

A Frenchwoman in Ecuador

by Mathilde Dybowsky

I am Mathilde, the daughter of Sylviane, from the south east of France. I enjoy the opportunity of writing to the Subud community to say hello and send my best thoughts to all the ones I meet one day in Amanecer or Indonesia (in 1994) or in Quebec last winter. This summer I spent 5 weeks in Ecuador in “Asociacion Vivir”, a project supported by Susila Dharma.

(from left to right, up line you have: Janeth, a doctor; Julia, the coordinator; Mathilde, who is writing; Bella, who welcomes people. Second line: Marco, a doctor; Christi, Eliana’s daughter who is helping for communication; Eliana Garzon; Veronica, the house keeper; Jennifer who was the communicator and Christina, the treasurer)

I was welcomed by Julia Friescheisen-Koehler, a German lady who coordinates a project within Vivir and who knows Ecuador well. She introduced me to the people there and helped me get accustomed to the local rhythm.

For those who do not know, the Asociacion Vivir was founded seventeen years ago by an Ecuadorian doctor called Eliana Garzon (or Mariana Galarza outside of Subud). Eliana, with her traditional medical training was not satisfied with only allopathic treatments, it was especially difficult for her accept to create dependency between herself and her patients and she felt that by only working with allopathic tools, she was not going to help the health situation in her country to get any better.

Thus she was happy to discover that there were other types of alternative medicines. Little by little she created along with the team of people who work in Asociacion Vivir with her, another proposal for health, based on a more holistic vision.

Vivir has the particularity of not being enclosed in a pre-established framework and to organically follow its own growth and development. Vivir has done an enormous amount of work in 19 of the 22 Ecuadorian provinces, with numerous people benefiting both directly and indirectly.

Vivir’s favourite tool is their taller or workshop, with its own very specific definition of workshop. The aim of these workshops is to break the pattern whereby the knowledge and the power over health is in the hands of the doctor. These workshops allow those present to reestablish the power over their own health.

With this aim, the workshops:

- Explain that health is a simple thing which each person can either strengthen or weaken in their everyday lives.
- Give back value to the “grandmother recipes” and the traditional lore and knowledge of the people of the Andes mountains.
- Provide basic tools so that each person can take care of their own health and wellbeing, as well as that of their families.

Susila Dharma International Association (SDIA) fosters global cooperation and understanding through long-term partnerships, education and capacity-building within its member organizations. Specifically, SDIA supports social and humanitarian activities including health, education, women and children’s development, and community development through its network of members and projects in more than 30 countries.

SDIA is an affiliate organization of the **World Subud Association**. **Subud®**, the acronym for Susila Budhi Dharma, is an association of people belonging to all cultures and religions who are united through an inner spiritual experience. SDI maintains consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

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Eliana during a Workshop



- Encourage participants to start making changes in their lives.

Following these workshops, many have improved their nourishment, their self esteem and their lifestyle; some have even taken control of their lives in a spectacular manner.

People from the poorest and most deprived districts of Quito have created their own enterprises starting from certain elements that they learned during the workshops. One woman set up a restaurant enterprise, others have proposed beauty care in their homes...so that these women really, by themselves, have come out of a state of poverty as these enterprises continue to flourish. Some among them have even decided to emigrate to Spain.

Reading about these impressive successes on Vivir's website while I was far away in France (www.avivir.org), I couldn't understand how Vivier was able to bring about such successful and important life changes

(Eliana during a workshop)

Meeting Eliana helped me to understand. She is a woman with contagious energy, unlimited motivation, and a holistic vision, a woman who is totally committed to her work. What is more she has trust in the people and does not work with her head alone, but also with her heart and her whole being. She has vast experience, is very enterprising and is not afraid of changing structures.

I came to work at Vivir on a project whose aim is to

understand the methodology of the Vivir 'workshops' in their entire dimension, with the hope to create modules and tools that can be duplicated.

Eliana has recently started managing a program called, "Feed yourself, Ecuador" within the Ministry of social welfare. This program is dedicated to the nourishment of the poorest groups of people. Before Eliana's arrival, it consisted in simply giving them food vouchers. Eliana was not happy with this and within a few months, working from her overall vision she gave another dimension to the project. Currently "Feed yourself Ecuador" comprises:

- Workshops throughout the whole country like the ones set up by Vivir.
- The creation of a national label which sells fruit and local produce all over the country in public places.
- A large television publicity campaign for this label and other related projects.

Eliana, herself, gives workshops herself to the poor populations belonging to this program and she is hoping to train the program's technicians in the Vivir methodology. She is applying what she has learned from Vivir on a larger scale. With this work, her personal goal and ambition is to resolve the problem of malnutrition and hunger in Ecuador.

One Thursday was a very special day for me. I went with Eliana, Julia, Carmen and the driver to sit in on a workshop being run by Eliana, four hours from Quito. During the drive, Carmen, who works with Eliana at the Ministry, told us about her own history.

I was very impressed, by this lady's tough story, her strength and commitment, by her financial independence which she earned very young through her arts and crafts, by the way whereby already at twelve years old she started encouraging women to not let themselves be beaten by their husbands, while she was teaching them to sew.

This woman always rebelled against machismo and the mistreatment of women and, thanks to her courage and will alone, she has managed to become respected by men.

She didn't set herself any professional limits, but she managed to get as far as working for the World Bank as a project manager for everything to do with human development and self esteem before joining Eliana at the Ministry.

Along the way to the workshop Carmen had organized a meeting with the provincial director. I was lucky to be allowed to attend the meeting. It was a

wonderful meeting, for this man has a very interesting vision of development. He had come to realize that one doesn't get anywhere with isolated projects and that a lot of public money had been wasted due to lack of coordination and long term vision. Today the objectives of the province are:



A Woman at the Workshop

- To know the territory well—to achieve this they need to create maps of the people concerned, those in need and the resources.
- To articulate the project from a global vision standpoint.
- To work on changing the attitude of the people concerned (individuals, farmers, NGO's, those who conceive projects)

The idea is to get out of a narrow vision where only personal interest counts, so as to adopt a vision that takes everyone's needs into account, and which also takes into account the available resources. To work from observations and to adopt a reflective attitude to be able to decide what can be done.

From this policy it appears that the main project for the territory is that of tourist development, taking into account the needs of the province. The state program "Feed yourself Ecuador" is bringing its competence to support this project.

What touched me the most was that Carmen told us in the car that the provincial director in question had had a very narrow attitude when they started working together. All he wanted to do was place his friends in positions of power. It was through debating with him and proposing alternatives that Carmen managed to change his attitude and that now he has now adopted a holistic vision.

Then we sat in on Eliana's workshop and little by little I saw the faces of the people change.

At first they all looked half asleep, but gradually, thanks to Eliana's evaluations and sensitive explanations which use everyday images and her sense of humour, they started livening up, smiling, becoming interested and attentive. By the end of her workshop they were so touched that they came to thank us and to hug us.

This day gave me a certain overall vision of the

project 'Feed yourself Ecuador'; the participants who benefited from Eliana's workshop; the technicians who will continue to give workshops throughout the province; Carmen, who supervises the project in the northern region and Eliana on the national level, as well as the two provincial directors who are relay partners of the project.

This day allowed me to realize the importance of the project to understand in all its dimensions the methodology used in the Vivir workshops in order to create modules to be able to replicate them. These modules are necessary to be able to train the technicians belonging to the "Feed Yourself Ecuador" program and to achieve the aim of changing the health culture in Ecuador.

It seems to me that Eliana and Carmen are changing the world—and it's not a dream. It is the result of a life of commitment and effort. It is helped by the current political context in Ecuador with the left wing president Sr. Correa. It is an everyday fight to resolve the problems and to face the difficulties.

I feel extremely lucky to have been there and to have had the possibility to know and understand this terribly interesting process and to participate in life at Vivir.

It seems to me that such processes of change may be difficult in our good old Europe... Civilized countries... look and learn !!!

I hope I the reason I say that is only that I don't know all the beauties of the projects that are happening in Europe. If you have informations about that or if you want to react, I'll be very happy to hear you. Here's my email: anothermatilda@hotmail.com

I wish you all success in your projects and a good Ramadhan,

Mathilde

Carmen is the woman on the right

