

Plant a Seed, Build a Brighter Future

Project proposal by Ervin Liz '16

San Andrés, Cauca, Colombia

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Luther College, Decorah, Iowa

Project description

Home to the Nasa Indigenous People is the town of San Andrés. The town, which is located in the region of Tierradentro in the Department of Cauca, Colombia, will be the place of execution of this project. I'll be working with teachers and students at the agricultural high school "Instituto Microempresarial Agropecuario San Andrés" (IMAS). This project is a joint initiative with the IMAS and will primarily focus on building a greenhouse for the study and reproduction of endangered agricultural plant species. Native species will be propagated, cultivated and re-planted in critical areas within the region. Ultimately, agricultural species will be reproduced with the aim of providing seeds for local farmers. **Peace for our purposes is defined as the recuperation and protection of the cultural and biocultural Nasa memory as a result of the conservation and redistribution of native species.** The redistribution of seeds will simultaneously enhance food security, generate and promote economic alternatives and ultimately empower the community. Peace is also defined as the process of learning and joint work derived from the execution of the project.

Project partners

Mrs. Manuela Silva is the principal of the IMAS; Silva is an honorable and hardworking person, whom I first met when I enrolled in the institution at age 14. Mrs. Silva verbally agreed and expressed her commitment and gratitude toward carrying out this project in the IMAS. Mrs. Silva primarily agreed to help me acquire the resources and tools for a satisfactory and productive completion of the project. Mrs. Silva also agreed to help me administratively with the project while I was not present in the school. Mrs. Silva presented my idea to the administrative and teaching body of the school, whose response was the consistent approval and commitment on helping with the project.

I was recently able to meet Dr. Olga Lucia Sanabria, Ph.D. in Ethnobotanical Biology. Professor Sanabria is a faculty member at the University of Cauca and also member of the Latin American Research Group in Ethnobotany (GELA). Professor Sanabria manifested her deep interest and willingness to help with the project. Professor Sanabria agreed to help supporting the project by offering her scientific knowledge on the plants from Tierradentro. Her thesis "Manejo de germoplasma nativo en agroecosistemas tradicionales de la region andina de Tierradentro, Cauca, Colombia, Suramérica" is a great source of information on the management and conservation of native species of Tierradentro. Professor Sanabria will be a great asset for the success of this project.

Budget requirements

The total budget for this project will be \$10,000; this project requires these primary elements: land, greenhouse for plant propagation, farming tools and seeds. Given the steep prices of land, a portion of the IMAS's farmland will be used for the construction of the greenhouse. The greenhouse is expected to be 8 m. wide by 16 m. long, and 3 m. high. The capacity of the greenhouse is set for 300 grow bags containing the same number of plants. A greenhouse of this dimension will require raw materials estimated at \$3,700. The greenhouse will be designed by IMAS professor Berta Flores who specializes in agricultural engineering. In order to reduce costs, the IMAS students and professors will help with the construction. One main architect will be hired at the expected cost of \$1,500. The greenhouse will be supplied with new farming tools, grow bags, etc. at the estimated cost of \$2,000. Half of the seeds for the first year will be purchased from local farmers at an estimated cost of \$500. The other half of the seeds will be collected from donations by the local government. The remaining budget of \$2,300 will be used as contingency for unexpected expenses and travelling.

Project schedule

This project will be executed over the course of six weeks. The schedule of the project is expected to begin on 21 July 2014. The first week I'll meet with the staff members of the IMAS. In this meeting a committee will be created; the committee will be responsible for planning, executing and monitoring the project. The committee will meet the same week with the community and the student body; this meeting will be used to explain and promote the project. During the second week all raw materials and tools needed for the construction and readying of the greenhouse will be purchased, and construction will take place during the third, fourth and fifth week. The sixth week will be spent on the collection and planting of seeds. A final meeting will be held on 27 August with the project's committee in order to write a progress report and assign duties and responsibilities after my departure.

My skills and prospects from the project

I am Ervin Liz a member of the Nasa Indigenous People, native of Tierradentro, Cauca, Colombia. I am an economics major at Luther College, a fluent Spanish speaker and I also understand Nasa, the language of the people which makes 60 percent of the population of San Andres. I attended the IMAS high school from 8th to 11th grade giving me the experience and knowledge necessary for working with the locals. My main asset is the understanding of the needs of the community and the most efficient and viable ways to address those needs with the available resources. In the short-term, my main expectation is to effectively build the facility for the study and reproduction of native endangered agricultural species. I also expect a prompt and effective engagement and commitment of the community with the project. In the long-term, my main expectation is to promote a sustainable peace by generating consciousness on the conservation of native species as a means towards nutritional sovereignty, economic empowerment and environmental sustainability.

Scope

This project primarily aims at the conservation of the wild Cacha beans (*Phaseolus dumosus* and *Phaseolus coccineneus*) and the less endangered Chachafruto bean (*Erythrina edulis*). These beans are not only highly nutritious but they are also endangered. This project also aims at benefiting 20 selected families over the course of one year after the establishment of the project. The criteria of selection of the families will be discussed with the project's committee. The selected families will be supplied with the seeds produced in the greenhouse. Each family will be responsible for planting and harvesting the crops in their own farmland. Depending on their success, each household will be expected to contribute to the expansion of the project by donating seeds back to the program. As time and resources allow, 20 more families will be added on a yearly basis to the project.

Future planning

The long- term sustainability of the project will be achieved through planning, budgeting and monitoring. The committee will be responsible for a semiannual meeting upon the completion of the project. These meetings will serve for budgeting and the identification of the current areas of improvements as well as future needs. The committee members in Colombia will be responsible for monitoring the progress of the families served by the project. The project will only continue to benefit the families that show progress and hard work with their seeds. Financially, the project will be sustained from money raising activities organized by the IMAS. On the other hand the government of San Andrés has an annual budget for environmental and agricultural projects. They showed interest in this project and agreed to issue some financial aid for the project as required over time.