitory schools are open to youth until they get married, a minimum of three to four years. Once married, they no longer return to the dormitory.

The IDEA centre also serves as resource and documentation centre, where tribal can come for meetings and training. Here, youngsters can choose to have lessons under a tree or in a cave. The centre uses computers and other modern communication methods, and has a garden for farming experiments. There is a conservation centre where all the plants used for medicinal and food are grown; here the students learn to identify the plants and learn their vernacular names. This study is complemented by trips to the surrounding forests. During festivals, traditional leaders perform rituals, the significance of which is also taught.

### Tribal teachers

In the dormitory school the young people learn through oral traditions from

seniors and traditional functionaries. Every elder and traditional functionary has something special to teach. The key knowledge holders of the village are the *guniya* and *gurumayi*, spiritual and herbal medicine men and women, and the *disari*, the astrologers and medicine men, who possess knowledge on

astrology, healing and herbal medicines. Other important teachers include the *sutrani*, or birth attendants; the *gowd* or ethno-veterinarian experts on healing of animals; and the *pujari*, the community priests and counsellors for village problems.

The local leaders and elders stay together with the youths for a few days, to pass on their knowledge and skills on subjects relevant to tribal life, such as hunting, farming, ecology and health care. Social issues, such as marital life, social regulatory measures related to pre-conjugal relations, and inter-caste marriages, are also covered in dormitory schooling.

### Tribal village networks

In order to revive indigenous functionaries and make their skills available again to the community, IDEA has supported the creation of a network of healers, birth attendants, ethno-veterinarians and other functionaries in tribal village networks. These networks form the basis of the *Naik Gotna* - the Network of Tribal Leaders in the Eastern Ghats. The major objective of this network is to form a strong group of tribal leaders to support the endogenous development process of their communities.

In the village networks, traditional functionaries come together regularly to share, discuss and assess their traditional knowledge, thereby greatly increasing their knowledge and skills and restoring their self-confidence. In this way the strengths of village-level farmers' research and training units are combined with dormitory education and community institutional infrastructure. The traditional leaders of the *Naik Gotna* have also been brought in contact with government agencies, to mutually assess the tribal development

policies. It was known that most government agencies do not integrate tribal and modern practices in their tribal development policies. Through these discussions both parties have discovered the relevance of tribal practices for the local conditions, such as in the case of the first eating ceremony (Box 3). At the same time useful modern knowledge has also been identified to complement the tribal practices. Through the ongoing processes of strengthening endogenous development processes, dormitory education and networking, the tribal organisations seem to be on the right track to face the present challenges, as well as those that inevitably lie ahead.

### Box 3. First-eating ceremony

The first-eating ceremony, commonly known as Kothala Panduga, is celebrated after the first harvest of farm and wild crops. It is a food-security related cultural mechanism of the tribal groups, which includes a taboo on touching or eating any food or crop until the entire community has celebrated the festival, and offered the harvested crop to the ancestral spirits. During the past decades this practice was often abandoned, which according to the tribal leaders constituted one of the reasons for the food security crisis among tribal groups, as well as the declining diversity of wild animals and plants. According to tradition, until the first eating ceremony is performed, the tribal community members may only collect matured and fallen fruits and flowers from the forests. These fruits also serve as food for wild animals, while the left over seeds of the rotten or fallen fruits contribute to natural forest regeneration. By understanding this rationale, the tribal communities together with IDEA have developed different strategies to motivate tribal communities to revive this first-eating ceremony.

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# Traditional female leadership

## A training course for and by Queens

Bern Guri and David Millar

In southern Ghana a Queen\* is the female counterpart of a Chief and occupies an influential position in society. In the Upper West Region of northern Ghana traditional women leaders are known as *Pognaa*. They are actively involved in the development of their communities. The Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD) organises training programmes to support the contribution being made by these traditional women leaders to the social and economic well-being of their communities.

In Ghana, rural poverty has far-reaching and disruptive effects on community life. In many communities severe environmental degradation and an unrestrained exploitation of natural resources undermines the stability of family life and the traditional institutions that ensure security and cooperation. Efforts to address these problems are constrained by the weakness of local organisations, and the shift towards modern forms of organisation that exclude significant sections of the community.

### Vanishing support

Women are amongst the most resource poor in rural Ghana. They are responsible for maintaining their families in a changing social context that encourages the type of individualism that conflicts deeply with communal duties, responsibilities and authority. The negative impact of these changes has meant that communities become unable to mobilise the human resources needed to embrace development interventions and that the poor and socially vulnerable are deprived of the security formerly provided by traditional institutions.

In many communities women and children, whose needs and ideas used to be mediated by traditional women leaders, can no longer rely on the Queen to intervene with Chiefs and eld-

ers on their behalf. Indigenous practices that have supported domestic and economic activities for generations are rapidly disappearing and, traditional women leaders who die are not being replaced.

### Training programmes

A programme for stimulating endogenous development by building on the skills of traditional leaders was initiated in 2004 by CIKOD (Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development), UCC (University of Cape Coast) and UDS (University for Development Studies). As a first step in the design of the programme, a workshop to assess the capacity of Queens was organised by the university of Cape Coast. Workshops were also held in Navrongo and Wa for traditional women leaders from northern Ghana.

These workshops enabled in-depth



learning about how traditional women leaders interpret their role and the problems they face. These insights were used to structure training programmes that would enable traditional Queens to overcome the obstacles that undermine their efforts to assert themselves in local affairs and create unity amongst rural women. In 2005, exploratory workshops on the theme 'Gender, Governance and Development for Queens' were organised by CIKOD and UCC for Queens in southern Ghana, and with UDS, for their counterparts in Northern Ghana.

### Challenges exposed

The image of a traditional Queen that emerged during the capacity assessment workshops, was one of a traditional leader who used to hold an influential position in society. Many examples were given of how traditional



*Queens at a training workshop on the role of traditional Queens and governance. The course was given at the University of Cape Coast as a joint training between University and CIKOD.*

\*Traditional women leaders in southern Ghana were described as 'Queen mothers' by the colonial authorities. At the workshop in Cape Coast the women leaders decided that this was a misrepresentation of their status: they are Queens in their own right rather than the Mothers of Queens. For the sake of uniformity, in this article the northern Ghana counterparts *Pognaa* are also described as Queens.

### Box 1 Mama Tekke Foliwa, traditional Queen of the Have

Mama Tekke Foliwa II is the traditional Queen of the Have, a rural community in Kpando, in the Volta Region of Ghana. Although everyone speaks Eve, the community is organised into several clans. The main livelihood activities are farming, fishing, weaving and small-scale trading.

In February 2005, Mama Tekke Foliwa II was one of the 35 participants who attended the workshop organised by CIKOD and UCC on 'The role of traditional Queens in governance and natural resource management at the local level.' Mama had been installed as a traditional Queen only six months prior to the workshop. She was already popular with the women in the community because she had dedicated herself to organising the women of her Ablode clan for income generation activities. Personally she was not so confident that she had the capacity to lead these marginalised women. She was not fully aware of the authority she wielded as a traditional Queen, or how she could use this power to benefit her community. She had very little information about local government structures and she did not have much contact with the world outside her community. It was, therefore, difficult for her to get in touch with the ideas and resources that she, as a leader, needed to support local women.

Mama Tekke is proud that this has changed. The CIKOD training has widened her horizon and opened up new possibilities. She points out the changes that have taken place since she participated in the training: "*I have now organised the women of my clan to form the Abrode Women's Association, and the women are undertaking income generating activities such as snail rearing and bee-keeping. I have influenced the Have Traditional Council to dedicate one day of this year's Hobgetutu festival, to cultural education for women. On this day all women above the age of 18 years will be given cultural education by traditional women leaders, to enable them to understand the norms and cultural values of their community. During the festival competitions will also be held in cooking, dressing and cultural games.*"



Mama Tekke Foliwa II

women leaders were involved in the social and economic development of their communities. As the 'Mother of the Community' the Queen commanded respect and in return she would use her position to settle disputes between women and intervene in marriage conflicts. She was also responsible for the sexual and reproductive health education of young girls, which is of particular relevance in communities destabilised by unemployment and HIV/AIDS, and where parental control has broken down.

But the position of these Queens has changed. Authority is heavily dependent on the personality of the individual Queen and the way she performs her role. Lack of education and illiteracy are problems that seriously weaken Queens' position, especially in matters of governance. However, today the position of Queens is most seriously undermined by a lack of governance structures that legitimise their position, rights and responsibilities.

In the past, a Queen did not have to 'work' in the conventional sense, as her community provided her with the food and other necessities to carry out her tasks. Today, even when provision has been made for allowances, families are increasingly reluctant to provide their Queen with security and other material support. Queens also experience difficulties in reconciling their private and public roles. Their poor public image also means that it is sometimes difficult to get other women to cooperate with them. As a result many traditional women leaders admit that they had initially been hesitant to become a Queen

because their status was inadequately recognised. It was only after they had been encouraged by parents and clan heads that they had agreed to accept the responsibility (Box 1).

#### Potentials exposed

During the training sessions, capacity building was based on a participatory adult learning approach: learner-centred, problem-focused and action-orientated. The methodology was one that recognised the many key resources these women brought with them: experience, skills, knowledge as well as personal talents.

Queens have provided the stories and proverbs that carry the information essential for preserving identity, cooperation and communal solidarity. Handed down through generations of traditional women leaders, they are still being used to resolve conflicts and deal with practices that limit women's access to natural resources. The participating Queens wanted to strengthen their awareness of governance, laws, financial systems and budgetary procedures in order to effectively address women's concerns and revitalise local associations and practices that support communal stability.

Amongst the economic initiatives presently being undertaken by Queens are beekeeping, processing of local products, soap making, textile designing and setting up market women's associations. They are also involved in recreational facilities, organising clean-ups of the domestic and natural environment around their villages and bringing women together in community

work groups. Sometimes they visit primary and junior secondary schools to talk about gender issues. They also use their knowledge of herbs and medical treatments for the benefit of their communities. However, it is clear that functional illiteracy and limited experience in guiding small businesses and other resource management initiatives are serious obstacles to realising their plans.

#### Discussing sensitive issues

Whilst increasing the capacity of traditional women leaders to take part in local governance was a primary objective of the training programme, another important objective was the empowerment and self development of the traditional Queens themselves. Many of them face problems at the personal level, including the lack of support from men, threats by husbands and the dangerous hostility of ambitious chiefs, heads of lineages and assembly members.

There are several issues to be tackled. Firstly, the tensions between Chiefs and the emerging authority of literate Queens, particularly over sensitive issues such as the selection of Chiefs, problems of corruption, and plans for new infrastructure need to be resolved. Secondly, women leaders need to gain the acceptance of Chiefs and elders to be able to attend meetings of traditional authorities and report back to community members. There is also a need to develop the skills necessary for documenting the history, prerogatives, and responsibilities of traditional women leaders. Improved skills are needed to

create structures, such as open forums where community members could assess the work of the women leaders.

It was suggested that the (male) Chiefs be invited to future training courses. Besides adding weight to the courses, it is expected to have a positive effect on the position of the Queen, and help harmonise relationships between these two important symbols of traditional authority. If their position was strengthened, traditional women leaders would be better able to support the Chiefs in their work.

### Modernising Queens' position

One of the results of the endogenous development programme has been the development of a curriculum for training traditional women leaders. This capacity building initiative recognises that development interventions based

teamwork; community resource management and rural livelihoods; advocacy skills for enhancing accountability and gender equity.

### Challenging traditional restrictions

The training curriculum takes into consideration traditional practices that place restrictions on women such as customary inheritance laws that inhibit women's enterprise opportunities. Such practices have become particularly problematic in the rural areas where the role of women has changed significantly in recent years. New income generation opportunities have meant that many women are now less dependent on men.

Queens are also working to modify the negative aspects of traditional rites, such as those relating to widow-



All Queens together with the Vice-Rector of University of Cape Coast and the director of the Centre of Development Studies.

on traditional forms of community organisation are often a more effective base for tackling poverty and rural livelihood issues than non-endogenous structures such as community-based organisations, farmer-based organisations, or cooperative societies that depend on unreliable external funding. In re-establishing an effective role for traditional women leaders in chieftaincy affairs, capacity building has focused on modernising and improving their position so that they can meet the challenges associated with their status.

As a result of the needs identified by traditional women leaders during these workshops, a long-term training curriculum has been designed by CIKOD and the two partner universities. It aims to increase the capacity of Queens to move between traditional and modern governance systems and other institutions that have a direct impact on their duties. The curriculum includes capacity building in communication and

hood, and to create more gender awareness on the division of tasks within the family household. In this way they are helping to ease the transition of rural households into modernity without destroying the heritage and indigenous knowledge that continues to be essential to rural life.

### Chieftaincy Act

The constitution of Ghana recognises the specific responsibilities of both formal and traditional institutions in national, regional and local affairs. There are constitutionally recognised institutions, such as Traditional Councils (local level), the Regional House of Chiefs (regional level) and the National House of Chiefs (national level). Traditional institutions are responsible for the management of natural resources (including land) and for stimulating pro-poor development programmes. These institutions enable Chiefs to interact and influence District

Assemblies and the Council of State where important development decisions are made. Traditional women leaders are currently excluded from these institutions.

Recent lobbying by Queens has resulted in the Chieftaincy Act being reviewed in order to ensure that traditional women leaders have the facilities they need to participate fully in the processes of decentralisation and democratisation. It offers an opportunity for re-establishing the position of Queens as respected spokespersons and councillors, whose capacity to mobilise women has important implications for the welfare of rural households.

### Queens Association

In southern Ghana, the status of Queens used to be similar to that of the Chief. They represented the female aspects of the Stool (the symbol of community) and complemented the work of the male Chief. Over time, the role of the Queen has changed. But the training programme described above has shown that there is still a great deal of respect for these female leaders who are symbols of vitality. Traditional women leaders in Ghana are still custodians of the knowledge and history of their communities.

The Queens who participated in the northern Ghana training courses agreed that there was an urgent need to work together to profile the significance and potential of traditional women leaders in their region. They plan to establish a strong, well-organised Association of Traditional Female Leaders in each traditional area. The association would be headed by a Paramount Queen, while divisional and sub-divisional Queens would be appointed to deal with local governance and grassroots issues.

Their initiative draws attention to the pivotal role of Queens and the positive contributions they could make to their communities. Working with traditional authorities and indigenous institutions has the potential to enhance inclusiveness and draw the marginalised individuals and communities into the development process. Experience in Ghana has shown that working with and through traditional Queens and other indigenous institutions can be extremely effective.

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# Connecting with rural India



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Ms Suganya

Ms Suganya is a very popular woman in Ulagapichampatti. Thanks to her, the people in this tiny village can, among others, get advice on farming, receive healthcare and communicate with loved ones in distant lands - all through the internet. Suganya is the operator of an unlikely internet kiosk located deep in the heart of rural Tamil Nadu. It is one of several hundred similar kiosks set up by N-logue Communications of Chennai. N-logue belongs to an alliance of organisations that is forging ahead in achieving their vision of a ‘wired’ rural India.

Each kiosk is equipped with a multi-media capable PC (personal computer), a webcam and other accessories. Kiosks offer villagers a bouquet of affordable services such as internet access, ATM (Automated Teller Machine) facilities, basic computer training for children and adults, as well as solutions to basic problems related to agriculture and health.

# The role of rural internet cafés

A.V. Balasubramanian

Compas partner organisation CIKS, the Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems in India, is exploring new ways of communicating with farmers in the rural areas about organic farming. The internet kiosks in rural villages open up exciting new possibilities. They are run by local people and feature, for example, interactive chats in the form of question and answer sessions with experts elsewhere. Even the illiterate seem to have warmed to the idea; using the kiosk operator as an interpreter and enabler, they have no problem using the facilities.

## The N-Logue project

India has about 100 million telephone connections and 30 million internet connections, mostly concentrated in the large cities. The current cost of installing a single telephone line in a rural location is around Rs 35,000, or 674 Euros. This cost inhibits the use of conventional telephones in rural areas. Additionally, none of the major telecom companies are interested in focusing on the demanding rural markets, as they prefer to maximise their earnings from the much easier urban markets.

In contrast, cable television connections have increased from almost none barely a decade ago, to about 50 million today. The keys to this have been: affordable cable charges (Rs 60-150 per month, approximately 1.2 - 2.9 Euros), low-cost TVs and small-scale cable TV entrepreneurs whose overheads are far lower than that of the corporate sector. Cable TV is now affordable for nearly 60% of Indian homes, not only in large

cities, but also in small towns and rural areas. Thus, by decentralising distribution and using lower cost technologies, cable TV has been widely adopted in a short period of time.

PC and internet penetration in rural India were also facing a number of bottlenecks. But now N-Logue uses an approach similar to cable TV to drive the kiosk PC and internet project in rural areas. It uses a wireless local loop technology called corDECT, which replaces expensive cabling with wireless base stations. These cost savings enable small operators to invest and provide services in a limited area, and make incremental expenditures as the number of subscribers grows.

Bank loans are easily accessible for an operator like Suganya to help set up business. N-Logue provides training to the operators at a nominal cost.

## Exciting possibilities

Internet connectivity opens up exciting new possibilities for rural communities. In the Melur district where Suganya's kiosk is located, N-Logue has tied up with several organisations to provide innovative services that can save the villagers a trip to the nearest city. Using a webcam, farmers can show diseased vegetables to experts at the Agricultural University, and receive recommendations. An eye hospital in the nearby city of Madurai provides preliminary diagnosis over the internet, and patients can also book appointments on-line. One of the most promising developments is the success of live chat sessions, using proprietary video-conferencing software provided to all kiosks. These interactive chats usually take the form of question and answer sessions featuring a consultant - doctors, agriculture experts or government officials - during which villagers can get answers on a variety of issues. This software enables several villagers to



*Ms Suganya's internet kiosk in Ulagapichampatti, deep in the heart of rural Tamil Nadu.*

participate simultaneously in the same session, making it convenient for the consultant to reach a large number of people regularly. These sessions are very well attended, and many have become weekly features.

### Villagers adapt rapidly

The high acceptance level among the general public is very encouraging. Villagers seem to have adapted rapidly to the concepts of PC and internet usage, e-mail and live chat. N-Logue partner companies provide local language software in various regions, hence eliminating the most significant barrier to PC use. Interestingly, even the illiterate seem to have warmed to the idea - using the kiosk operator as an interpreter and enabler, they do not seem to have problems using the facilities.

The face of rural India is changing rapidly with affordable internet access becoming a reality. With the current bandwidth sure to increase, technology will tear down barriers, giving information providers an economical and reliable method of instantaneously reaching millions of people.

### CIKS web-learning system

The N-Logue project has also opened up exciting new possibilities for CIKS - the Centre of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, in Chennai. CIKS is in the process of developing a web-based learning system designed to deliver content to a typical rural audience. It aims to make it a simple and user-friendly system, with a multimedia content, which can be updated regularly (see Box 1).

The system will make available a vast storehouse of information, techniques, practices and reference material on organic farming. This will include

three elements: (1) training modules on various aspects of organic farming including best practices, pest and disease management; (2) resources and frequently asked questions related to organic farming; and (3) an on-line community for knowledge sharing. The project is now in an advanced stage of development. A multimedia training module on organic cotton cultivation has already been developed. The module includes detailed instructions for every aspect of cultivation, supplemented by pictures and video demonstrations.

### To spread organic farming

While live interactions are definitely effective and useful, they depend on the coming together of a consultant and an audience at a given time. A multimedia module has the advantage of

being continuously available, does not require the interactivity of a live session, and can provide comprehensive and interactive information on demand. Used together, multimedia and the internet can be a powerful training platform. The intrinsic advantages of on-line content delivery - economy, reach, flexibility - make it an ideal way to rapidly extend the training work.

The promise shown by the N-Logue project has convinced us that the rural community is ready for multimedia content delivery. The success of the live video chat sessions demonstrate the ability of the audience to relate to a 'talking head' on the screen - which indicates that they will adapt to multimedia learning with relative ease. By making a comprehensive, user-friendly collection of modules available over the internet, we hope to grease the wheels of the spread of organic farming know how.

#### Box 1 Features of the CIKS web-learning system on organic farming

**Simple and user-friendly:** The user interface has been kept extremely simple and easy to understand. Users can use either the keyboard or the mouse to navigate the system. On-screen instructions are available at all times, and help is available at the touch of a button.

**Multimedia content:** The content is presented as a series of multimedia screens. Simple, legible on-screen text is supported by recorded voice-overs. Videos and animation are used wherever required to demonstrate techniques and practices.

**Updated information:** The system is completely modular - new content can be developed and plugged in at any time, becoming instantaneously available over the kiosk network. This means that content can always be kept up-to-date and fresh. Adding content to a module is also simple. Modules, once developed, can be easily converted into other languages.

**Bandwidth efficient:** The system is designed to perform efficiently on any connection over 64 kilobytes per second. In fact, in early tests the system performed acceptably over even a 56.6 kbps dial-up line.

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# Ecology and global solidarity

## Swedish Folk Colleges for a more sustainable world

Julia Hedtjärn-Swaling and Camilla Josefsson

**Ecology and Global Solidarity** is one among the many courses offered at Folk Colleges in Sweden, as a means of equipping people to look at our globalised world through a different lens. In this article, two Swedish students talk about their motivation to enrol in this course and their eye-opening field experience with the indigenous communities in the Nilgiri mountains of India. They are assured that the course is equipping them to follow their dream of fighting for a more just and sustainable world.

*'Olengae ithiya?'* Every morning we greet the office staff in Kurumba and at least four other local languages. Working at Keystone Foundation in the Nilgiri mountains is surely a multi-cultural experience, especially for us, two Swedish youth volunteers coming to southern India for five months. The Nilgiris are home to several indigenous communities such as the Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, Sholigas, Badagas and Irulas, and we get to learn about them on a daily basis. Being here, 2000 metres above sea level, is also a thrilling adventure. Following indigenous honey hunters and organic farmers in their everyday life is one of the most interesting parts of our one-year course, *Ecology and Global Solidarity*.

### Folkbildung

We study at the 'folk college' of Biskops-Arnö near Stockholm. Folk colleges are informal, creative and very different in structure from the regular universities. It is the students themselves who learn and teach each other, while the teacher provides guidance. Students share thoughts, knowledge and seek new insights together. Most of the

folk colleges have a general course to enable people to finalise their high school and continue to university. The colleges also offer a variety of courses in, for example, arts, music and journalism. Our course, Ecology and Global Solidarity, is one of the travelling courses, through which young people are stimulated to look at our globalised world through a different lens.

Today there are 148 folk colleges in Sweden, catering to about 30,000 students each year. The schools receive financial support from the state and can therefore keep all tuition free of charge. Folk colleges are often run by community organisations, churches or county councils. Together they have influenced rural development in Sweden over the years. They use an alternative form of education called *folkbildung*. It is a form of participatory education that has been practised in the Nordic countries since the 19th century.

The aim of the folk colleges is to dissolve the gap between the elite and the common man. In fact it set the foundation for a movement that gave labourers, farmers and women more

knowledge thus liberating them to take an active part in initiating the process of democracy building in Sweden. Through education the labour class got the tools to fight for their rights, a key outcome of which is the well-known Swedish social security system. The results of *folkbildning* are not as noticeable today, but yet important. Nowadays people take the welfare system for granted. What our parents and grandparents fought for is about to disappear, and that is why *folkbildning* is still a must.

Most folk colleges are boarding schools which provide plenty of additional opportunities for learning in the evenings, often organised by the students themselves. At our school we have yoga, choir singing, pottery making, poetry readings, sports, photography, African dance, documentary film evenings, and an organic cafe. And don't forget, our college is situated on an island with views of cows grazing in the fields outside our window. The entire atmosphere is an inspiration to both body and soul. And for us, studying at the folk college is most about personal growth.

## Experiencing other cultures

All kinds of people, no matter what age or background, can study at folk colleges. Each person, through his or her personal experiences, has something unique to offer. However, more emphasis is given to people who have only a short basic education, are unemployed or disabled, and to immigrants. Our class has only eight students. The two of us are 21 and 30 years old respectively and have very different experiences and backgrounds.

The purpose of our course is to raise awareness for the sustainable use of natural resources and to work for a righteous society. It is organised together with *Future Earth*, a network of NGOs in Sweden, South America and Asia, involved in ecological activities from a social perspective. To practise what we have studied, we have been given the opportunity to work with an Indian NGO within the Future Earth network. So, that is how we ended up at Keystone Foundation in the Nilgiri mountains. Keystone works together with indigenous communities on an ecological and economic basis to strengthen their position in society. They also try to showcase the important interactions between humans and nature through agriculture, land development, local governance, marketing of their own organic products etc.

Our stay in India is funded by Future Earth through Sida (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency). Before coming to India, we had a two-week course at Sida's training centre. After that, we spent another two weeks at an organic farm in Sweden, which was different from India in many ways, but at the same time similar in thoughts and objectives.

## Towards a sustainable world

While the poverty limit has been set at one USD a day for humans, it is ironic that a cow in Europe gets more in subsidies from the EU. Something has gone very wrong, and to passively stand aside and watch is to tolerate this immorality. We cannot accept this hypocritical worldview anymore and we sincerely believe that our world can be improved. We wish to take an active part in the on-going struggle to make the world a better place for all. This has been a strong reason for us to enrol in this course.

Former students who have completed this course are now working at Future Earth or in other NGOs. Practical experience, from both India and Sweden, will definitely help us in finding similar jobs. But, most importantly, we would never have learned so much had we only depended upon books for our education. This is truly a school of life.

## Together we can succeed

Living in another country has made us see our own lives from another perspective, and in turn has made us question our lives, motives and purposes. For example, we now know more about the Kurumbas of the Nilgiris than the indigenous Samis in northern Sweden. Where should we put our effort? What can we actually do to make a difference? How can we truly live as we learn? Maybe the only place where we really can act effectively is at home.



An Irula women's group in southern India building their new Village Resource Centre, initiated by Keystone. Here they will be able to improve their income through value-addition from non timber forest products.

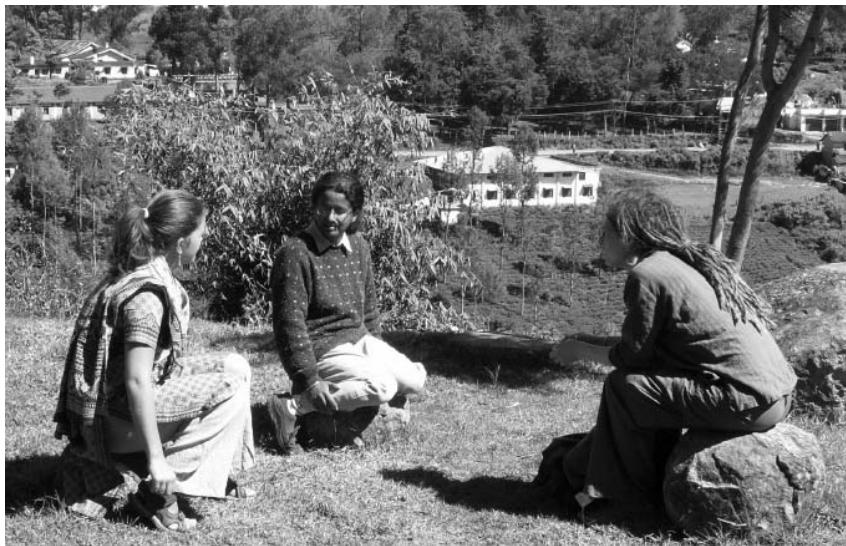
But seeing other people's work, in a different country's context, has made us realise that all of us are working for the same goal. There is only one world and we need to work as a team in order to make a difference.

When we return to Sweden, we hope to undertake some information sharing together with our classmates. We plan to organise a two-day festival to show a different image of India than the one that is normally seen in newspapers. We want to create interest and enthusiasm in the civil society by showing that it is possible to make a constructive change in the world. The two of us are also working on a cookbook, which will be a guide to South Indian food as well as a promotion on an organic lifestyle for a healthy planet. This cookbook is in its final stages of production and we hope to come up with an attractive fare of thoughts to spice up people's lives.

As many of us have realised, the world is in a critical condition today. However, knowledge gives us the power to question this condition. That is what *folkbildning* is really about. And *folkbildning* happens all the time, all around the world, through dialogues between people in their everyday life. We wish to inspire people to work towards a socially and ecologically sustainable earth. We can only succeed if we join hands and forces.

For more information:  
[www.keystone-foundation.org](http://www.keystone-foundation.org)  
[www.framtidsjorden.se](http://www.framtidsjorden.se)  
[www.folkhogskola.nu](http://www.folkhogskola.nu)

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Intercultural learning and solidarity: Julia (R) discussing with Anita from Keystone and Tobias from Future Earth.



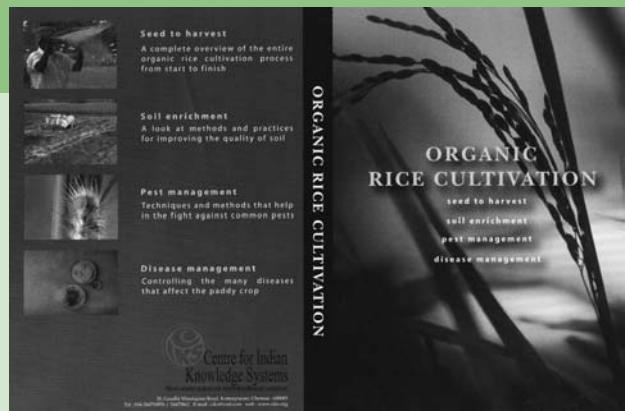
# Compas Partner News

## CIKS, India

### Publication: Organic rice cultivation DVD and booklet, 2006

This booklet has been produced by the Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS) in India, and complements earlier publications on the same subject. The publication provides clear how-to-do information on irrigated organic rice cultivation, including seed selection techniques, seed treatment and use of organic manures to improve soil fertility. Pests and diseases affecting rice are also described in detail, including organic control measures for these. The approach combines time-tested traditional organic practices with modern insights in organic rice cultivation.

For copies and more details: [info@ciks.org](mailto:info@ciks.org)



## Cecik, Ghana



### Dr Millar promoted to Associate Professor

We are pleased to announce that in June 2005, Dr David Millar of CECIK, one of the Compas partner organisations in northern Ghana, was promoted to the status of Associate Professor of the University for Development Studies (UDS) of Tamale. Professor Millar's specialisation has largely resulted from his work with Compas on indigenous knowledge, cosmovisions of indigenous peoples, culture and development, and more recently on endogenous development and African Sciences. Professor Millar's promotion is an expression of the increasing official recognition within the formal university and policy environments, of the work we have been doing with local communities within Compas for many years.

For more info: [cecik@africaonline.com.gh](mailto:cecik@africaonline.com.gh)

## SAEDP, South Africa

### Council to be inaugurated

The Southern African Endogenous Development Programme (SAEDP), based at Vaal University of Technology (VUT) in South Africa, has now been registered as a formal NGO. At the launch of SAEDP on 26 August 2005, the nine Leaders of SAEDP resolved to constitute themselves into the SAEDP Council. This council, comprises of five Chiefs of rural communities and four Vice-Chancellors of the Universities from Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

For more info: Abraham Mwadiwa, at [mwadiwa@vut.ac.za](mailto:mwadiwa@vut.ac.za)

## FRLHT, India

### Unique workshop on traditional orthopaedic practices

A survey done by FRLHT (the Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions) amongst traditional bonesetters in 25 districts revealed that there are more than 400 active bonesetters in Tamil Nadu. Bone setting is one of the key specialties of local health traditions in rural India. It is estimated that there are approximately 60,000 bonesetters in rural India, whose work includes fracture and dislocation management, management of injuries and their complications, as well as congenital anomalies. FRLHT also studied the efficacy of traditional fracture and dislocation management methods, which revealed important strengths and weaknesses in the work of the traditional bonesetters.

In order to initiate an intercultural dialogue between traditional bonesetters and modern orthopaedic doctors, a unique workshop entitled 'Tamil Nadu State Level Consultative Workshop of Traditional Bone Setting Practices' was organised in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, on the 18th and 19th of May 2006, in collaboration between FRLHT and the Christian Medical College. The main objective of the workshop was to share the documentation and experiences, and to formulate a participatory training programme for traditional bonesetters.

During the two days the participants experienced an overwhelming enthusiasm. As a result, a training module for young traditional bonesetters is being designed as part of the community healthcare programmes, for large-scale dissemination of positively assessed traditional bone-setting practices.

For more info: Unnikrishnan.P.M, at [unni.pm@frlht.org](mailto:unni.pm@frlht.org)



*The participants of the workshop on traditional orthopaedic practices included traditional bonesetters, eminent experts in Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani systems of medicine, modern orthopaedic doctors and community health workers.*

Photo: Poochi Venkat

# Fundecam, Chile

## Mapuche territory threatened

The Institute of Indigenous Studies of the University de la Frontera, and the Foundation of Indigenous Development (Fundecam), are engaged in supporting indigenous Mapuche communities in southern Chile. The territory of the Mapuche population is presently under threat due to government plans to construct a highway, which has not been agreed upon with the local communities. The government plans also include the construction of an international commercial port, which threatens the Mapuches' possibilities for religious expression in relation to the sea.

Fundecam has worked with the Mapuche communities to carry out a participatory diagnosis of their local resources, with the objective of supporting the local communities and their territorial organisation. A central element in this work is the *guillatun*, a Mapuche ritual performed by local indigenous leaders and with presence of all communities involved. Using the insights and the unity gained in this ritual, a joint plan for territorial organisation has been drawn up. This plan is now serving in the dialogue between the communities and the state authorities about the future of the Mapuche territory.

For more info: Jaime Soto, at [jasoto@ufro.cl](mailto:jasoto@ufro.cl)



The Mapuche *guillatun* ritual performed by local leaders.

# IDEA, India

## New tribal networks created

IDEA is creating new networks at various levels, in order to upscale its efforts with endogenous development in tribal communities in the Eastern Ghats (southern India). Thematic forums have been created on forest health, human health, cattle health, crop health and women and children health, bringing together the tribal knowledge specialists from about 35-40 communities. These thematic forums are clustered at regional level in federations, called *Naik Gotna*. This started with about 2,000 members in 1998, and by 2005 the membership had increased to around 26,000.

After this successful organisation of village-based associations of traditional functionaries in the North Eastern Ghats, IDEA decided to replicate the approach in other regions: the Eastern Ghats, Andhra Pradesh, Chattishgarh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. So far, three regional Naik Gotnas and one regional Naik Gotna have emerged, as well as one tribal federation for endogenous development at national level.

At the level of support organisations, the IKREF forum was created - the Indigenous Knowledge Research, Conservation and Development Forum. IKREF is a national network to promote endogenous development of tribal communities. For operational convenience, the national network is divided into 5 regional networks covering the entire tribal belt, including 13 states and 1 Union Territory. IKREF now has 265 members, varying from NGOs, research institutions, and universities, to community networks like the Naik Gotnas. For more info: Mr. K.J.N. Gowtham Shankar, at [gowtham\\_shankar@hotmail.com](mailto:gowtham_shankar@hotmail.com)

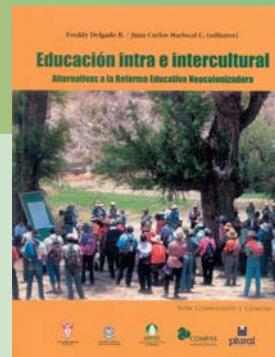
# Agruco, Bolivia

## New book:

### Intra- and intercultural education - alternatives to the neocolonial education reform

In this new book, the vision of Agruco, other Latin American Compas partners and like-minded organisations on reform of the formal university education system of Bolivia and Latin America is presented. The book presents important insights on conventional western, as well as Andean and other non-western forms of learning. The learning experiences presented from Bolivia and various other Latin American countries, provide insights in ways to stimulate reforms of the formal education system. One of the most important conclusions is that intra- and intercultural dialogue need to form the basis of a new university system that can play a role in poverty alleviation and support of social movements on the continent.

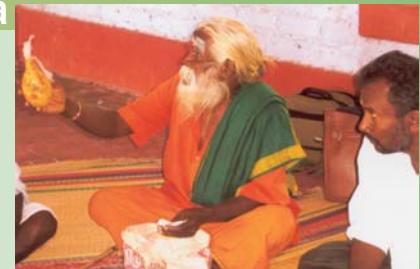
For more info: Cesar Escobar or Freddy Delgado, at [agruco@agruco.org](mailto:agruco@agruco.org) or go to [www.agruco.org](http://www.agruco.org)



# Sri Lanka, India

## Folk Healers Exchange

Six Sri Lankan Folk Healers, practising medical astrology, bone setting, ayurveda, ethnoveterinary and snake bite treatments, compared



their healing practices with South Indian healers during an exchange visit (21-28 August 2005). The healers' knowledge is eroding due to many factors. Recognition, documentation, sharing and assessment will have to reverse this trend. (See also p. 32). For more info: Unnikrishnan at [FRLHT: unni.pm@frlht.org](mailto:frlht.unni.pm@frlht.org)



# Learning endogenous development

In preparation!

## Learning endogenous development



This book first and foremost targets staff of development organisations and projects directly working with communities, farmers and groups. As part of their main task, they interact frequently with communities. They are interested to learn how their interaction can build on the often more invisible part of culture: values, belief systems and assumptions on how the world is or should be organised. Endogenous development aims at well-being: reducing material as well as social and spiritual poverty.

- Introduction
- Endogenous Development: a summary
- Learning in Endogenous Development: basic approach, methods and learning forms
- Supporting Endogenous Development: an alternative development approach
- Understanding basic principles of cosmovision, local institutions, learning and action
- Facilitating visioning and planning
- Supporting local learning
- Supporting local action
- Strengthening local institutions
- Creating a supportive environment for endogenous development

Each chapter centres around concrete case studies, mostly from Compas partner organisations from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe. Each chapter ends with a synthesis of main issues and dilemmas related to learning and training. Suggested learning forms give ideas on how field staff can learn the approach described in the cases. The book will be co-published with IT publishers (UK/India) and will be available early 2007.

## How do you like the Compas Magazine?

If you send in the Reader's Survey (see inside), you might be one of the three lucky people to receive a copy of the Earth Charter in Action (published 2005, 200 pages).

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful world. It is an inclusive ethical vision which seeks to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the human family and the larger living world.

