

Chocolate & Women: Creating Strong Female Leadership in the Peruvian Amazon



Ana Pranjic
2014 McBurney Fellow
McGill Institute for Health and
Social Policy

Project Overview

Student: Ana Pranjic
 Department: IDS, Psychology
 Organization: PRO-A and APROCAM
 Location: Bagua, Peru
 Mentor: Duncan Pedersen, Psychiatry
 Fellowship Duration: July 1- Nov 10, 2014



Contents

Project Overview	1
Contents	1
Fellowship Rationale and Objectives.....	2
History	2
Background.....	3
<i>Local Context and Partners</i>	3
<i>APROCAM</i>	3
<i>PRO-A</i>	4
<i>Other Partners</i>	4
Activities	5
The Experience: Challenges and Successes	7
Recommendations for Future Development	9

CHOCOLATE & WOMEN: CREATING STRONG FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN THE PERUVIAN AMAZON

Fellowship Rationale and Objectives

My principal objectives for the McBurney fellowship included spearheading the implementation of a project that I created in 2013: helping women in local cocoa- and coffee-producing communities gain more independence, improve their access to health services and develop a means to educate themselves.

History

I was sixteen when I first went to Peru. Coincidentally, that trip also marked my first venture into the world of international cooperation and development, and became a crossroads in my life: I found my vocation and was determined to return to Peru. In May 2013, I participated in an AUCC-SFD Arts Internship near Cuzco. Following the internship, I was fortunate enough to be put in contact with the directors of two non-profit organizations, PRO-A and APROCAM. These organizations are dedicated to promoting better agricultural practices and implementing sustainable development projects in the poorest agricultural areas of Peru.

While working with these organizations, I had the opportunity to submit a proposal for a local rural development project for a community in the Peruvian Amazon to the Embassy of Australia within the context of their Direct Aid Program. This program focuses on supporting small-scale development projects and activities that involve the beneficiaries in the identification, design and management of the projects. My project, AP-FEM, *APROCAM Fortalece el Liderazgo Feminino en las Comunidades Nativas de Imaza*, was officially chosen in October 2013, receiving USD 25,000 for its implementation. That was when I knew I needed to go back to Peru.

The project is focused on gender empowerment. It aims to promote women's participation in all aspects of their community – economic, social and political – by improving their access to health and nutrition services as well as education.

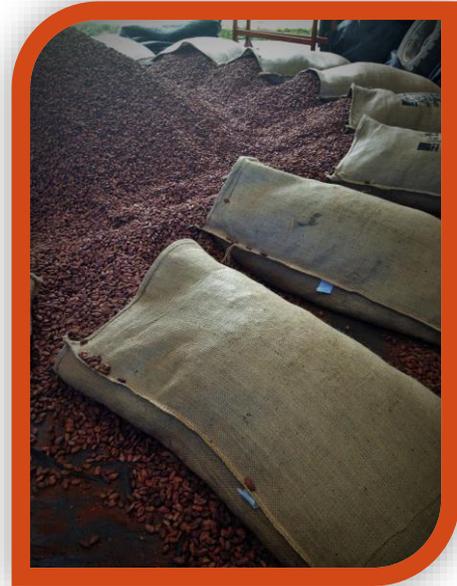
July 1- Nov 10, 2014

The project itself focused on the implementation of a small cocoa processing plant managed entirely by wives of farmers and women producers in the district of Imaza, in the Peruvian Amazon. A large part of the profits from the plant will go into a fund for the provision of preventive health services and nutrition workshops for women. Another part of the profits will go towards establishing a fund for women and children wishing to pursue higher levels of education.

Background

Local Context and Partners

The initiative to implement a small processing plant for cocoa was born from my growing awareness that there is great economic and social vulnerability in the local populations in the Amazon basin. Past research I did in the area found that this vulnerability is due to a combination of factors including the homogeneity of local economies, the lack of access to health services and the lack of access to education. The most severely affected population was women. The research guided my steps and motivated me to apply for funding and find partners to support APROCAM in the implementation of our first gender-oriented development project.



APROCAM

APROCAM (*Asociación de Productores Cacaoteros y Cafetaleros de Amazonas*) was created in 2003 as a result of much persistence and devotion on the part of a small group of coffee and cocoa producers from three little communities in the Amazon region: La Peca, Copallín and Imaza. They wanted to make a stand against the exploitation they were facing in terms of having to sell their products at appallingly low prices. In creating APROCAM, they hoped to be able to come together in order to achieve a better quality of life for their families and communities in a sustainable and durable way. Indeed, things are progressively getting better for producers in the areas thanks to their sustained efforts and hard work. With the intention of positioning its producers in exclusive niche markets, APROCAM has fought to get organic and Fairtrade certifications. Though the organization started with only 47 members, APROCAM is now made up of more than 500 families. Together, APROCAMs members produce and export more than 100 tons of cocoa and close to 90 tons of coffee. On top of offering technical, agricultural and commercial support to its producers,

APROCAM invests in local communal and social development, creating and implementing projects that reach far beyond the limits of cocoa and coffee production.

PRO-A

The Association for the Promotion and Agricultural Development (*Progreso Agrario* or PRO-A) is a non-profit organization created in 2002 in the coastal city of Chiclayo, Peru. PRO-A is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that has distinguished itself by its work in rural areas of extreme poverty in Peru. For more than 10 years, it has focused on promoting better agricultural practices and implementing sustainable development projects in the poorest agricultural areas of Peru. Throughout the years, PRO-A has supported the establishment and development of 7 associations of small producers dedicated to the cultivation of rice, coffee and sugar cane as well as to the promotion of local handicrafts. PRO-A is also interested in establishing a network and partnership between Peru and Canada. The NGO works in tandem with many Canadian organizations such as SOCODEVI and has been promoting Peru's fair trade and organic production through the sale of roasted coffee, panela and crafts in the Canadian market. PRO-A is also involved in projects related to climate change. Through reforestation initiatives and the promotion of agroforestry systems, PRO-A hopes to raise awareness among the producers it works with and change agricultural practices to be more sustainable.

Other Partners

One of APF-FEMs principal partners is a government programme called *Qali Warma*. Their mission is to provide children in all Peruvian elementary schools with sufficient nutrition through a lunch-box programme. While I was in Bagua working with the women in APROCAM, we collaborated with APPCACAO, a large cocoa and coffee cooperative in the Amazon area, SOCODEVI, a Quebec NGO (Carrefour International) that has an office near Bagua, a Quebec organization whose work focuses on entrepreneurship in developing countries, and P-ROA, an NGO working in developing sustainable agricultural practices throughout the Amazon region. APPCACAO provided us with all the assistance relating to the actual production of the chocolate products (in terms of machinery, its operation and training the workers). SOCODEVI, like Carrefour International, helped out on everything



July 1- Nov 10, 2014

relating to the business aspect of this endeavour. Carrefour International has long-standing expertise in entrepreneurship in small communities across the world, especially female entrepreneurship. Finally, PRO-A contributed by providing punctual administrative or engineering staff when needed in the evolution of this project.

Activities

During the five months I spent in Bagua, Peru, I had the opportunity to learn about the administration of a non-profit organization and the management of development projects from top to bottom. Like a bee, I often had to jump from one flower to the next, trying out different pollens and trying my hand at a great diversity of tasks and challenges.

I worked directly with the women in the community of Imaza, assisting them in organizing and legally formalizing a Women's Committee for the management of the small plant. I also took charge of coordinating all the necessary capacity training for the women, such as training in business, management, operation of the machinery in the plant, safety and health regulations, and chocolate-making. I worked hard at maintaining and creating relationships with organizations that provided assistance in terms of capacity training, data collection and health service provision. These organizations included SOCODEVI, Carrefour International, and FEMESSOR, two of which have come on board with this project through my efforts.

So far so good: the activities outlined above were more or less the same I had identified and put in my work plan before I left for the McBurney fellowship. However, I soon came to see that much more was expected of me and that the scope of my work would have to be much wider than what

I had originally foreseen.

I effectively worked as a project coordinator for APROCAM. On top of working with the women in the cocoa plant, I was in charge of overseeing two other projects for the producers' association. One had to do with the building of infrastructure in our partner communities. We needed to provide another centralized space to enable our more distantly located producers to process their production.



I was able to arrange for this new infrastructure to include a space for a second cocoa-processing plant when it is completed. The other project focused on the development of “clones” for the cocoa plants to make them more resistant to illnesses and to increase the volume of production. Though I am not an agro-engineer, I worked to create a network of collaborators, met up with other organizations and potential fund-brokers, and established a solid information database to help with further research.

I also actively participated in the *Mesa Técnica del Cacao Amazonense*, a centralised collective made up of representatives of cocoa producers from the entire Amazon region. We worked together in order to promote the development of a uniform and united brand of Amazonian cocoa, unique in the world for its ancient origins and specific properties.

Finally, I put together two new project proposals (linked intrinsically with the cocoa-processing plant project) in order to fund a generalized market study for our chocolate, to potentially open a small chocolate shop in the area, and to start producing artisanal paper out of the unused parts of the cocoa and coffee we produce here. APROCAM is currently waiting to get answers on the funding.



The Experience: Challenges and Successes

As my account so far illustrates, my experience turned out to be quite different from what I expected. I did indeed spearhead the implementation of the gender empowerment project, but it ended up only occupying part of my time. The responsibilities kept adding up, and my attention and efforts were eaten-up by the sheer amount of work that needed to be done in APROCAM. This fieldwork experience became a full-time job with endless supplementary hours. I learned so much and at an alarming pace! I was able to get a complete sense of the cocoa and coffee universe from the cultivation of the seeds to the commercialization and export of the dried and fermented beans. I was able to integrate into the agricultural/rural development scene in Peru, which can be somewhat hard to penetrate because of the centralization of development work and large NGOs in Peru in large urban areas.

Milestones

There have been several milestones in my work in Bagua. First came the official inauguration of the cocoa processing plant at the start of August. We were joined by a representative from the Australian Embassy as well as reporters from national Peruvian media and important regional government officials. The event marked a first step in the right direction for the Bagua and the Amazon region in general. Shortly after, the official kick-off of the CHOCONUA brand took place. *Choco-nua* means 'chocolate' and 'woman' in the local native language, Awajun. Around the same time, the Women's Committee in charge of running the plant (the COMFAS) was formalized. Independent from APROCAM, these women now have free reign to develop this initiative and make a change for a better future for their families and communities. We also participated in the ExpoAmazonica as an independent enterprise: it was our first time going as the COMFAS and promoting our brand new chocolate: Choconua. Soon enough, we were completing our first chocolate sale to the governmental program *Qali Warma*.

As my fellowship progressed, I had the opportunity to work on two short documentary films about the origins of cocoa. Introducing the APROCAM producers I had had the privilege to work with to the world and promoting their unique produce and lifestyles made me more proud than I can remember. And finally, shortly before my departure, we inaugurated a new brand of chocolate in Italy, entirely made of cocoa beans from our producers. Our partner company in Naples signed an exclusivity contract with us and has pledged to help us promote our Amazonian cocoa across the world.

There is still an incredible amount left to accomplish and even more left to learn, but I am confident that my presence in Bagua during those five months was useful and made a difference both to me and to the friends I left behind.

Challenges

In terms of challenges, there have been several. First of all, there was the issue of adapting to “the way things work around here”, which is not as easy as it sounds. Everything is a process that takes three times what it would take in Canada (and sometimes more!). Priorities are also different. Even though I worked in tight collaboration with few people (we were a team of four), I often found that we were on completely different wavelengths. It could be hard to reconcile our perspectives at times and so work I judged to be a priority sometimes had to be put on the backburner while we accomplished another task. Also, there were no fixed work hours. We worked from Monday to Saturday, and often Sundays as well, until we got the job done. Furthermore, I had a hard time reconciling my goals for the work I wanted to accomplish before I left and realistic expectations for what could actually be done in that period of time.

As my fellowship progressed and I attracted responsibilities like a magnet, I was struck by a small case of the impostor syndrome. I started to question whether I was qualified and experienced enough to make all the decisions I was making. Once it hit me that my actions had potentially



huge repercussions on a large number of people, I lost my previous confidence. It took a few days to re-evaluate my progress and the status of my work, but I worked through it. It was a daunting experience, realizing that I did not have all the answers and that it's okay.

Finally, I found that certain goals I had set to myself at the start of fellowship were simply not realistic. For example, I had planned on working to establish a baseline of data to be used for future follow-up and assessment of the impacts and outcomes of my gender empowerment project in the community. I wanted to work in close collaboration with community members to determine relevant indicators of change to be used in future follow-ups and assessments. The goal was to create a relevant model for replication based on solid data. Unfortunately, due to severely lacking financial and human resources, I was not able to conduct any such assessment.



But it was worth it, challenges and all. I had the chance to work with inspiring individuals; it was motivating to be in a work environment where everyone is passionate about what we do. I feel that in only five months, I have grown both professionally and personally in ways that would have been impossible had I not had the opportunity to go to Peru.

Recommendations for Future Development

My recommendation has to do with one of the greatest challenges I faced during my fieldwork. I know this is also one of the greatest challenges faced by all who work locally and on a small scale in developing countries: the lack of infrastructure and resources to be able to do things without cutting corners. I wrote my first development project proposal based on research that I judged to be slightly incomplete because the deadline for the funding application was approaching and I felt like it was the best option. That is how my gender empowerment project got its funding. When I applied for the McBurney Fellowship, I was determined to implement this project properly, starting with proper data collection. Unfortunately, my best intentions were thwarted by on-site constraints.

I know that there are countless numbers of organizations working in small-scale rural development in Peru – I have even worked with several of them. However, from what I could observe, the problem is that there is no pre-existing structure enabling them to implement their individual projects and apply appropriate needs-assessment and monitoring measures. Often it is a question of either insufficient funds or insufficient human resources, which ultimately comes back to a question of funding.

I believe that it would be beneficial to create a system that provides locally-based initiatives with access to trained staff to do research, statistical analysis, data collection, and project monitoring. First, it would make it easier to find detailed information on small-scale, local initiative taking place all over the country. Second, it would increase the accountability of the organizations implementing local projects. Third, it would make it easier to do a macro-evaluation of development needs in all Peruvian regions based on the bottom-up initiatives sprouting all over the place. This in turn would facilitate the creation and improvement of local, small-scale models for community development.

Future Fellows, This Is What I Learned

All this does not change my initial internship objectives as much as it expands my horizons and teaches me to be flexible and open. There are things, such as the data collection I was planning to do, which proved very hard to accomplish and disappointed me and my *grand* expectations. I definitely had to adjust what I initially planned to do to make it more feasible in the local context and situation, and I gladly did it. I got to experience many more things and accomplish unlikely tasks, jump over intimidating obstacles and get victories in the most unexpected places.

During my fellowship, I read about other fellows' experiences. One of these accounts really stuck with me: "*Mi consejo es no crearse grandes expectativas sino fijarse metas concretas*" (My advice is not to entertain great expectations; just stick to concrete goals). On the one hand, I agree and I think it is important to follow one's progress throughout the fellowship based on specific goals set at the start. On the other hand, I believe that the bigger one's expectations are, the more it is possible to get out of the fellowship. In the short time we often have, it can be hard to achieve many things because of situational and contextual limitations. However, it is possible! And it can't hurt to try and set goals that seem out of reach. If my experience is any proof, it can pay off to try. And even if it doesn't pan out, it remains a good learning experience and an example set for future initiatives.