

# Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational Experience No. 39



**TRANSITIONS IN TIMES OF  
PANDEMIC**

*It all started when the Muyu Chakana Foundation, in the middle of the pandemic, decided not to put band-aids on the biggest wounds, the other words, instead of handing out food baskets, give native seeds and promote family gardens. Vegetable gardens and native seeds that change lives, young former gang members and indigenous people in the process of becoming seed growers and permaculturists, understanding the true importance of native and indigenous creole seeds.*



## **PILAR O KINTY, BUT NOT MARÍA**

Pilar, a Kiwcha woman from Otavaleña, tells her story: "I come from a Kiwcha family, dedicated to agriculture. My ancestors were exploited in the *haciendas* and all indigenous women were obliged to be called Maria. When I was 9 years old, I refused to be called Maria by my teacher because I am Pilar". When the teacher wanted to punish her, she grabbed the whip. "From that moment on, I began a process of different experiences that forged me as a leader. Adding to this the wisdom of my *taitas* (elders) and *mamas*. My grandmother used to tell me: you have to tighten your waist to open the roads! My grandfather, who passed away when I was 7 years old, gave me the name Kinty, which means hummingbird. Pilar or Kinty fulfils to the letter the legacy of her grandmother, being guardian by ancestral heritage, rescuing women's leadership,

permaculture, culture, mother tongue and clothing.

**"It is a real challenge that all the ancestral knowledge and wisdom of our taitas and mamas be the legacy of identity for the new generations, since we are so immersed in wanting to adopt other ways of life that we need to rescue and strengthen our roots and identity".**

Pilar says that in the communities adults do not easily enter into interaction with young people. **"Permaculture has existed in the communities because it is our daily lifestyle,...as a consequence of this great system [of development] our young people, including adults, have been absorbed, putting at risk our identity from the true Sumak Kawsay, which is where all life is born, our seeds to our food heritage, this being the biggest challenge to recover, what belongs to us by ancestral heritage. We have lost food sovereignty",** says the leader.



## PANDEMIC TRANSITIONS

The Muyu Chakana Foundation (from Kiwcha: Andean Seed Cross) began during the strict closure due to the pandemic health crisis with the delivery of food baskets to the most vulnerable; disabled, elderly and single mothers in impoverished urban neighborhoods of Ibarra and in some rural communities in the cantons of Cotacachi, Otavalo and Ibarra, all in the province of Imbabura, in the north of Ecuador. Pilar recalls: **"We started to put band-aids on the biggest wounds,**





**but when we saw that this was not the solution to the big problems we were going through, we began to hand out native and creole seeds instead of food baskets”.** Through Paul Murtha, another member of the foundation, we contacted the Seed Guardians Network to purchase organic seeds; from there, the foundation came up with the idea of creating native and creole seed banks to rescue, conserve and regenerate biodiversity, respecting the social and natural environment of each community.

With the support of Rogelio Simbaña of the Seed Guardian Network as a sponsor, Muyu Chakana started the first Basic Permaculture course. Asking Rogelio how to start a seed bank, Rogelio remained thoughtful for a while and then answered with a big smile: **“I don't know, but be you sure it's not going to be easy”** Pilar explains, in her words what Muyu Chakana seeks with the workshops: **“We are helping several mashis (colleagues) to make their knowledge a fundamental pillar to create a permaculture center**

**offering workshops, being them the teachers who impart their knowledge with the principles and ethics of permaculture, where their innate knowledge will remain for the new generations”.** At the beginning and before starting the course, Pilar, along with Rogelio made a tour of 16 rural communities of Cotacachi, Otavalo and Ibarra, in the end 86 people participated, as well as young people from urban neighborhoods of Ibarra.

The basic permaculture design course deals with the management and use of soil, water, seeds, cultivation techniques, edible forests, seedlings and aims to raise awareness for the respect and exchange of native and creole native seeds for the rescue and strengthening of the real food heritage.

A total of 148 people graduated, between women and men, between 8 and 64 years old. 48 of these people decided to continue with a second course, training themselves as seed

specialists, for the rescue, regeneration and conservation of the food heritage.

The transition experienced by Muyu Chakana, breaking away from the conventional logic of many NGOs, also as a response to people's weariness with the traditional approach to development, has cost discussions within the foundation because for those who come from the conventional school of development, it has not been easy to move towards new paths.

## URBAN VEGETABLE GARDENS OF PEACE

Christopher Robles is another leading member of Muyu Chakana. He lived with his grandmother in Ibarra until he was 12 years old. Then, living with his mother, they moved to Alpachaca, a neighborhood with a very complex social reality. At the age of 15, Christopher had already joined the *Blood* gang; violence, drugs, delinquency

and war with other gangs for the control of territory were the daily bread. At 19, he got into criminal trouble as a result of street violence. He eventually met his father, with whom he lived on a farm, away from Ibarra and his gang. Christopher recalls: "I cultivated the land and the land cultivated me; thanks to these years, living on the farm and working the land, I had become one of those people I hated, when I lived in the drug world.

In these years, Paul Murtha approached the *Blood* gang in the Alpachaca neighborhood and a prevention project was carried out; in this way the young gang members began to work as promoters visiting schools and working with young people, talking about the disadvantages of gang life, including drugs, robberies and violence. This way the gang members formed the collective "Calle, Paz y Respeto" (Street, Peace and Respect).



**Christopher, from the family farm, went to university, finishing his degree as an agronomist, and then returned to Alpachaca where he re-joined the collective. Blood as a gang did not cease to exist, but it did change its direction and achieved a new meaning. Together with its former rival, the Latin King gang, a group with which it had lived for years in a turf war, they took on the role of peacekeepers, helping to de-escalate the territorial conflicts of other youth gangs.** Blood currently manages the Cultivarte Center, located in the Alpachaca neighborhood; the facilities, managed by Blood under a loan agreement with the local government, house a rugby field so that the boys have a sport to channel their energies, a hairdressing salon where young ex-gang members are reinserted into the workforce, and a fast-food outlet. **"The gang has changed its raison d'être, but it is still our tribe and we feel part of this territory,"** Christopher explains.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Paul Murtha wanted to deliver food baskets in Alpachaca; Christopher managed to convince him to support young people in particular to create urban gardens. This Urban Vegetable Gardens of Peace project aroused great interest among young people. Christopher mentions the case of several young gang members, drug and alcohol addicts, with family disintegration signs, in whose cases the garden began to generate family interaction; boys who exchanged violence and vice for the garden.

## INTERCULTURALITY FROM PERMACULTURE

The Muyu Chakana courses generated more permanent encounters and coexistence between indigenous Karanquis, Otavalos, Kutacachis,

mestizos and Afros, groups that do not always feel comfortable sharing. Both Pilar and Christopher worked hard to create an intercultural environment. Christopher introduced Pilar to his people as his "sister". Little by little an atmosphere of respect arose where everyone didn't not hide their way of being, on the contrary, they showed their culture and identity. Mauricio, an urban mestizo participant of the course, achieved in the coexistences, with his rap presentation inspired by permaculture, that even older indigenous people entered with their body language to the rhythm of the music. Thus was born the intercultural network of permaculturists.

The role of Pilar and Christopher from Muyu Chakana, more than facilitators, is that of leaders of processes based on the social fabric of the territories they are part of. They are currently knocking on doors to obtain financial support to guarantee the continuity of the processes.

"The predisposition of the participants to support in order to make the coexistence and workshops possible is very great, there is a lot of social cohesion. And the interaction as a group gives us a lot of security to continue taking steps in the process of moving towards regenerative models of life", both agree.

## SEED FARMERS IN ACTION

Lourdes Muenala lives in a peri-urban neighborhood of Otavalo. She, along with her son Joshua of 22 years old have graduated from the basic permaculture course. **"With the course we recovered a lot of wisdom from our grandparents that we had already lost,"** says Lourdes. Since her husband did not participate in the course there are times of discussion about building a dry toilet or planting fruit trees for an edible forest on the



small plot of land. At the moment, she lacks the resources to re-build her greenhouse, which was destroyed by hurricane-force winds. Lourdes is a hard-working woman, used to taking on several jobs to support her four children. **"I have always recovered the seeds of beans, corn, quinoa and amaranth, but with the recovery of carrot seeds as well as the planting of ancestral and medicinal crops such**

**as the chaucha potato or black mashwa I have started from the workshops"**. Claudia Sanchez is another participant in the basic permaculture workshops Muyu Chakana. She is very appreciative of what she learned in the workshops and is applying it now. **"We harvest according to the lunar cycle, we smoke the seeds and the grain harvest before storing them; we store**

**the corn together with ash,"** says Claudia. Then we walk a little to see the vegetable garden, the growing edible forest, the gray water purification pond. Three generations work here: Claudia, her mother and her daughter, the youngest above all harvesting and eating...

Young people who have migrated with their parents from the countryside to the city or who were born there, as children of rural families, quickly understand how important and kind it is to grow food when the limiting factor is not having much space. Young people in the countryside often have plenty of land within their reach, but want to move to the city; it seems like a vicious circle.

## MESSAGES TO THE FUTURE

- Understand the pandemic also as a moment of opportunity, initiating transitions in acting towards the rescue and regeneration of biodiversity and seed exchange, ensuring from the permacultural understanding of food security and sovereignty and the creation of dynamic banks of native seeds.
- The vegetable garden as an element that generates union and family interaction, capable of giving a new direction to lives.
- Permaculture as a path that unites the recovery of ancestral wisdom with innovative technologies, promoting the improvement of health, welfare and economic opportunities among families, in full harmony with mother earth and the future.





# Almanac of the Future

The text was elaborated, based on conversations in situ by the Almanaque del Futuro, represented by Jorge Krekeler, (facilitator of Misereor on behalf of Agiamondo) with Pilar and Christopher of the Muyu Chakana Foundation. This text has been the object of socialization. A big thank you to Pilar de la Torre and Christopher Robles, main managers of Muyu Chakana and to Claudia Sanchez and Lourdes Muenala, participants of the permaculture course; thanks also to Javier Carrera of the Seed Guardians Network for having facilitated the first contacts.

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