

Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational experience No. 14



I do what I can

I DO WHAT I CAN

In the Amazonian border region of Ecuador and Colombia, the problems that threaten the population are not few: oil extraction, pollution, social violence. The testimony of Belia Vaca, inspired by the “Wiphala” system of the Environmental Clinic, is a faithful demonstration that it is feasible to change reality from oneself life, beginning processes and transformations within reach, without ignoring at the same time problems of greater magnitude. I do what I can - Belia’s motto is to awaken other people from her own testimony and concrete actions

Feeling fulfilled

With these words, Belia Vaca begins her story. She lives with her husband Galo Rodríguez in rural Pacizacu, about an hour by bus from Lago Agrio, the capital of Sucumbios, one of Ecuador's Amazonian provinces. The couple has five kids, who are already grown up and live in Lago Agrio. Ricardo, one of the sons along with his girlfriend are here for a visit this weekend. They will help Belia with the people assisting a workshop of the Environmental Clinic. Belia and Galo have built some simple cottages as tourist accommodation in the last years, so there is room enough for the expected group.

"I have been participating in the Environmental Clinic for 9 years and I still remember very well when Dr. Adolfo was working in the area". Adolfo Maldonado, along with others, supported by the environmental organization Acción Ecológica and sponsored by ASPA began to invite people like Belia to work as a collective to develop and implement a system of integral community alternative. From there, the “Wiphala” system (in reference to the flag of the Abya Yala people) was born, a product of collective work. It combines the personal, family and community levels, seeking to build relationships through knowledge, skills and attitudes, including production, marketing and energy; together with participation, organization, and environmental coexistence. In the workshop of



Belia Vaca

Through her new routine, she motivates others to become interested in transformations.

this weekend, a group of approximately thirty people will learn more about the concepts of permaculture, visiting the house and farm of Belia, and additionally getting to know experiences of other members of the group living in a nearby town.



From sadness to joy

The community of Pacayacu, like many other settlements along the border with Colombia, has been affected by the civil war in the neighboring country. A further complication is the fact that the whole area has been an oil exploitation zone for more than 30 years, with very high pollution levels.

The Environmental Clinic in one of its magazines (Alert Orange No. 7) mentions that "in the last 10 years, 8,888 people have committed suicide in Ecuador, mostly young people, especially women and more often in rural environments". This phenomenon relates to the lack of perspectives for many people. The Amazonian region of Ecuador is not the exception in this aspect. A study in the zone found that an above-average proportion of children were suffering this situation as a result of the imminent intra-family violence as well as of the brutal war scenarios, the children's drawings showed a strong black-white contrast, where black represented sad emotions and thoughts.

Slogan of the Environmental clinic.

Open your eyes! Seeks doing studies that allow to know more about the problems that affect people.

Act! Seeks that the affected population intervene on their situation to change it.

Rejoice! Joy is the pillar of any personal change.

(Source: Magazine Alerta Naranja No. 7 - August 2013, Clínica Ambiental)

Belia has always been aware of her community, but the discord has often not allowed the community to take concrete steps to bring real change. When she first heard of the Environmental Clinic she did not think twice, and decided to participate.

With what crazy idea will she return this time?

With a smile, Belia remembers: "At first I went to the workshops of the Environmental Clinic and returning home my children used to tell me: what crazy idea did you bring back home this time?" She says that being the daughter of a farmer taught her many things, she learned to respect and value nature and also got to know other forms of coexistence. "I am not much of theory,

I prefer the practice", explains Belia. Over the years, she managed to get her husband Galo and her children involved. Two years ago, at Christmas, her son Ricardo wrote her a letter thanking his mother for being such a resourceful and different person, admitting that he and his brothers did not at first understand Belia's will and energy when she changed things in the house. "Life gave me my family and my knowledge, I have joy and satisfaction of having done what I did and will continue to do; and as a woman I feel pleased" says Belia. Motivated by the work shops, Belia decided to change her life and her habits. She recalls: "We started reading stories in my home to all children in the sector; for this we had a box with 500 stories that rotated in the community, they and I were very happy".

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Sowing joy, harvesting happiness

Belia gradually changed the diet of her family: fruit juices, aromatic waters of local medicinal plants instead of sodas or chemical drinks, less sugar, no more hormone-fed chicken, meals are prepared with herbs and vegetable from the orchard. A dry toilet whose fertilizer serves for the orchard has been installed in the house, the orchard is full with a large variety of plants, edible and medicinal, as well as ornamental. "I began to work the esthetics of my house and garden, planting flowers and joy". The farm of Belia and Galo is named Paroto Island and is located on an island, formed by the Aguarico River and an arm of this. The name Paroto refers to a species of Amazonian tree of great dimension, the largest that is found on the island. There are more than thirty hectares. Previously, cocoa was grown in monoculture, today a great variety of plants are grown in the sector, without any agrochemical and implementing permaculture practices acquired in the Environmental Clinic.

Edible forest

An area of the island has an edible forest. Belia explains: "It is a fairly large agroforestry plot where, respecting the trees, different fruit



Agroforestry

"Fruit juices, aromatic waters of local medicinal plants instead of sodas or chemical drinks"



Edible forest.

“With the edible forest we produce and a part of the production is given back to nature; We do not harvest everything and we leave some for the survival of the animals that have returned to the area where, in addition to food, they have regained the confidence of subsisting in this habitat that is and will always be their home by right”.

and timber trees, and medicinal plants have been planted in addition to some tubers, including: chapel, mango, avocado, lemons, bananas, grape, peanut, ginger, turmeric and others. Much of the family's food comes from the edible forest and the vegetable garden of Belia. "With the edible forest, we produce and a part of the production give back to nature; we do not harvest everything and we leave some for the survival of the animals that have returned to the area where, in addition to food, they have regained the confidence of subsisting in this habitat that is and will always be their home by right. Among these we have: birds, monkeys, rodents and even turtles. The flowers and fruits of the orchard have attracted butterflies, bees, hummingbirds and other birds. We installed a small corral

to raise Guatuzas, a species of rodents typical of the area that was not seen frequently, which have returned to their natural habitat. In Paroto Island wood is used from fallen trees, straw toquilla and others, only to build cabins, houses, tools or some useful crafts in the same place.”

Spreading curiosity

Many of Belia's neighbors still live in the classical developmental system, completely deforesting their farms to sow oil palm, maize, coffee and cocoa. But there are also cases where neighbors come to learn about the concept of producing and living like Belia. "The ideas are not lacking



“The old depot was transformed into a cottage for Reiki and relaxation”

and there are many projects to start”, Belia laughs: “a pond for fish farming, installing solar panels and a bio-digester, but for now that is too expensive”. During the visit the installation of a sauna bath was in full march. The old depot was transformed into a cabin for Reiki and relaxation, walking around the house and the yard you can see the changes: A small mill mechanically driven by an old bicycle, an earth-built energy saving stove and a colony of native bees that begin to inhabit its new hive. “The charm here is the simplicity and the nature,” says Belia whose motto is not only to copy ideas but to improve them during implementation. “I often go out in the morning to the patio to be with my plants and also attend my house, but the priority is the environment and nature.”

Despite everything – I do what I can

Every eight weeks, the Environmental Clinic group realizes its workshops, where people from three Amazonian provinces attend. The principle of the Environmental Clinic is to work and start with those who are interested. Belia remembers that “the seeds exchange has been a part right from the beginning”. The oil extraction make people sad like Belia. “Pools next to oil wells have been around for many years and companies have never

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cleaned them, causing spills, polluting soil and water. The authorities deny everything and say everything is fine". From the Environmental Clinic, Belia and others have denounced these cases and now follow up on them. The other side of the medal is that the oil companies are almost the only option to find paid employment in the region. Most of their sons work in these companies. "You have to build happiness, from your own activities", summarizes Belia, remembering with laughter the comments of her family. One of her sons said "my mom works with her mouth", referring to the insistence of Belia for everyone to participate in community work or the case of the nun who said during a visit "looks like a crazy house". Belia was not let down or demotivated by these comments, feeling part of nature today, not wanting to dominate it but to live horizontally and being part of it. "It gives me great peace of mind that my children and their couples begin to take an interest in the edible forest that we have near the house since this is the way to guarantee the continuity of everything, when I am no longer here. Meanwhile, like the hummingbird - I do what I can”

A small mill mechanically driven by an old bicycle and an earth-built energy saving stove



Bike machine



Rocket stove



Messages to the future

- It is possible to change reality starting from your own life, conviction and personal motivation are crucial, and at the same time not lose sight of major problems.
- The overcoming of personal resignation, expressed by a passive attitude, generates authenticity in the person, transforming his life and coexistence with his family, community and environment.
- This experience shows that the most viable way is to spread curiosity in others based on oneself testimony, personified in concrete actions.

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Almanac to the Future

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Author: Jorge Krekeler, (jorge.krekeler@scbbs.net)

Misereor Adviser

Translation: Jorge Krekeler

Layout: Diana Patricia Montealegre

Images: Jorge Krekeler

Contact to the Story of Success:

Belia Vaca, email: beliavaca2@gmail.com

Adolfo Maldonado, Clínica Ambiental - salud@accioneologica.org

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