

Plant a Seed, Build a Brighter Future
Colombia
Luther College
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Section I:

Goals

This project's short-term goal was to build a greenhouse for the reproduction, and redistribution of native agricultural species. In the long-term the projects aims at enhancing food security and generate and promote economic alternatives through the redistribution of seeds to the local farmers.

Overview

Initial planning indicated that this project was to be executed in the town of San Andres with the help and coordination of the IMAS high school. Due, however, to the high presence of Guerrillas in this area and with the concern about the safety for myself and for the project, Plant a Seed, Build a Brighter Future was moved to be neighboring town of Togoima. The project was executed in the town of Togoima with the coordination and help of the agricultural high school, Institucion Educativa Angelina Gullumuz, and under the supervision of Mr. Rodolfo Ipia and Mr. Marcelino Nez, both teachers and leaders in this high school.

The change of location of the project did not carry any major difficulties. On the one hand, the IMAS high school and Mrs. Manuela Silva understood the safety concern, and sympathetically agreed the project to be moved to the Town of Togoima. On the other hand, the whole community and teachers at the Angelina Gullumuz high school cheerfully welcomed the project and offered to help with anything that was needed for a satisfactory execution and completion of the project.

The town of Togoima is located in an isolated region, and public transportation to the town is available only on Saturdays and Sundays. Although reaching the town wasn't a major issue, its far location did convey into more transportation costs to be incurred. Transportation costs were indeed higher, but aside from that, no major tangible difficulty was encountered.

The engagement and support of the community with the project was unceasing and constant. The government of the municipality of Paez was also involved and offered valuable help. Most of the construction material for instance was shipped using the trucks, which the government of Paez kindly borrowed to us for two days. The local government also paid most of the gas, which reduce our transportation costs by around \$300. Local architects Joaquin Muse and Odilmer Muse also semi-volunteer to do all the construction work by working at a rate of only \$10.7 per day. This help allowed us to save more than \$600 in architectural wages.

Thus far the project has been a complete success. No major difficulties were faced at any point during the whole of the construction process. There was no budget constrains or language barriers because I am a native Spanish speaker as well as Nasa Yuwe native speaker which allows me to communicate well with all the members of the community. Communication between the committee, the community and me was satisfactory and nobody had contradictions or different ideas with respect of the goals of the project. Such excellent communication and understanding was key to develop the project and to complete it in such a successful way. The short-term goal was successfully and satisfactorily completed. All work was done on time and the schedule was almost never altered. The willingness to work and the acceptance of the project by the entire community was key for the success of this project.

In the short term, countable people were benefited with the project. The benefited people include the architects, local shops and restaurants. These people were benefited because they got new jobs in the case of the architects and in the case of the shops and restaurants they got to sell their goods and services increasing their incomes and sales. The project tried to benefit the local community as much as possible, thus most shopping and services were acquired from shops and people within the community of Togoima.

In the long term this project primarily aims at providing with seeds and products mainly to the Togoima high school and the local community. The project will also be used for the cultivation of native medicinal plants, which will be provided to the people in need at the local health care office.

The use and maintenance of the greenhouse will be coordinated between the Togoima high school and the health care service center of the town. This joint work is expected to ensure good use and long-term sustainability for project.

Section II

Definition and contribution to peace

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. This project contributed and will continue to contribute to peace in many different ways. In the short-term the project generated jobs and encouraged people to work together. "Minga" is a word, which indigenous people use when referring to community work. Minga, however, is slowly being forgotten as time and more "modern" ways of working influence the indigenous communities. This project, nevertheless, in an effort to recuperate the old traditions and thus contribute to peace, made use of Minga as a mean to bring the community together and work in this project, which will benefit everyone.

In the long-term this project will recuperate and redistribute native agricultural and medicinal species of plants to the local farmers. The redistribution of seeds is expected to contribute to the restoration of endangered species, thus assuring a future for these plants as well as the traditions associated to their consumption and medicinal use. The recuperation of this species will contribute to peace because it will assure the protection of the cultural and bio-cultural memory of the Nasa people.

This project has allowed me to understand that despite the racial and cultural and even intellectual differences it is possible to work together and achieve a common good. I also discovered that people can learn to work not just focusing in their personal gain, but in the gains of the community and also care about nature and sustainability.

This project allowed me to grow as a person and as a leader. Throughout the 2 months period that lasted the execution of the project I understood that a leader who makes himself equal to the followers is a leader who will never lack supporters. Also it is important as a person to be humble no matter who you deal with, in the end even the "smallest" person has something to teach you. Lastly, as a leader I learnt that good incentives and the right amount of authority and guidance makes any work, even the hardest; fast, possible and well done.

Despite poverty, lack of education and technological knowledge, Plant a Seed, Build a Brighter Future not only offered to the local community innovative farming methods but also pioneered more sustainable and efficient agricultural production processes. With the right investment, good budgeting and planning, it is possible to offer isolated communities better ways of production and ultimately generate economic alternatives, and thus enhance and promote peace.

- Ervin Liz

