

REPORT OF THE NETWORK OF SINTRAL ECUADOR LEON DORMIDO - OYAMBARO FEBRUARY 2006

RESUME:

Mauricio and Rebeca Wild

1) REGULAR AND ESPECIAL ACTIVITIES

Since our last report two months ago the activities of the network of Sintral have followed their usual rhythm: the exchange of products between different provinces and climate zones have been made possible by four trucks. The Centers of Autonomous Activities (CPAA) have been attended by our coordinator and have opened their doors to children, youngsters and adults according to the locally established days and hours.

In December around 40 persons came to the Province of Pichincha to visit an organic model farm. This was an opportunity to organize a meeting of the coordinators and representatives of a number of Sintral groups on the Pestalozzi grounds. This meeting allowed us to have new insights into the present state of the network of Sintral, to better understand its needs, achievements and projections for the future.

In January, Mauricio and one of our neighbors of the León Dormid visited a number of groups in various provinces (Chimborazo, Loja, Zamora Chinchipe, Guayas, Cañas and Imbabura) during a trip of around 3500 km. The main purpose of their visits was to give support and guidance for their efforts to organize themselves in activities of mutual financial help and to clarify the relationship of this aspect with the meaning of Sintral.

Two new Sintral groups were inaugurated in the provinces of Esmeraldas and Manabí. One of them is located in a nearly untouched natural environment about two hours' drive from the city of Esmeraldas and intends to contribute tropical products to the network. The other group has been constituted by fishermen who are able to contribute valuable proteins to Sintral.

For these openings the groups of Cotacachi sent Andean products and the truck which transported them was accompanied by two Indians from Cotacachi. For the first time in their lives they had close contact with the way of life of black people in Ecuador and immediately this exchange of products turned into an exchange of cultures with their different folklore and habits.

In January a group of youngsters of the CPAA Kausankapac (Cotacachi) came for an exchange of four days with the youngsters of the León Dormido.

In February we had a meeting with the Commune of Oyambaro, our closest neighbors, to explain the functioning and meaning of our CPAA and invite their youngsters and parents to get to know what it is all about.

In the meanwhile, at the León Dormido the processes described in our last report are slowly taking shape. Still, the land of the Fundación Educativa Pestalozzi in Tumbaco has not been sold, while the expenses for maintenance and legal obligations continue. This limits us very much in making headway in our new project.

However, thanks to the conviction and dedication of the persons living here, projects like community spaces, agricultural farming , irrigation and drinking water go on functioning and the Centers for Autonomous Activities for children and youngsters are progressing with courses for all the parents involved.

At the same time we have started to work with an internal structure which makes it possible to register the activities of all the projects of the León Dormido in alternative currency.

Thanks to weekly dialogues of all the participants of the project we have worked on a new framework that can accommodate the transition from the former “housing project” into an environment suitable for all generations.”

With the arrival of a sixteen year old student of a school in Switzerland (SBW=School for the Development of Vocation) we have now initiated a new project destined to provide new experiences and activities to young people.

A parallel project for adults interested in getting to know our new approach at the León Dormido is ready to be sent out on request.

Since January, our weekly Sintral meetings in which we have regularly been exchanging experiences and reflections, has been moved from Tumbaco to the León Dormido. These meetings are attended by the drivers of the Sintral trucks and by other people with different functions in the network. Lately it became transparent that a new process of becoming more sensitive and reflective of the meaning of Sintral has been going on which we would like to share with you in this report.

2) IDENTIFICATION OF THREE MAIN ACHSIS OF SINTRAL AND THEIR INTERRELATIONSHIPS AND EFFECTS ON EACH OTHER

In our last meeting, in order to come closer to the meaning of Sintral, we felt the need of formulating a number of aspects in a more systematic way - not as a theoretical exercise, but rather as a way of finding more precise explanations for the innumerable experiences gained during the last years, appreciate the results obtained and analyze our limitations.

a) FIRST AXIS: ASPECTS OF SURVIVAL IN SINTRAL.

Here we have identified the following aspects that affect us immediately:

- 1) Security of providing necessary food.
- 2) Access to healthy food through organic agriculture.
- 3) Conservation of farmland under the menace of being expropriated.
- 4) Provision of clothing and housing.
- 5) Practice of natural medicine.

- 6) Commerce through alternative economy.
 - 7) Practice of alternative economy in various aspects, such as actions of mutual financial support with official money, but without interest.
- Reflections on the implications of the general economical system and its effects “against life”.

b) SECOND AXIS: HUMAN ASPECTS IN SINTRAL/ CREATION OF RELATIONSHIPS OF MUTUAL RESPECT

- 1) Education based on the respect for the individual and his/her authentic needs of development that requires adequate and prepared environments.
- 2) Integrity of families.
- 3) Equal value of men and women
- 4) Practice of “mingas” = community work and cooperation in working teams instead of vertical relationships of authority and obedience.

- 5) Creation of structures for giving personal support both free of conditioning and favorable for self-determination.
- 6) Creation of social environments for human development at all ages.
- 7) Cultural diversity, respect for local cultures and cultural exchange.

- 8) Meetings of people of different backgrounds in which exchange of know-how, knowledge of all kinds, processes of communication and reflection can take place.
- 9) Festivities based on living cultural expressions.

c) THIRD AXIS: PROBLEMS OF ENVIRONMENT

- 1) Contamination of the earth, water and air through chemicals, wastes, noise, noxious technologies (e.g. television, video-games and many others), all kinds of invisible waves etc.
- 2) Fight for access to water, lack of protection of water sources, adequate distribution and quality of water.
- 3) Many difficulties in the distribution of farmland and manipulation of farm produce for economical reasons.
- 4) Unscrupulous mining and exploitation of woods, abuse of animals and plants
- 5) Lack of measures of precaution for natural disasters (climate, floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes etc.)
- 6) Wide-spread lack of consciousness about the consequences of strive for power, corruption and tendencies of war that increasingly undermine efforts of protection and prevention.

3) REFLECTIONS UPON RESULTS AND LIMITATIONS

- a) Thanks to support received from SWISSAID three truck drivers are able to practically dedicate themselves to keep up the alternative market

activities in different provinces. This includes get-togethers of people of different cultures, exchange of experience, knowledge, techniques and similar activities. On occasions up to 20 people travel up to 10 hours on these trucks standing or sitting on mattresses.

These trips have made possible to serve at least 35-40 groups of the over 100 groups that initially were opened in Ecuador. Counting an average of 40 families per group, this means around 4500 people who profit from the network in this way.

In addition, thanks to the exchange without official money between different climate zones, they now can afford a more diversified diet than before. Of course this means that the products are transported over long distances and tremendous changes of altitude, often on roads that are defective and menaced by landslides and fog.

Thanks to community actions and "hiring" of workers with alternative currency, it was possible to grow products for Sintral on farmland that otherwise would lie idle.

In order to secure healthy products, several seminars and visits to organic farms have been organized.

Whenever possible the drivers collect used clothes in urban groups and transport them where they are needed most.

At a very small scale building materials could be purchased in alternative currency and housing problems been solved through community actions.

Through personal donations it was possible to save two farms from being confiscated by the bank ? one in the province of Loja and the other in Guayas. There is a long list of small farms still in danger. However we hope that later on the activities of interest-free mutual financial support going on a number of groups might help out in such emergencies.

As far as they could persons with knowledge of natural medicine have traveled to various groups when people were severely ill or simply to show a way out of a practice of medicine closely tied to money.

During the last months they drivers have tried to organize themselves in order to spend more time in the groups for conversation after delivering products and helping with the accounting.

b) Usually the drivers are accompanied by a couple of members of the groups involved. Thanks to these regular journeys between the regions get-togethers ? such as national congresses, meetings of coordinators and on specific topics, a new consciousness of the values of other

cultures is growing in Sintral. These are opportunities for exchanging styles of life and know-how, beginning from recipes, alternative technology, prevention of illness and handicraft up to dances, folkore music and rituals in occasions of birth and death.

However, in spite of all this positive development we realize that on many levels a real respect for the individual ? between men and women and between different generations ? is still lacking. This may be explained simply because of habits, ancient traditions or difficult circumstances of life.

In most Sintral groups there are more women active than men. Often women not only carry hundred-weights of potatoes, but double responsibilities ? household and children and hard work outside of the house which seldom is recognized.

Generally children get to feel all these problems in a special way. Psychological and physical ill-treatment are still widely spread and many families are the dumping ground for adult suffering caused by outer factors.

On the other hand, parents believe that their children will have a better future if they receive a "decent schooling" and learn to be obedient to teachers. In reality this means that - at an ever earlier age - children are separated from their families and communities and forced to submit to an alienating and often humiliating system.

Even the poorest make big efforts to acquire a television set that ? at least for a certain amount of time - allows them to escape from their real circumstances. Watching TV makes them feel part of a grandiose world, disregarding that it is just a world of fiction. If possible everybody would like to get hold of some modern fixture ? a mobile phone, radio, a stereo set of great volume or some other contaminating apparatus.

The propaganda which reaches people this way pushes them to buy chemical fertilizers, sprays which promise better crops on short terms, remedies for animals and people to combat symptoms and thus take part in "progress".

During their journeys the Sintral drivers are constantly in touch with all these increasingly growing phenomena. They are invited into families who do not have plates for each member of the family, but where radio or TV are running all day long. Obviously, as guests they can hardly speak about the dangers of modern entertainment technology without lacking respect towards their hosts.

Since Sintral has started in the "Pesta" with its basic theme of

preparing environments in accordance with processes of development, the Centers of Autonomous Activities (CPAA) have become places where we are able to perceive certain changes in the above mentioned habits.

There is a notable difference in human relationships between newly opened groups and others where experiences have been gained in preparing environments where people are able to develop initiatives and are accompanied by others who do not manipulate or determine their actions.

Thus we hope that around these centers structures may be built in which different quality of life can grow and where support in personal and family problems can be given. In these places an example can be set how authoritarian relationships can be substituted by human cooperation.

c) The first points show how Sintral has made little advances in diminishing suffering and in creating circumstances where a different quality of life can be experienced.

It is much more difficult to deal with the huge environmental problems of our present world, since they are have to do with interests related to the official money system, structures of power and corruption.

Here we feel that Sintral is an "impossible mission", but still does the work of ants who build underground tunnels in the jungle without mixing with politics.

Human contacts in which confidence can grow make it possible to point to dangers and to interrelations, to set examples such as "dry toilets" and separation of garbage, organic agriculture or a more loving family life.

This way small social environments can be built where life has a better taste and new doors can be opened.

With regard to natural catastrophes we have no choice but to point out to dangers which are often concealed because of inertia or economic interests.

4) THANKS FOR SUPPORT

Finally we would like to thank again all those who have contributed, so that in spite of all problems and obstacles Sintral has been able to live:

On one hand to SWISSAID as an organization interested in our approach to assist people in need,

On the other hand all those who as individuals or through calling upon others have assisted this work.