



# INNOVATIVE IDEAS

**Fernando Francia**



**AWARD**  
RURAL YOUTH  
INNOVATION IN  
LATIN AMERICA &  
THE CARIBBEAN



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## **DEDICATION**

**To the Latin American and Caribbean youth innovating for and out of the rural areas to come out on top of the crisis**

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International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

Technical review: Cintia T. Guzmán

Technical management: Denise De Freitas Carvalho, Elodie E. Esteve

Interviews and text: Fernando Francia, Costa Rica

Photos: All pictures presented within the stories belong to the person responsible for the initiative

Graphic design: Ane Louise Gaudert & Maúna Produtora

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We thank the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), for their direct support with the organization and celebration of the virtual launch event for the Award's Second Edition, from their headquarters in San José, Costa Rica, in March 2021.

We extend our special gratitude to all of IFAD's different divisions and their teams located in its Rome headquarters, as well as their offices in Panama, Lima, and Brazil. Their support has been essential to the Award's implementation throughout 2020 and 2021.

We also express our appreciation to Fundación ACUA for their commitment that extended beyond the sanitary restrictions that limited the possibility of planned in-person exchanges. We also thank Universidad EAN for their direct involvement in the conception and execution of the Award's launch in 2020 and its closing in 2021, for their technical support with initiative evaluations, and for offering professionalization courses to the Award's winners and runners-up across both of its editions.

Our thanks to Fundación Alpina for the extra award granted to the highest-rated initiative of the Award's Second Edition in the category of "Commercialization and Market Access Solutions."

Lastly, we thank all the Award's institutional partners, including private companies, universities, and organizations that have supported the Award's realization. They have collaborated to bring us closer to a society in which no one gets left behind, as outlined by the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development.



# PRESENTATION

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has been promoting the development of rural communities in Latin America and the Caribbean for over four decades. The organization works alongside these communities and their governments on projects that can open paths to prosperity by providing them with the capabilities and financial assistance required to move forward. IFAD collaborates with state and national governments, and non-governmental organizations and institutions in the region by using strategies and action plans to empower small farmers and vulnerable groups in rural areas.

Within this framework, IFAD's South-South and Triangular Cooperation and Knowledge Center for Latin America and the Caribbean — based in Brazil — launched the Rural Youth Innovation Award in January 2020, financed by the China-IFAD South-South and Triangular Cooperation Facility. The project, which focuses its efforts on rural youth, was born from the necessity of identifying and promoting innovative initiatives developed by Latin American and Caribbean youth.

The Award's main objective was to strengthen these youths' entrepreneurial capabilities and provide them with exchange opportunities to promote the sustainable implementation, diffusion, and replication of their solutions to the constant challenges that small rural farmers face.

After a successful first edition that culminated awarding ten prizes to innovative initiatives<sup>1</sup> dedicated to their region's rural development, IFAD decided to launch a second edition in March 2021, organized remotely from the IICA's headquarters in Costa Rica. This second edition focused on innovative initiatives developed by young individuals aged 18 to 35, to overcome the challenges presented by COVID-19 in their region's rural zones.

This edition had five technical categories: Female Empowerment and Gender Inclusion, Financial Inclusion, Recycling, and Renewable Energy Connectivity Solutions, and Marketing Solutions, and Market Access.

The Rural Youth Innovation Award helped shine a light on the creativity and effort of youth in the region working toward an inclusive and sustainable rural development in search of a more resilient society in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact.

Carrying out both editions of the Award despite the circumstances and social distancing measures has been challenging for everyone involved. However, Latina American and Caribbean youth believed in IFAD's proposal and answered the call by submitting over 130 new proposals. The panel of experts who evaluated the first edition's initiatives enthusiastically joined the contest team once again. Each initiative was evaluated according to rigorous selection criteria, and, in the end, IFAD awarded prizes to nine proposals. We now present the stories of their undertakings.

<sup>1</sup>Found in: Caminos de innovación by Fernando Francia, available in <https://lac-conocimientos-sstc.ifad.org/documents/262275/451cf129-8382-9b0d-176b-33926da8bd9d>

# INTRODUCTION

**Ideas are essential for facing all kinds of situations. They are like seeds that must germinate for a plant to grow. Innovative projects are much the same**

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced all of us to organize differently. Daily activities came to a halt due to the required social distancing, but life in the countryside did not stop. Likewise, the ideas of young individuals looking for ways to face an exceptionally impactful situation refused to rest.

Rural youth live in a region with many challenges: lack of access to financial and technological services, connectivity restrictions, limited access to health, and essential services in general. These factors contribute to the marginalization and isolation of rural people, particularly youth, who move to cities seeking better opportunities.

However, by promoting the participation of youth in the decision-making process, as well as recognizing their productivity and impact on their communities, it is possible to find new pathways and ideas that foster the development of regional economies. Young individuals are bolder and capable of taking risks, innovating, adopting new technologies, and adapting to changes. Focusing on youth means incentivizing innovation for present and future generations.

Rural youth developed nine innovative ideas before or during the pandemic: building service stations in places where it seemed financially impossible, creating a virtual marketplace where countryside products are sold, providing electricity to communities forgotten by modern development, bringing specialized medicine to remote regions, delivering groceries to the doorsteps of those unable to leave their homes during the pandemic, leading workshops that can offer women financial opportunities, providing essential services to marginalized communities, generating value for the people involved in productive chains, and generating opportunities for agricultural projects to receive funding outside of the banking system. All these innovative ideas had to adapt and develop responses to the new COVID-19 reality. Thus, in Bolivia, a young lawyer named Alejandro developed “Caminnos,” a network of service stations funded and administered by local communities to generate prosperity in isolated regions.

In Brazil, Deise and Marco contributed to the development of small farmers in the Santa Catarina state by creating “Raeasy,” a digital platform that reduces the number of intermediaries between farmers and consumers.

In Peru, Elizabeth works with Amazonian communities, limited in their ability to communicate and perform their daily tasks due to the lack of energy, developing the project “Comunidades iluminadas.”

In Honduras, Eimy leverages communication as a tool to overcome the isolation of rural communities by creating a telemedicine network called “Telesan,” which benefits small, marginalized health centers.

In Colombia, Yeisully and her team implemented a barter and mutual aid system called “Chao COVID 19” to help the inhabitants of the Department of Caldas combat the isolation that threatens their survival.

In Mexico, the whims of fate pushed Alan to offer training workshops to rural women, creating “Mujeres de Cambio,” which contributes to their financial independence and self-esteem.

Meanwhile, in Colombia, Jenifer y Alexander looked for sustainable solutions through a project called “Energía Grata.” It aims to deliver energy, connectivity, and wellbeing to rural and marginalized communities in Cartagena.

In Huaráz, Peru, Milly decided to use her knowledge of commodity chains to support female weavers of sheep and alpaca wool, improving the profitability of their work through the “Putzkan” initiative.

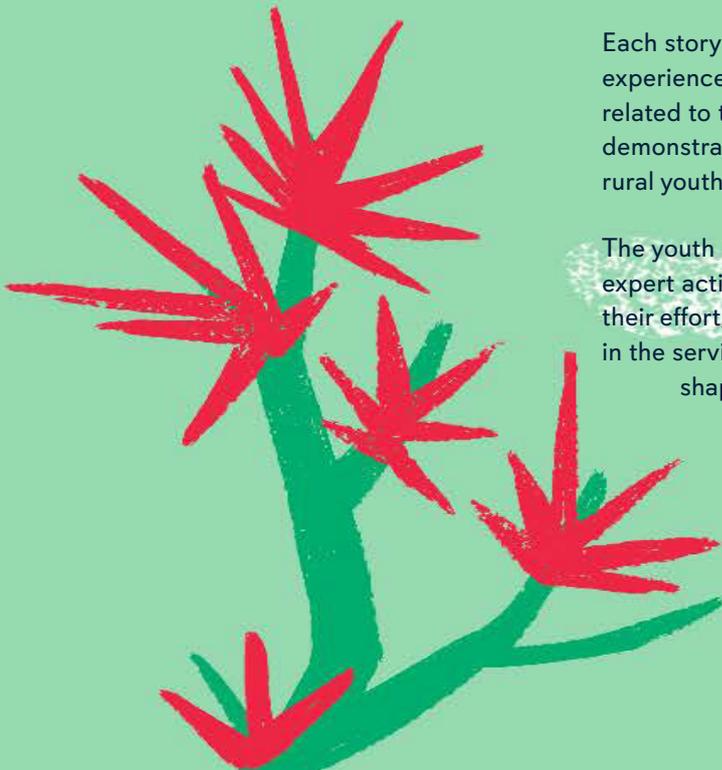
In Bogotá, Colombia, Weimar founded “Agroune,” a startup that channels funding to producers who cannot participate in traditional credit systems.

Each story is an idea taken from inception to execution, led by the youth’s eagerness to change the world for the better, show solidarity, and the possibility of a brighter future for rural communities.

Each story is a testimony to life, a sharing of experiences that show common concerns related to the rural sector. Above all, they also demonstrate the ingenuity and resilience of rural youth.

The youth is the present. Watch as the ideas and expert actions of young individuals who put all their effort, talent, and capacity for innovation in the service of sustainable rural development shape the future.

Innovative ideas in the rural world continue to develop and we present you with nine of them. Even more, these innovations are currently underway, and we should know more about them.



**BOLIVIA:**

**Caminnos**

**THEY BECAME  
VISIBLE**



## **It was something different from usual. It was a rural community wanting to talk business. He didn't fully know what he would find**

The meeting he was heading to was different from every other in his professional career. He was unsure of what clothes to wear. Normally, he would wear a suit and tie. Should he dress the same for this meeting? It was different from the usual, a rural community that wanted to talk business. He wasn't fully aware of what he would find.

His responsibilities in the firm focus on legal transactions for developing new businesses, new gas stations. All sorts of legal transactions and errands are handed to him. His parents are partners in the firm, but he had to earn his position all the same.

He was already used to dealing with high-level businesspersons, including those in the petroleum industry. He knew the Agencia Nacional de Hidrocarburos (ANH or National Hydrocarbon Agency, in English) very well, where he would file for permits and handle any situation that came up.

Alejandro Trujillo is not a partner, but he joined the firm after graduating from Law School in 2010. Working for a firm where his parents are partners is helpful and challenging at the same time. He cannot fail; he does not want to fail. He always aims to succeed.

He wore jeans and a white button shirt, thinking it would be hot outside. He still brought his briefcase along to avoid appearing too informal. At work, the dress code is very important. It informs one's intentions or opinion of the people you meet with.

Alejandro was headed toward the Entre Ríos community, in Bolivia's Cochabamba Department, almost 200 kilometers away from the capital. Driving in his car with the air conditioning turned on; he could not truly appreciate the landscape he was driving through. He kept his eyes fixed on the road ahead, wondering how the community he would meet would react to his words. Who could be waiting for him? How would they respond?

Several weeks earlier, in his office at the firm, a group of the community's leaders had stepped in to talk with him. They complained that there were not enough gas stations nearby, that the act of driving to stock up fuel and returning used up so much fuel that it was impractical.

He took on the case pro bono, that is, free of charge. The idea was to get the ANH to authorize a recurring dispatch of fuel trucks to the community.

The proposal was rejected. Fuel trucks only drove to service stations. These townfolk, the community leaders of Entre Ríos, were invisible.

At that moment, after having put down the telephone receiver and communicating the negative response—several weeks before the planned visit in jeans and a shirt—he thought, “What if...?” No, it was too difficult.

For a business owner in the fuel industry, a service station in this community would not be profitable. Alejandro knew this, given that he regularly acted as a consultant to gas station owners. Building a station would require a serious investment that would hardly be agreeable to businesspersons looking for the best return on their investment.

After that call and the first draft of an idea, he continued to mull it over in his head, but he quickly returned to focusing on his clients at the firm.

On his way to Entre Ríos, he considered this idea in the car. He did not know if it would work, but he thought it was worth trying.

Would it be possible for this community to build and operate the service station they needed so much? His knowledge of state permit processes, entrepreneurial capabilities, legal studies, and consulting work with petroleum industry businesspersons had given him some tools that could be of use with a creative application.

Now bringing a plan to the community -What if they took the initiative? It was an outrageous idea. A community installing a service station? The investment alone would require millions, and the bureaucratic process to approve such an undertaking is incredibly complicated.

But Alejandro wanted to propose it. He needed to know what the community’s leaders—the same ones who had their request for a fuel truck denied—would think of the idea. The community needed that fuel to work on the farms, to produce.

He somehow felt kinship and empathy towards them. He may have lived all his life in the city, with many privileges that few people in Bolivia had. Still, he was born in the rural community of Valle Hermoso. This part of his personal history linked him to these communities, or so he felt. Valle Hermoso has oil extraction and refinery plants but there are no gas stations. This part of his past somehow made him feel closer to the community.

He had already witnessed conflicts between the city and the countryside and the polarization that took hold of the country. He had been a part of fruitless dialogues between people who had no interest in speaking or listening to each other - “dialogues” between people unable to understand each other. In Alejandro’s mind, “the other” should be someone you need to work closely with to avoid the sectarianism that can only harm the country, its communities, and its people.

These quarrels, which have taken place across several well-known confrontations between cities and the countryside, result from lingering resentment, Alejandro thought. One group denies the existence of the other, which, in turn, resents this form of oblivion.

In his university courses and legal practice, he was always told not to get involved in personal matters. Get the job done, move on, and keep working. This time, however, he got emotionally involved.

He thought that communities could engage in business. He believed they could manage a collective property, which would generate collective profit and true welfare for the region and its people.

If the business is collectively owned—meaning the community is a shareholder—all decisions would be collective. The community would invest its profits according to their priorities.

The residents would have to learn to think like business owners to ensure the undertaking would not fail—to safeguard its profitability, success, and sustainability. They would have to preserve their community spirit and dedication to the common good and collective benefits, however, preventing the undertaking from becoming yet another business that fails to consider the local community’s needs.



The founder of the initiative, Hugo Alejandro Trujillo, walks with a local community member.

## **It would be a way to stop being invisible - for them, the market, and the government**

It would be a way to avoid oblivion personally and in the market and the government.

These thoughts ran through Alejandro's mind as he drove to Entre Ríos. He thought of how to communicate this to the community and convince them. Also, he thought of the half a million dollars required to invest in the construction of the gas station.

Alejandro was impressed by the road. It was practically empty; one long highway. He thought of the trips that they had to make for fuel—transporting fuel drums or tanks to fill up their work vehicles while using the same fuel they bought to make the trip back.

He wanted to cause an impression on them to make business culture work for them. They had to find a way to make that culture, those duties, systems, and methodologies work for the collective undertaking.

Alejandro was nearing the community. He could see the highway not much longer. A slightly worn-down home greeted him. Some 120 people inside wanted to hear him out.

The community used to greet government personnel, members of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and other non-government organizations. The community was used to asking for things.

He left his briefcase in the car, and he felt hostility. He could feel the community's eyes on him, almost as if they were demanding something from him. He would have to give them something. That is what they were used to.

And indeed, Alejandro would give them something—an idea. Not a single cent, however. In fact, he would be charging them for his work, as he would inform them in follow-up meetings.

On that day, during that first meeting, Alejandro wanted to probe whether this community was up to the task of managing a collective business. The process would not be immediate; they would have to understand they would not become rich overnight. The process would take months, and they could burn out. There would be progress and setbacks, good and bad news along the way.

Hostility turned into curiosity.

*“Us? Owners of the service station? We wouldn’t even know how to manage it; we don’t know how to build something like that.”*

*“I would be your consultant in these matters. I’ve been working with business owners for years, helping them accomplish the same thing. The only difference is that there would not be a single business owner, but many.”*

## Alejandro understood that they had their processes, pace, and ways. Treating them with respect was a way to give them visibility

The community told him that if it were so simple, anyone could do it. Alejandro was frank. It would not be easy, and it would cost lots of money.

*“How much?” a handful of people asked in unison.*

*“Half a million dollars,” Alejandro said. The room went quiet.*

It was an immeasurable amount. Incomprehensible, even. They would have to translate that to Bolivian pesos, write out the zeroes. Silence.

Alejandro developed a simulation that calculated the investment needed to get the idea off the ground. Around 20% of the total amount. At least, that is what banks would ask for before granting a loan.

Not to mention that these communities were still effectively invisible. Later, despite having acquired legal representation, the banks would come up with even further requirements because they were rural people, invisible. Alejandro, as a lawyer, would help them request the banks that they were sure to win.

However, in this first meeting, amid hellish heat, suspicious gazes, and many questions, a community member interrupted.

*“And what do you get out of this?”*

*“I charge my fees. I make a living off this. You get your service station, and I charge my attorney’s fees, as with any other project.”*

*“Others come here, offer us tractors, offer us things, and we end up beholden to them.” They fired back immediately.*

*“We’re all individuals here, autonomous. You may fire me if you wish.”*

Alejandro knew he had to earn their trust and establish a working relationship. Not a vertical one, but horizontal. Communities and businesses each have their ways. In this case, it was necessary to respect both worlds and make it work.

Alejandro’s simulation showed the people in the meeting that each family would contribute around five hundred dollars.

The half-million that Alejandro had brought up initially was starting to sound possible. However, the community would have to think, consider, and decide among themselves.

Alejandro understood that they had their processes, pace, and ways. Treating them with respect was a way to give them visibility.

It would be easier to convince a business owner to build a service station there. Still, the business owner would be more calculating. “Why to build there when I could build someplace more profitable?” they would think. Alejandro knew this because he had tried before.

But Alejandro did not reflect upon this during that first meeting. The innovation he witnessed along the way was not the discovery of something previously unknown but a more contextual innovation. There were already thousands of service stations in existence, but building one that would be collectively owned between 150 to 200 people in a rural area and making it work? That was an innovation.

*“We are innovating from a rural business perspective. We will have to develop an entire framework,” he would occasionally think to himself.*

Alejandro knew that he must offer his services impartially. He could not impose his vision or interests on the community. He could only advise them on their blossoming business.

The meeting did not go smoothly. Tensions were high, and distrust was in the air. That day, Alejandro was unsure whether he would be booed, applauded, or treated indifferently—which would be even worse.

It was the first meeting, and no one knew that there would be many more. No one knew that they would have to go to dozens of meetings with banks, other business owners and that Alejandro would go with them as their consultant.

Alejandro was also unaware that his undertaking would only grow from this. Other communities would also want to build their service stations to replicate and improve the methodology created for this community first. “Caminos” was beginning to take shape.

The community’s leaders listened intently. People much older than Alejandro, who was barely reaching his thirties.

*“We know nothing about construction!” someone shouted.*

*“We’re farmers!”*

How dare a lawyer tell them, in the middle of blistering heat, in a run-down building, that they had to build a 500,000-dollar service station?

Some were exasperated. Community leaders tried to calm people down. Alejandro grew nervous. Sweat stained his white shirt.

Though he did not know it then, months later, he would be invited to fish and chat with the community. Alejandro would spend several hours understanding the vision that these communities had—understanding their dynamics—so he could better advise them from his point of view and interests, but always in compliance with the standards that society, the State, and the market demanded of an undertaking such as the proposed service station.



Construction of one of the gas service stations in the community of Colom

After receiving all the information he had to offer, the community would ask him for time to consider. It took them six months.

Alejandro had the opportunity to study for a Master's degree in the United States. He learned more about economics, the hidden market at the base of the business pyramid. In one of the University of Michigan's majestic classrooms, it would be there that the vision of a road would present itself to him. A road with its surrounding communities. He thought about starting from the pyramid base that often-overlooked foundation that holds up much of the economy but seldom benefits from it. "It will be different now," he thought. The residents of this overlooked foundation would go on to make their own profit, but it would not happen automatically, nor would it be easy.

That first meeting finished without any agreements but with a promising future. Alejandro looked at his white shirt. It was drenched in sweat and somewhat stained. It had been a few hours since he left the comfort of his car's air conditioning. He realized he had left his comfort zone to face a new world, but he had a path.

Months later, other communities would reach out to him. Another five service stations would eventually be developed following his model for collective business management.

After navigating countless bureaucratic and business processes, and construction setbacks, the day of the Entre Ríos service station's grand opening would soon arrive. He would again make the same trip he took on the day of that first meeting. Only now, he did so with confidence and a bright smile on his face. He had accomplished his goal.

Everything was festively decorated, and people gathered near the service station. They named it Tricolor Nacional, after the Bolivian flag. Alejandro recalled the clashes between the countryside and the cities and thought:

*"This is what Bolivia needs to develop further. Opportunities for the rural communities, so they can stop being invisible." He smiled once more, looking at the scene before him.*

**"Our goal is to serve our purpose, to make a difference, generate value, and eventually become no longer needed. We hope to initiate a paradigm shift. That's our innovation"**

It was an emotional occasion. A woman said that if this had been done a few years earlier, her son would not have left. Green, yellow, and red were streaked all around. Balloons and decorations were everywhere. It was hot outside. Joy flowed throughout the town. They owned this new service station. No one gave them a handout - not even Alejandro, who charged 50% of his fee when the loan was first obtained and the other 50% once the work was done.

Alejandro will no longer be indispensable once the station starts to produce dividends for the community. The community will have its lawyers, pushing forward as business owners.

Even though he provided the initial push that set this process in motion, he quietly slipped away amid the rejoicing of that day. He wanted to tell them that this would become routine for them, that the community would be the makers of their own development and that Caminnos, the organization created to help them with these undertakings, would cease to be indispensable.

*"Our goal is to serve our purpose, to make a difference, generate value, and eventually become obsolete. We hope to initiate a paradigm shift. That is our innovation."*

In serving as a gateway to these communities, their development, and the creation of opportunities in rural areas, Caminnos was awarded the International Fund for Agricultural Development's (IFAD) Rural Youth Innovation Award in the category for Commercialization and Market Access Solutions in 2021.

His startup, which helps other ventures to grow, is already mutating. He is developing the software that provides greater control over how things get done. A system that analyzes each venture's performance and their management. This will provide specific parameters to evaluate each initiative better. It will help identify potential areas for improvement over time.

Alejandro looks back, driving through the roads of remote communities in Bolivia. He sees that these towns are not empty but filled with dreams, hard work, and future shareholders of self-owned enterprises.



**Caminnos, Bolivia**

Instagram: @caminnos\_org

Web: <https://www.caminnos.org>

E-mail: [alejandro.trujillo@caminnos.org](mailto:alejandro.trujillo@caminnos.org)

Phone: +591 633 83499

**BRAZIL:**

**Raeasy**

# **WE'RE ALL WINNERS**



*“Hit refresh!”*

*“I just did. Still nothing.”*

*“Everything’s ready but, when will this start?”*

*“Patience, no? We were told it wasn’t a sprint but a marathon. We’re close, though.”*

*“Yes, yes, but I want to see it working for real. I can only see the purchase simulations we made, but everything’s set up.”*

The Campo Alegre co-op’s produced right here, in Santa Catarina, in the South of Brazil. I still remember when they finally agreed and said yes. Oh, how did we celebrate, right?

*“Yes. We showed them the location, had a conversation, and proposed they sell their products using our platform. By then, we had already set up most of what you can see on the website.”*

*“By the way, any purchases yet?”*

*“No, no. Calm down.”*

The good thing about this co-op is that it had a wide range of products, making it easier to provide enough variety in a single shop online.

I remember how exciting it was to show them our sales plans, ideas, and how the platform operates from the seller’s point of view. Commercialization is always a relevant topic for farmers, and technology can help them achieve it, even if it sometimes seems complicated. We had to explain every function, form, and mechanism carefully.

*“Yes!” We jumped with joy then. It was an important step. Farmers had placed their trust on us. It was an emotional moment, thinking of our own families that sacrificed so much to sell their products. Thinking of the difficulties that rural communities in our state go through. We could help them now.*

Farmers are generally not very familiar with Internet technology. They are not quick to trust a new business model, such as our proposed one. It was very complicated initially, lacking a client portfolio or success stories that could reassure them. We had to explain in detail what would be happening online, on the application, and on WhatsApp. Family farmers—rural producers—are more willing to trust something they can personally observe and discuss in person with them. Because of this, the pandemic represented a slight setback for us since we had to speak with farmers over the phone, which is considerably more impersonal.

Everything slowly fell into place. We are Deise Mezzaroba and Marco Amaral. We observe our website, waiting for someone to make the first purchase.

We had already engaged in some marketing and public relations work across social media networks, friends, and family.

*“Who will be our first customer?”*

*“How exciting, we’ll know soon enough!” I refresh the page, F5), nothing.*

*“Remember how we wanted to do something else before this? We wanted to process agricultural products, work closely with the processing of raw materials. We always noticed how raw materials held less value-adding and produced lower revenue the less processed and industrialized they were. We wanted to create a brand that would process, package, and sell products so we could buy much of the countryside’s production at a fair price.”*

*“We still believe it’s a good idea. Perhaps we’ll*

*be able to make it work soon.”*

*“We changed plans while we were at the startup incubator, right?”*

*“Yes. Those were the times!” Still no purchase orders on the app.*

When we graduated from university, we had many ideas. We were full of enthusiasm and eager to do something. We met during the last months of our final undergraduate project. It was related to agriculture since that was our background.

## There we began to draft our new plan: a digital marketplace

We studied together at the Santa Catarina State University, in the São Bento do Sul campus.

Later, at the incubator, we were faced with business models, analysis, market research, financial planning, marketing, etc. There we found out that an industrializing business required physical locations, large investments, machinery, sanitation, and very strict protocols.

We began to draft our new plan: a digital marketplace.

There were already many marketplaces on the international stage, but we wanted to focus on connecting urban and rural areas.

We started to develop the idea during classes at the Luzerna tech incubator. We analyzed, projected, visualized.

*“Remember the first sketches? They look nothing like the final product.”*

*“We made so many drafts and evolved since that first idea until it matured into what we’re seeing before us.”*

*“Still no sales. Check if someone’s asking anything in the chat.”*

*“The incubator was fundamental to our efforts in developing the digital marketplace as a technological project, as a startup.”*

*“The classrooms were filled with classmates conceiving their proposals. It was a creative environment, full of futuristic perspectives. Our teachers were like mentors to us. We dealt firsthand with administration, economics, budgeting, brand design, business planning, and marketing.”*

*“We knew we couldn’t handle everything by ourselves. Once the startup was designed, we had to find people who would join us in this venture. We needed website programmers, brand designers, and other essentials—all under our supervision, of course.”*

*“We were taught about scalability, ease of investment, and competitor analyses at the incubator. That is why we settled on a digital marketplace. We noticed there weren’t many similar proposals, and our idea would have a lot of room to grow.”*

*“Our project had it all: it was a scalable business model, had an easy installation, a tangible concept, involved applied technology to the market and was aligned with our goal of connecting the urban and rural to generate more profits for producers.”*

*“For example, cutting out intermediaries was a goal in itself. Intermediaries raise the price for the consumer, which takes away from the producers’ benefits.”*

*“We hit the nail on the head, yeah?”*

*“Hey, no one’s buying anything, though. Did we do it right?”*

*“Patience, patience.”*



*“Now the challenge lies in finding customers who recognize the value of rural farmers. We don’t have the lowest prices, but products are not overly expensive either. Without intermediaries, some steps can be skipped. However, we don’t want to pressure farmers.”*

*“Well?”*

*“Nothing. F5, F5, F5.”*

We secured our investment with the families’ help. We had only recently graduated. We didn’t have jobs and wanted to start our own business venture.

The incubator gave us the tools we needed to know what we wanted. We hired programmers, brand designers, and marketers—three core aspects of the business.

We studied many online stores, but none could be adapted to our specific vision, which is why we presented our programmers with several drafts. We chose features and chunks of other businesses’ business models to adapt them to our own. We had no template available and had to program our website from scratch—with the help of our collaborators, of course.

*“That part took a long time.”*

*“Yes. I think that set us back about a year.”*

Those are not setbacks, however. They are definitions, adjustments, and changes in direction to ensure that whatever we did turned out well— all from a functional and technological standpoint, aiming to develop the rural areas countryside further.

*“I don’t know. I think we must stop and do something. No one’s buying.”*

*“There’s no rush. They’ll be here any moment. This week’s marketing plan is done, yes?”*

*“Yes, yes. F5, F5, F5.”*

*“Our concept has to do with the Sun, the earth, water, and the elements that make life grow in the earth—agriculture’s most essential component. Our concept is about Ra, the Egyptian god of the Sun, and roots, which are the plant’s foundation. That’s where the name of our startup came from.”*

*“A name that also involves the concept of “easy.”*

*“Yes, easy for the customer.”*

Everything always had to be looked at from two sides, the farmer, and the customer. It had to be agreeable to both parties.

This is how Raeasy came to be, a combination of the Egyptian god “Ra”, roots, and easy. Phonetically, it was all there in one word — everything at once. There’s our name!

*“And the “.com” domain was available!”*

*“F5, F5, F5.”*

*“We have everything ready as we refresh the page, waiting. We even had rollmops—a German appetizer commonly consumed in Campo Alegre—just like the first time we talked about and imagined the project.”*

*“Some years before this moment, we had a few beers and rollmops in a Campo Alegre bar. We made a pact that we would create something together, a startup that would bring the cities and the countryside closer. Just like us, a mix between the city and the countryside.”*

*“This time, we have a bottle of wine with us. We want to toast our first order, which still hasn’t arrived. Will it arrive?”*

*“Of course, it will! And if it doesn’t, then you can buy something yourself.” We chuckled nervously.*

We had already made mock purchases to test functionality, but we were now waiting for real ones since our Facebook campaigns launched.

F5, F5, F5.

...

Something on-screen changed.

Tears suddenly flowed from our eyes, unimpeded. We hugged as we witnessed the arrival of our first purchase order. It wasn’t much money, but it was symbolic. Our startup had officially gone live! All our efforts are represented by a “1”. A single sale. R\$ 68.

**There we agreed that we would do something together, an undertaking that would bring the countryside and the city closer, like ourselves, that we are a melting pot of the countryside and the city**

*“Cheers!”*

*“Cheers!”*

*“We waited for such a long time, and now I can’t believe it. Seriously? Who is it?”*

*“It’s our first sale.”*

We hugged again. We went over every moment of the last three years. We also thought of our families—who are country farmers—and of the communities who would be able to sell their products directly. This is what we dreamed of! Reasy.com in action.

Now to check that everything is running smoothly and make sure that farmers are notified of the sale to prepare their products.

Our dream was happening before our eyes. We dedicate this effort—and the business itself—to all the rural family farmers. It is dedicated to everyone who worked on the project from the start, and of course, our parents, who are our inspiration.

*“To the memory of Valdir Marcos Mezzaroba, my father, and my dear mother, Lucila Chince Mezzaroba.*

*“And to my parents, Jose Adilso Borges do Amaral, and Ida Bambi do Amaral.”*

*“Cheers.”*



Raeasy founder Deise Mezzaroba (left) visits a family of farmers

*“Several months later, we stopped pressing F5 obsessively. Sales come in regularly. We won the International Fund for Agricultural Development’s (IFAD) Rural Youth Innovation Award in the Connectivity Solutions category in 2021.”*

We will also make plans for the near future: changing some functionalities to make them even more user-friendly, including reservations for rural tourism, and some additional changes to streamline and automate the process for farmers.

Our idea for a startup changed shapes many times throughout the process. Our desire to directly link the countryside and the city never changed, eliminating intermediaries to generate benefits for farmers.

Today, each purchase is a way of supporting the identity that is so deeply rooted within us—the rural folk of Santa Catarina and all of Brazil.



**Raeasy, Brazil**

Facebook: @raeasy.com.br

Instagram: @raeasy\_

Web: <https://raeasy.com>

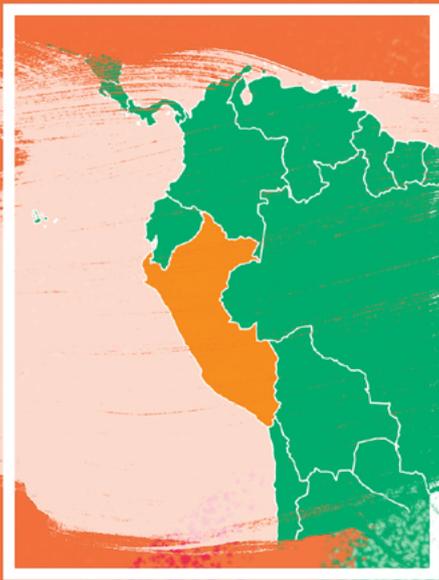
E-mail: [contato@raeasy.com](mailto:contato@raeasy.com)

Phone: +55 49988373155

PERU:

**Comunidades iluminadas**

**I AM THE LIGHT IN  
THE UNSEEN CORNERS  
OF SOCIETY**



“You know I exist but don’t even know how to describe me. You know I’m energy but don’t know whether I’m a wave or a particle. You make use of me, reap benefits from my existence in all my forms, and often take my presence for granted, thinking I’ll always be there.

But what happens when I’m not there? What happens when the star that lights our days—the Sun—goes down and I’m nowhere to be found?

You all might think that with just the push of a button, I’ll be there—and it’s true. But not always. I am electric lighting, an energy that often makes life easier.

You have no idea what some communities have to do to find me, harness my power, strength, and radiation.

There are many stories of how people try to have me reach their homes. There are countries with more access to electricity than others. In some countries, geography helps make this possible, while in others, there are long-standing public policies that helped make access to electricity more widespread.”

However, some regions lack the comforts that most of Latin America’s population has. These are the parts of our countries that are nearly hidden. People survive with very little and are marginalized from many benefits that others enjoy without a second thought.

I love traveling through our Amazon. People are happier there, more trusting, and closer to each other. Everyone welcomes you with open arms and always willing to participate in whatever you propose.

## There are countries with more electricity coverage than others. In some countries, geography helps. In others, long-standing public policies favor broad electricity coverage

I grab a map, study the zone, research the development of surrounding communities on the Internet, and choose a destination. It must be someplace where many communities are close together or connected by a river — communities without electricity that can be visited in quick succession, all in one trip.

I am Elizabeth Corzo. I studied Sociology because I enjoy interacting with people—with communities—getting to know their needs, their aspirations and helping to improve their daily life.

Landing this job was incredibly lucky. I had to go through many interviews before a small office welcomed me aboard. That office was “PowerMundo,” a social company that provides Peruvians without access to electricity a way to use solar technologies. I liked how they emphasized social issues in their activities. Despite this, I had to do all sorts of work, from marketing to sales and community visits.

This is what I like: visiting communities and talking to people.

It looks easy sometimes when you look at the map, though it seldom is. I’m not as surprised as I was at the start. Sometimes communities are marked as electrified but they’re not. Sometimes they’re not marked at all. Planning takes time. I first reach out to organized communities that can be reached by postal mail, telephone, or other methods. I’ve probably visited 50 communities in total. “Hasta la última milla.” Up until the last mile, as we say.

The map sometimes states that I am there—and you would think so—but the communities don’t know me. Sometimes they know me, but I am out of their reach. Sometimes the light poles through which I travel are there, and you can see them if you visit, but I am nowhere to be found because they are not connected to the grid. These are the difficulties many small, rural communities face in the Peruvian Amazon, where it’s hard for me to reach. You know this.

## This is what I like: visiting communities and talking to people

Occasionally, someone gets a battery-powered lamp, but it doesn’t last long. I have been the topic of conversation for a while. The locals don’t have access to more adequate technologies, such as solar-powered lamps, like the ones Elizabeth takes on her adventures.

You could argue that some communities might not need me—they have kerosene, lamps, or candles. But you know that it is not the same.

The boatman waits for us once we reach the boat. Three of us travel for 15 days. We have no idea where we will sleep, nor under which conditions. Sometimes we will have our morning shower in the river. In Lima, we plan, but everything ends up being much different. We’re used to it.

The boats are always different, too, depending on the trip. Sometimes they have roofs, and sometimes they don’t, so we travel by daylight. We leave early—very early in the morning—and we load the boat. We pack our backpacks with clothes and personal items, food for a few days, pamphlets and decorations for meetings, and the lamps, of course. Just a few small boxes containing the object that surprises many once we show them.

The boatman stays on board, but I sleep outside because we take out all the lamps we take to schools, local spots, or homes that allow us to use their living rooms. These are open houses.

After the trip starts, we stop in front of a community. It’s four in the afternoon. We unload our things, the boatman stays, and I speak with our hosts. The sight of children playing, women washing clothes, and doing other daily activities is our sign that we are close to a community.

The meetings where I show them the lamps are held at night to make them more impactful.



One of the beneficiary families of the initiative

I decorated the place, placed the lamps, then sat and waited for the people invited to attend. The entire community usually shows up. It serves as a moment for gatherings and even entertainment. I put on some music, children come and play, entire families are ready to listen to me.

Around seven at night, I'm ready to begin the presentation.

"You've never seen anything like it, or rather, you've seen it so often that it no longer surprises you. But I am there, lighting up the place. Sometimes it's a classroom; sometimes it's a community center. I shine, and people are amazed. You'll understand when I say that I am the star of the night, and I shine spectacularly. The children come closer, staring intently. It's not that no one knows what I am. I am electric light, but they're not used to having me so close. I travel here with Elizabeth in the shape of a solar lamp, and she takes me to unimaginable places.

I am light, but I also bring ways to connect cellphones and other small devices. I bring the possibility of studying past daylight hours, meetings between friends and family, and the promise of more fun. I solve multiple needs at once."

I place some flyers on a table. I hang up some posters and lamps on the walls. I want everything to look enticing because even though the light is the centerpiece, I want people to get excited. I come here to offer them a practical and affordable solution suited to their needs, which can last them a long time.

They are used to using kerosene lamps or candles. These items can be dangerous, represent a high cost, and are quickly consumed.

After some time waiting, a community leader or association president signals to begin speaking once the space is full.

Members present  
the project to  
the community



I start by talking about the problem at hand. I calculate how much each family spends on candles or lighters. We add up everyone's monthly expenses and multiply to calculate the yearly expense, and then we multiply by five years. We conclude that the solar kit I'm offering is cheaper and a significant technological advancement.

I listen to the residents' comments. Many of them complain about the rudimentary lighting implements. Some even complain that they've had solar panels installed, but no one comes around to repair them when they break down, and they can't take them along if they move to a different home.

And so, little by little, each community gains consciousness about the issue at its own pace. That's where I point to the solar lamp and tell about the solution I bring.

"It's my time. You haven't seen the looks full of surprise and joy at the same time. Elizabeth grabs one of the little devices that makes me shine, but it falls from her hands. Everyone looks on, concerned. I tell you, though, I continue to shine on the floor. All Elizabeth has to do is lift it and show how resilient they are. It's a little trick that PowerMundo uses to dispel fears over these fragile-looking devices.

People want them, though not everyone decides to buy one. Some have to discuss it with their family if they're not present at the event hall.

Some will decide tomorrow. Some can buy me right away.

Elizabeth shows off some of the implements within the box and explains that, for a while, they continue to be the star of the show.

I see the children approach me smiling, with happy faces. I see the women look at me intently, dazzled. I see the men looking at me out of the corner of their eyes."

Once I'm done with the presentation, we all analyze the problems within the community and each household. We analyze how much they are currently spending on lighting and how it works. I then explain how the new solution I've brought works.

## **I take the lamps with me, leaving them on to continue the demonstration. The family gets to witness the potential benefits firsthand**

The solar kits I bring are suitable for these communities, easy to use, long-lasting, and recharge in the sun. They last about five years on average. The prices we offer are usually subsidized. We at PowerMundo secure financing so that the cost to these communities is as low as possible, making it a viable solution for them.

For example, in a few months, at the end of 2021 and the start of 2022, we'll be visiting schools to provide them with free solar solutions. This donation is possible because we won the "Conectarse Para Crecer" contest in 2020. The project is called "Escuelas iluminadas." Two communities have been mapped out already in Indiana and Loreto. I spoke with some teachers who showed great interest. In this case, we take portable radios with a solar lamp that helps recharge the battery and a micro SD card with preloaded content—for when radio signals are unreliable. This memory card is full of audio stories, audiobooks, podcasts, and other educational and informative content for children and their families.

People continue to opt for the solar kit I'm offering. I manage to sell a few. It's getting late. Around nine PM, the community center starts emptying. I've already made plans to dine and sleep in a family's place.

I take the lamps with me, leaving them on to continue the demonstration. The family gets to witness the potential benefits firsthand.

I am indispensable to many, but I am still absent from many communities. You would say that it is possible to live without me, and it's true. But many of the activities that everyone is used to are made possible by me across several spaces.

Just like I reach every corner of a home with the help of projects such as this. Thus, I can reach even further into communities isolated from me and the rest of the country.

PowerMundo is one of the organizations that brings me along that tries to democratize me. They do it so that marginalized communities can come to me for aid.

A boy once stared at me for a significant part of a night until his eyes closed and he fell asleep. On a different occasion, some children played around me. I've also seen people read until the wee hours of the morning or hug each other, simply knowing that they were there for each other in the dim but persistent light.

The following day, we load up the boat once more, and everything repeats, but in different communities. I sometimes leave equipment in a centralized location to check if anyone else has decided to purchase it when I come back. They need time to decide.

We're up to some 100,000 users, people who've felt the impact of these solutions. Thousands of solar systems are sold.

Prices often vary due to the subsidies we've secured. The people of these communities end up paying less than half of their actual cost.

It also depends on the device's version. Technology changes quickly, and the devices we provide today are not the same as those from two or three years ago.

Each lamp can have a small device connected to it, such as a cellphone. Thus, in addition to lighting, we bring electric energy, which allows more permanent access to cellphones as an essential communication tool.

Our innovation is bringing multifunctional technology to those who need it. Above all, we focus on building a social business, bringing products that ease people's lives closer to those who have no access to them.

My trip sounds like an adventure. I am often unsure of where I will be sleeping, whether the bathroom is available, or what I will be eating. I know that I will be meeting people who need these solutions and that if I don't travel under these conditions, they won't be able to access the technology.

We created a methodology for transporting the product, exhibiting it, explaining its functions and advantages, designed a communication plan, flyers, and presentations adapted for our audience. The speech we give is rarely the same. You have to be informed and apply what you've learned in the course of your professional career to explain these things properly.

**Wherever I go,  
I not only light  
up spaces, but I  
brighten lives**

We could advertise on television or radio, but we wouldn't reach these communities. We could simply send the devices over and hope they get purchased, but that is not the primary goal of our activity. These communities require specialized attention, and we are there to provide it.

The end goal of our "adventure" is making sure that people have wider access to electric power. PowerMundo can attest to its positive experience by showing that there is still much to be done, not only in Peru but in surrounding communities.

It was incredibly emotional to win IFAD's Rural Youth Innovation Award for the category of Recycling and Alternative Energy Sources in 2021. Because we passionately do what we do. IFAD determined that our project, "Comunidades Iluminadas," improves living conditions in the countryside and allows for sustainable access to technology by way of solar energy.

Due to the pandemic, we haven't visited these communities in the last few months. I miss the work I did, bringing innovative technology closer to these communities and contributing to their welfare and development. I miss the adventure and the proximity to people.

You haven't seen the joy I produce. When I arrive, I see their faces. They are lit not just by me but by their smiles and the explosive laughter of those who see the magic happen.

You also don't see people planning where to place me. They try placing me in the middle of their living room, a little closer to the wall. They rearrange everything to place me at the center of their lives. Some want me for their church, their school, their community center.

Besides, once I'm shining in every corner, families start to spruce up their houses, their homes. I have seen it with my shine.

In the places I reach, I not only light up their spaces, but I also brighten their lives.

I once arrived at a town where a climate disaster displaced people who had their houses destroyed. These people were used to electricity, but they no longer had access. Once they saw me in these solar-powered devices, they smiled again.

And so, thanks to projects that help me shine in every corner of the Peruvian map, I travel. I travel as a wave or a particle, as light or energy, as a necessity or as joy, to light up those dark places that were previously invisible.



**Comunidades Iluminadas — Powermundo, Peru**

Facebook: @PowerMundo

Web: <http://www.powermundo.pe/>

E-mail: [info@powermundo.com](mailto:info@powermundo.com)

Phone: +51 945 377 802

**HONDURAS:**

**Telesan**

# **DISTANCE NO LONGER MATTERS**



Soon I will be a doctor, my childhood dream. I'm heading into my eighth and final year. I need to choose—or compete for—a place to complete my professional internship.

Having worked at different hospital centers, I saw patients from the Gracias a Dios Department in Honduras' southern coast, in an indigenous region called Moskitia. I had witnessed their needs. I noticed the injustice of having an easily treatable condition get out of hand because they couldn't receive the necessary care timely. They were too far away from any hospital center. Due to my eagerness for a challenge and because I believe that medicine plays an essential role in society, I thought to myself, "That's where I want to go for my internship."

As it turns out, few people are interested in going there. I avoided competing for a position in favor of working in a remote location where internship positions are always available.

I am Eimy Barahona and I finished my studies at the Universidad Católica de Honduras in 2017. I was ready for my professional internship.

I already imagine all that I could do. I will try to go where people are, break down the distance barrier, and bring medicine to the places where it is most needed. I am very happy. I will write a letter to the Colegio Médico de Honduras (Honduras Medical College) and the Secretaría de Salud (Health Department) to assign me to Gracias a Dios. Yes, that's it!

*"Drug trafficking is rampant there. You'll face many hardships," my parents will say.*

*"Trust me," I will reply, "like you always have."*

I will have to promise them that I won't put myself in danger and behave well. I will keep my word.

I will arrive at Puerto Lempira, a modest hospital that services a vast jungle, mountain, and coastline. There are many territories to cover and people to treat for a distant hospital.

I will breathe the air that feels different in Moskitia. There will be so much to do. I will experience mixed feelings once I witness so much poverty and realize that I will help and make a difference.

Because short response times are essential for the treatment of wounds, illnesses, or other medical procedures, long distances represent a hurdle for the practice of medicine.

## I dream—and I always will—of the day when public investment in health services provides everyone with access to quality and timely healthcare

This hospital will be very different from the ones I know in Tegucigalpa. I will notice the scarcity, the distance, and the marginalization of certain communities within my country. I will notice the lack of necessary public infrastructure for everyone's wellbeing.

I dream—and I always will—of the day when public investment in health services provides everyone with access to quality and timely healthcare.

Our group of over ten medical practitioners will arrive in Puerto Lempira. We will want to do everything but lack time to do so. Once our hospital shift is done, we will visit the most remote communities. We will get together with an organization that directs the people we want to help outside of our hospital work to us. On the weekends, we will visit these communities, tend to the people who need them, and provide first aid materials.

We will know the reality of the place. The city has children with treatable diseases in advanced stages, pregnant women without check-ups in critical situations, snake and crocodile bite victims, and so much more. We will even see many decompression sickness cases: fishermen who dive significant distances and accumulate excess nitrogen in their bodies because they come back to the surface without stopping to decompress. They lack proper training and are only trying to work for international companies fishing for lobster in the region. If they spend more than 24 to 48 hours in this state, they remain in a state of paralysis.

We will sleep very little, giving our all to our passion, the practice of medicine.

One afternoon like any other, I will see a couple come in with their crying baby. We will ask what happened while attempting to administer first aid. By the time I check her, she will have entered respiratory arrest. Another physician will come by, and we will begin resuscitation procedures. The mother—crying and shaking—will tell us that the infant inserted a bean up her nose, that they've traveled four hours to the hospital, and the girl fainted twice along the way.

The screams, the efforts, the silence.

What more can we do? The foreign body will have gone deeper, and we will lack the tools to do more. Impotence. Deafening silence. The mother cries soundlessly. The father is barely able to breathe. These will be daily occurrences. A bean. A simple procedure that can be completed quickly with the proper tools.

## The screams, the efforts, the silence



Residentes de la comunidad de Mocerón con sus certificados de capacitación

We used to face difficult situations during our studies. There was always a doctor to tell us what to do back then. In Moskitia, we have no one. We will face this by ourselves, and it will be a daily occurrence.

We will see many pregnant women in complex situations. Regrettably, midwives are prohibited, which is medical nonsense. Some will be able to obtain training to offer solutions to difficult births or catch problems before they get out of hand.

One case I attended was a pregnant woman who tried birthing in her community because she lacked access to transportation. Complications arose, and she had to be transferred to the nearest hospital, which was hours away from her community. Upon arriving at the medical facility, the baby was deceased. She carried her dead child in her womb for three days and needed to be hospitalized for two months. She didn't speak Spanish, she was left alone, and no one explained what had happened to her. The woman returned to her community in shambles.

They will say that doctors become desensitized to death, but I won't. However, many will have to harden themselves to deal with these daily occurrences.

The time will come when our zealous activism will turn into reflection. We will want to think of ways to make our practice more functional. We will find ways for these distant communities to no longer feel like these distances are a significant hurdle to their wellbeing.

I will return from my internship with my heart in hand, devastated. Feeling accomplished by all that I contributed, but feel torn after witnessing the difficulties encountered in the practice of medicine.

Around fifteen people will get together and form Moskitia Med. This informal group will reflect upon what we have witnessed and attempt to provide aid beyond what is required for graduation.

Yes, we will graduate, and my family will happily welcome me back. I will have left behind a piece of my innocence in Moskitia, a piece of my heart. I will think, "They're so far away."

We will think about telemedicine at Moskitia Med - a practice that has been ongoing in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Guatemala to some extent for fifteen years. We will think that we in Honduras should also do it. We will be testing it out informally through the use of cell phones.

We will develop a practical knowledge network, be more proactive in our consultations, share X-rays, EKGs, second opinions, and become more involved in the different medical facilities we will form part of.

Our excitement and passion will wane as these situations become commonplace. Still, the three of us who will remain to continue working toward our dream, eventually forming Telesan. We will be determined to work entirely on telemedicine. We will lack the knowledge to do so at first, but we will do it.

We will submit our idea to a contest in the Universidad de Antioquia for innovative health projects in Latin America and the Caribbean. We will propose virtual conferences, training, and further use of practical telemedicine. We will win this contest and be one of the chosen projects for the Caribbean region.

**We will be  
determined to  
work entirely on  
telemedicine.  
We will lack the  
knowledge to do  
so at first, but we  
will do it**

Telesan  
telehealth  
operator



While that seed germinates, we will knock on more doors. Everyone likes the idea, but we lack sufficient resources. Regardless, we begin to produce results and expand our proposal. We will come to know of another contest by EuroSan Innova, sponsored by the European Union. We will spend five months organizing our ideas and drafting the project. We will win. Our excitement will be indescribable because we will finally have the resources to make our dream real.

I will always remember the girl who almost died in my arms because of a bean lodged in her nose, and due to the difficulties in treatment that long distances between problems and solutions.

The project will provide public services with a network of long-distance professionals. This software allows direct communication, consultation, and evaluation of concerns.

To accomplish this, we will need more specialists and expand our network. We will have the needed resources, and it will become real. Months will go by from the inception of our idea to its realization.

We will return to Moskitia and install solar panels, take biomedical equipment with us, and train the local staff to use the new network and its possibilities.

The system will allow for long-distance appointments. Specialists in Tegucigalpa will attend patients in Moskitia. We will bridge the gap and take the specialists to the people of Moskitia.

It won't solve every issue—the lack of resources, the marginalization I experienced during my internship—but it will improve the quality of care. Above all, it will serve as a support structure that regional physicians can rely on by consulting with a network of specialists on specific cases.

I will know that I owed a debt to that girl, those parents, that community. “Why didn't I do more?” I will think. “It is unthinkable that diarrhea deaths are still a thing. Why?”

Telesan will exist, but it won't solve issues due to a lack of public resources. What will it solve? It will provide the ability to consult with a specialist in a real-time environment, to inquire if there are any doubts about a diagnostic, to start treatments, and increase the confidence in health professionals. Physicians don't know everything. That is why specialists exist. But if specialists are not available in the region, there is no way to contact them. With Telesan's physician network, it will be made possible. They will have access to video conferences, an information system that we built to eliminate the distances that separate us. Our innovation nullifies the adverse effects of long distances so that communities have local access to knowledge, and we can service them wherever we are.

A patient who develops complications will be able to consult with a specialist through telemedicine. They can preempt sudden developments and save lives. Even chronic patients can schedule treatments, so they don't have to travel to the capital. Patients in Puerto Lempira, the specialist in Tegucigalpa. We will deal with Parkinson's cases, neurological and psychiatric issues. We will facilitate dialogues between specialists and community physicians. Dreams will come true.

One of the immediate consequences of our service is that community physicians will no longer feel isolated. They will have the support they need from the physicians' network we will build. Remote education will be especially pleasing to them, given that many are unable to travel for ongoing studies. They will have the opportunity to study once more and further develop their knowledge base. We will have health professionals who will feel supported and valued. We will have improved diagnostic and problem-solving capabilities, allowing the community physician to do so themselves.

I will come to see it as an accessibility tool. The gaps in sanitation between the regional community and the capital are broad—too broad—but instead of nothing, we will at least have access to this type of communication.

The community physician will be able to access an online platform, share consultations, and choose the service where they wish to send them. There will always be a resident physician available. Within 48 hours, appointments will

be dismissed, or a teleconsultation will be scheduled. We will organize specialist schedules so that every physician has an assigned patient. A world of possibilities will open up before them by accessing the platform. Neurological services will be available in distant communities, something previously considered unthinkable.

We will win several awards, contests, and calls for proposals. We will have the resources we need to implement a robust system for Gracias a Dios.

In 2021, we would win IFAD's Rural Youth innovation Award in the category of connectivity solutions for our inclusion of entire communities in public health services and our innovation in long-distance medical practice.

Later on, we would even be contacted by the Health Department for assistance after they have seen our progress, eager to implement our system in other parts of Honduras.

All of that will not just be my imagination. However, it is currently 2017, and all I can dream of is practicing medicine and helping remote communities. I dream of Moskitia, that sacred, exuberant, and profound place that lacks many things. I dream of shortening the distances that don't allow people to receive the attention they need.

That is why I want to complete my internship with gracias a Dios, where no one wants to go, where minor problems become significant. I will dream that I can.



**Telesan, Honduras**

Facebook: @TELESAN-Honduras

Instagram: @telesan.hn

Web: <https://www.comsaludparatodos.org/>

E-mail: [eimybarahona@gmail.com](mailto:eimybarahona@gmail.com)

Phone: +50495783039

**COLOMBIA:**

**Chao COVID 19**

**SPREADING  
ACTION**



We saw the pandemic coming from a mile away. It started in China but spread to nearby and European countries. Suddenly, it forced its way into our country. We didn't expect things to happen as they did, and we realized we had to do something.

We already know that we, the youth, are an active force. Our organization, the Asociación de Jóvenes Emprendedores, had been operating for many years in Colombia, where we developed many projects and countless activities. My name is Yeisully Tapias, and I am one of the founders of this undertaking.

We began to notice that what was happening already impacted thousands of people in different ways: people unable to go to work, people unable to see their families, people unable to live their lives as they were before the pandemic.

"But we are young," we thought. "Nothing will happen to us," some would say. However, this was not so. The disease could affect us, and we were also affected by the lockdown that started to take hold of the country.

In rural areas, this impact is not felt as strongly, given that there's always room to move around, a backyard to step out onto, to see the sun and breathe fresh air. The large crowds in the cities were more strongly affected by the lockdown.

What does affect rural areas are the great distances that are harder to cross by the restrictions in place. Going to the market became an issue. Thanks to the different mobile platforms allowing home deliveries, it is easier to order food or groceries in the cities. However, many of them have limited to no functionality in rural areas.

As an organization, we knew that we had to help each other—the youth—and that we were a social force with the ability to help others.

That's what we must do! Continue to help. Logically, we had to help our families and those closest to us. If they could not leave their homes, someone would have to do it for them. We came to see it as a way to help even more people. If it grew enough, it could even provide startup opportunities and part-time employment — a way to make money for social work.

We at the Asociación decided to organize this effort. It couldn't be done off-handedly, willy-nilly, because we could be infected, too. We needed protocols and disinfecting tools for our safety and of those we were helping.

We imagined strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic on rural youths and their families.

We implemented our safety protocols and thought of how to organize ourselves. We imagined a project that could serve people, rural communities, and ourselves differently.

Our Asociación de Jóvenes Emprendedores had already won awards for developing youth organizations in La Dorada Municipality, in the Caldas department.

I was younger then. After seeing my mother participating in co-ops and women's associations to better herself, I thought young people could also do this.

## We started to grow beyond the municipality with rural and urban youths, who brought forth sports and cultural ideas to enrich the group

How did we do it? We contacted the children of every displaced woman in municipal organizations, and we created our organization as practically as possible. We invited youths to form part of an organizational process to strengthen and provide leadership for startup ideas. Back then, we were 150 young individuals seeking alternate ways to live, produce and coexist.

We thought of farming fish—tilapia— and we quickly realized that we needed to do more if everyone wanted to participate. We commercialized the fish, produced organic fertilizers, among other activities.

We started to grow beyond our municipality with rural and urban youths, who brought forth sports and cultural ideas to enrich the group.

We developed cultural projects, study, and learning groups, among other activities. That's how we began to formalize the Asociación de Jóvenes Emprendedores to support the development and economic and social prosperity of its associates and their communities. We realized we now had access to awards, training, and seed money.

That was almost ten years ago, long before the pandemic.

What mattered most was that we had a methodology in place to develop ideas and projects that led to the development of the one we called "Chao COVID 19." We wanted to say, "Ciao!" and reduce the virus' impact in our lives and the lives of those around us.

We structured this new project, Chao COVID 19, around three key principles:

1. Protection and prevention: families in the area receive a protection kit and basic training.
2. Doorstep delivery service: we deliver food and products to people's doors, eliminating the need for them to travel to the city to buy them at a reasonable cost.
3. Bartering: commercialization alternatives for the many existing projects and small businesses in rural communities.

*"Good afternoon!" I called out from the doorstep of a small wooden home. "Here is your order."*

*"Oh, thank you. What a blessing," the woman responded.*

That exchange would repeat several times a day, every other day. The youths in our organization worked to bring the market to people's homes, eliminating the need to travel to town to purchase something or get their daily paper.

We had organized and operated like clockwork. Orders came in. We went out to do the shopping and procure what was needed, the youths delivered. Besides, we provided training, delivered protection kits, and encouraged bartering.

We hadn't considered—I hadn't considered—that the virus would also knock on our door. My husband and I were infected. The project moved forward, but I remained bedridden.

Fatigue, shortness of breath, joint pain, my sense of taste and smell went away. It seemed like the only thing I consumed were medications. My husband and I lived alone, so no one could come and help. At least we received our medicines through our project. I was worried about neglecting my duties. I did what I could with what little strength I had available—long-distance, remotely.

Project member helps a farmer with the banana harvest



Sometimes I remembered other hardships, bigger ones. My father, who was kidnapped and assassinated, my family displaced, my mother with her eight children. I knew that I had to succeed and that I could do so.

The organization continued to act. I gave directions, and our members carried them out. They even took over leadership duties while I was sick. Breathing became difficult during one Zoom meeting. We managed to secure oxygen inhalers. I didn't need to go to the hospital, but I got scared.

We have done so much to protect our communities from Covid. We sought to spread initiatives and cooperative efforts through our project, not the virus.

This led me to put myself even further in other people's positions. Caring for each other as a society and collective thinking are fundamental. The pandemic is communicating a message to humanity. The youth needs to understand it and change the lifestyle that led us to this crossroads. We know that nothing would be the same.

The project strengthened its protection and sanitation measures. The Asociación held strong deliveries. The whole team wore face masks, shirts with the project's logo and kept visiting homes while observing distancing protocols. Some drove all-terrain vehicles to reach the more isolated communities; others traveled by boat. That's how it is in rural areas -not every road is paved.

I experienced solidarity firsthand—how families produced, the items they brought me, the orders they left outside my door to help us with our shopping. Our team pampered me, as well.

I once thought that it could get complicated, what with all you saw and read about the disease, I thought it could all be worse. I understood that being young did not make me immune. We thought that we were super-powered, tough, and that it only affected older folks, not us. When the disease hit me as hard as it did, there were moments where I reached out to spiritual leaders because I was afraid to die. I begged for forgiveness for all the things I had and hadn't done.

The Chao COVID-19 team fights against the isolation of the poorest



My attachment to my family deepened. What would happen to my younger siblings, who lived close by, if I were no longer here? Who would help them? In my mind, as I struggled to breathe, I wrote a letter to the people who could help my siblings.

Meanwhile, deliveries continued to arrive at people's doorsteps, including my own.

Later on, a short while after my recovery, I was afraid to go out. I didn't want to go through that experience again, but I knew I had to do it anyway and take better precautions. It was a call to caution on my part and the rest of the team and their families.

Our lives are important, but we also represent a process, and we cannot afford to be infecting people. We represent the Asociación and show that young individuals can handle this task based on solidarity and do it well.

**The pandemic was not just a 2020 thing. It extended to 2021 and will likely continue after that. That is why our project continues to develop and adapt**

We are here to protect, safeguard, and care for others. That is why we imposed limits on outings, greater restrictions, and more security measures. The team knew we could not afford the luxury of family gatherings. We had to take care of the good of the project and each of us. We could not go on family outings or attend birthday celebrations. We also could not organize parties as we did before the pandemic.

The pandemic was not just a 2020 thing. It extended to 2021 and will likely continue after that. That is why our project continues to develop and adapt.

We won IFAD's Rural Youth Innovation Award in the category of commercialization solutions and market access. Our work in combatting impoverished people's isolation through collectivized alternatives create a pathway towards the societal inclusion of socially isolated communities.

We had previously earned some awards and acknowledgments for several projects, such as the CAFAM Women's Award in 2016, for my role in creating the Asociación and strengthening young individuals' abilities, intending to improve their lives and those of their families. I was also awarded the Mejor Caldense Award in 2016 for my and my colleagues' efforts in entrepreneurship and the search for peace, reconciliation, and opportunities for rural youths.

In 2017, we even supported new initiatives such as Family Bike with seed money and consulting services. Family Bike resulted from a young man's dream and efforts of turning his passion for cycling into a business that would benefit his community.

In 2021, we started replicating and implementing the "Chao COVID 19" project in the Costa Rican communities of Namaldí, Talamanca, and Barra de Pacuare, where 120 country families in vulnerable conditions are reaping the benefits, just like in the Caldas Department of Colombia.

And tomorrow? We won't stop what we've already accomplished. We now seek to provide aid to rural families in the form of seeds, vegetables, and farm animals, to improve the economic conditions in their territories.

Some project members were also infected, but they've made a recovery. However, once they recovered, they wished to continue contributing to our project that was conceived in response to the emergency. It continued to operate as a form of living in solidarity, bringing people closer together and seeking, above all, to bring opportunities for rural communities.



**MEXICO:**

**Mujeres de Cambio**

**THE ENGINE  
OF CHANGE**



## JUANA

*“Sweetie, I’m going to my aunt’s house!”*

*“All right. Be safe, don’t meet up with anyone.”*

*“Yes, my love.”*

To protect her identity, Juana—not her real name—takes a few things with her and leaves. She makes little effort to dress up, using just a long dress that covers her well, no makeup, and a small bag with the essentials. She kisses her husband and leaves. She is secretly excited but can’t show it. She is heading to her aunt’s home, yes, but she’s not going to visit. She’s going to attend a workshop on preserved foods.

She lives in Las Flores, Paraíso, an oil town in Tabasco, a state that borders the Gulf of Mexico.

“If only I were like my cousin,” Juana thinks. She’s allowed to learn things and work. But Juana has to stay at home. She’s not allowed to leave. Not only to prevent others from seeing her bruises, but so she doesn’t see anyone. She’s only allowed to do housework, wait for her husband, and make sure that dinner and the home are ready. “Why d’you want to work if I’m already working?” her husband says, demanding a plate of hot food. “Learning that stuff’s a waste of time. You were born to stay at home and take care of the kids and me,” said Juana of her husband’s words.

Today, however, she wakes up earlier. She makes sure food is ready, cleans the house quickly, greets her husband lovingly, and heads to her aunt’s house. It’s Saturday. She’s always very insistent on starting workshops on time or earlier if possible, and she’s always very concerned with the finish time. She cannot overuse her time out of the house. At her aunt’s activity, she meets many women who are also there for varying reasons.

## ALAN

The pandemic fell over our heads in 2020. Everything was about to change, but we didn’t know how much, in what way, or how long would it last. Boys and girls no longer run through school hallways or classrooms; they stay home. Now that children cooped up, it’s hard to continue the program that I coordinated, which produced such good results. I wasn’t expecting my contract to be suspended, to get fired. I thought we would change the way things are done. But no. “Alan Cupil, your services are no longer required,” I was told.

I was left without employment at one of the worst possible moments in human history to be unemployed. And once again, I felt that slump that comes when you feel that your life has no meaning, you don’t know how to get ahead, and you start questioning everything. That’s how it felt.

A few months back, I had won a contest held by the Instituto Mexicano de la Juventud, presenting a project. Whoever won would receive the legal personhood or legal constitution of a foundation to carry out activities of a more formal nature. I had many ideas, which were a product of my studies and interest in environmental and scientific topics. The project entailed the production of green hydroponic fodder for use in transfer zones, a project that I already had on paper. I had provided training on the subject and adapted it for the contest.

**“Alan Cupil, your services are no longer required,” they told me**

## My dream was to change deeply rooted elements in society and leave my mark on others

That's how Fundación Contigo es Posible AC—the organization I lead—was born. I decided to occupy myself by getting this project off the ground.

I mostly envisioned myself as a researcher, which truly excited me.

But one has to do what life sends your way, and with my foundation and a winning project, I decided to get to work. I may not be a researcher, but I can be a social business owner. I had to do things to show how science is an engine for social change. If only we could demonstrate this, I would be satisfied—and have some personal funds, of course.

The foundation created the possibility of influencing communities. This is so that science can project and give visibility to the importance of education, children's upbringing, and allowing them to shine and gain opportunities. I could feel a different kind of science. Not the science I wanted at the start, but it was science with social applications that produces overlap between what's produced in a laboratory and applications that can tangibly impact communities.

My dream was to change deeply rooted elements in society and leave my mark on others.

We started a campaign called “Un Tabasco Más Verde” in an attempt to reclaim endemic species. We gathered the seeds, got them to germinate, and planted trees. However, we did not do this in barren lands or communal spaces. We innovated and did it in the backyards of homes located in vulnerable communities, communities with violence, social or economic issues. It was a way of adding value to their lands and providing them with shade and fruit.

According to their available land, we took stock of how many trees each person would like. Then, volunteers would go and plant trees in people's homes the day of the event.

I've never been one to seek recognition because people who seek recognition tend to act performatively. I seek to make a change in society, to have my work motivate others. The work that we did caught the attention of a former coworker in the Unidades de Servicio de Apoyo a la Educación Regular (USAER) in Tabasco. The challenge was linking children with disabilities with science, and it went well.

After the first trial run, we signed a collaboration agreement to work with nine children over two years. They had the task to solve a real problem within their community. So Ciencias Sin Fronteras—one of our foundation's programs—was born.

Turning an aquatic weed—a pest—into fertilizer brought recognition to the children participating in the project and won them a state fair. We eventually won at a national level and traveled to Phoenix, in the United States, to represent Mexico in a science fair. One of the children had been contracted to extract lumber illegally in Guatemala. Their science work, education, dedication, and enthusiasm prevailed over their fears of consequences for participating in the fair.

Women avoid waste and honor the taste of seasonal fruits



Our greatest satisfaction was that the children stayed in touch after the project was done. At the start of it, they were only thinking of completing their high school degrees, but afterward, they started to consider college careers in engineering.

We later launched a second project with three children. They also participated in fairs and attended a social enterprise camp. They won the Expociencias contest in both Tabasco and Monterrey. Finally, they won a state and national fair to represent Mexico in the Stockholm Water Prize, which was held virtually due to the pandemic.

I had accomplished all of this, but then the pandemic arrived. That marvelous work came to an end. Things crumbled for everyone around the world, including me. It's not easy when everything you used to do falls down. The satisfaction remains, but the future looks bleak.

## **JUANA**

Besides the many women, Alan was also there at Juana's aunt's house. He was leading the workshop. Juana looked at him, perplexed. "I know how to preserve food. My grandmother taught me," she thought. "But I'm not a man. I can't lead a workshop," she concluded. "You were born to stay at home and take care of the kids and me," the words echoed within her.

Juana completes all the cooking exercises with ease. She chats with the other women, and, slowly, her situation becomes clear to others.

She wants to work, have her income. She thinks that food preservation, caramelized peanuts, apples, or chamoy apples, could be easily prepared at home and provide additional income. If only she could.

She knows—believes—that she can't do any of it because she's a woman. But, why could other women do it? A man can go out, teach, demonstrate knowledge, and get paid. She could not.

## Alan learns to listen. He begins to acquire the tools to understand, as well

Juana's world is not the only one on shaky ground. Other women are in similar situations. They barely speak of it, but by listening carefully, the truth comes out in between conversations, like speaking in code. Alan learns to listen. He begins to acquire the tools to understand, as well.

For a brief moment, Juana sees a way out through creative gastronomy. "No way, it's not that easy," she puts herself down.

## ALAN

Once I lost my job due to the pandemic, I tried to earn a living however I could. My time as a student gave me good writing and investigation skills. I ended up helping many of my classmates with their theses, and one of my former classmates asked me to help with his wife's thesis.

I dove headfirst into a psychological topic: violence against women. I took notice of models of violence and the many forms that violence takes: physical, economic, sexual, psychological. Gender violence, family violence, intrafamilial violence, violence during the courtship period, all of it surrounding women. The topic captivated me, not just to help Helena with her thesis but also because men need to know about these manifestations of violence to detect them within ourselves and around us.



Women of the Chontal indigenous community of Tucta

At the same time, I was notified that people were called to lead food preservation workshops. I saw an opportunity to lead two simultaneous workshops. Once again, I saw an opportunity, and I took it. I prepared as best I could. I knew little of cooking beyond stirring a pot with a spoon, but I'm not afraid of a challenge.

All of a sudden, with all of my preparation in topics related to the environment, science, aquatic ecosystems, environmental impact, and management, I was overseeing the writing of a thesis in psychology and leading cooking workshops. Those last two came together in my head explosively.

Leading the workshop and revising the thesis, I saw a new opportunity.

The literature on violence against women states that it is pointless to lead violence awareness workshops when women don't have the means or platforms to face said violence and leave violent situations behind. Experts say that when a woman recognizes violence, attempts to escape it, and lacks the means to lead an independent life, the possibility of leaving her situation and abusive spouse behind vanish.

They have no money saved, no job, no chances of survival, and in many cases, no social network, given that their isolation leaves them with no close contacts.

What's more, assault complaints in Mexico rarely go anywhere, and women lack the support of pertinent institutions. Even if they try to escape the violent situation by leaving their partner, they wind up back at their homes. Instead of allowing their children to go hungry or find themselves without support or being persecuted, they would much rather put up with physical violence, humiliation, forced sexual encounters, or whatever else.

Thus the Mujeres de Cambio initiative was born.



Jams prepared by the women of the project.

## Leading the workshop and revising the thesis, I saw a new opportunity

## JUANA

Juana inadvertently shows her bruises, not just on her skin but throughout her conversations. She wishes to escape her hell, but she cannot. She thinks she can't. Alan starts noticing this and knows that he cannot simply tell her to leave her husband, to leave home. We never know the realities and possibilities that each woman faces.

Juana is constantly paying attention to the time to avoid returning home late. In just a few sessions, Alan notices. The other women do, too.

This time, Alan tells Juana, "Look, try to perfect your technique first, little by little, without leaving the house. Make it if you can, sell it if you can. Perhaps local women can pick up their orders, or you could send someone to deliver them. That way, you can start making some money with the orders you get." It's not a solution, but it's a way out.

Alan intends to get her to achieve financial independence, to change her relationship with her abuser. He knows it's not easy. It could be risky, even. There are many unknown factors. Alan doesn't know how her husband will react, he doesn't know how bad the violence gets, and it could even cost Juana her life.

**We saw that many of these women ran businesses out of their homes during the pandemic. They found opportunities**

## ALAN

Mujeres de Cambio attempts to combine workshops that provide useful tools for productive enterprises for women with an outlet for these women's situations.

We first handled the topic of food waste in their backyards, which is a way to broach the topic of violence within the family circle. Then, we created a product that can empower women. We saw that many of these women ran businesses out of their homes during the pandemic, selling food, dishware, cosmetics, etc. It became a way to face economic hardship.

The workshop was successful not because it ended misogynist violence but because it provided them with tools for empowerment and a space to share or think about their conflictive situations. Facing violence is not the main goal of these workshops, but it is often discussed.

That is why we brought a psychologist into the Foundation, and we looked for ways of openly discussing the topic of violence against women. In 2021, for our work on the inclusion of women as agents of change in their own lives, we received IFAD's Rural Youth Innovation Award in the category of Female Empowerment and Gender Inclusivity.

In the future, we seek to include greater and more qualified professional support when discussing topics of misogynist violence during the food preservation workshops. That way, we place the development of women at the center of these activities and make a tangible, positive impact on the lives of those who need it. For example, we've already seen that it would be important to start with self-esteem workshops. A woman with good self-esteem is less likely to accept and remain in a violent environment. Physical abuse is rooted in the low self-esteem of the victims, a situation that is further compounded by the victim's isolated circumstances.

## JUANA

Juana now has a skill that can bring financial rewards. She is selling preserved foods. She has also received other tools to face violence. She knows she has options. She knows what she must do for her well-being and survival.

She's readied some things. She's saved up some money if only just a little. She's thought of how to do this for many days and many nights.

She's thought her plan over a thousand times in her head.

She stops for a moment, stares at the ceiling, and takes a deep breath. She knows that she would likely not have to go through these things if she were a man. She could be leading the workshop. She could be Alan.

But she is a woman, and so she reviews her plan.

**But she is a  
woman, and  
so she reviews  
her plan**



**Mujeres de Cambio, Mexico**

<https://www.facebook.com/Mujeres-de-Cambio-100340599002311/>

E-mail: alan.cupil026@gmail.com

Phone: +52 9931153019

**COLOMBIA:**

**Energía Grata**

**FULL OF ENERGY  
FOR THE FUTURE**



On Sunday, September 20, 2015, a group of young individuals spent the whole day doing voluntary work in a community. They habitually use their days off from school or work to collaborate with marginalized communities in Cartagena, Colombia. They are about 15 people, total. It's not the first time they do it, though some met on that same day. They share the desire to find a better future for many families, not just their own.

They look for organizations to be of service and sate their appetite for helping others. They're only 18 to 20 years old, but they already know that youth is a force for change; they have the strength, energy, and drive to improve their lives and the lives of those with fewer opportunities—especially in communities where they are most needed.

This particular Sunday, they will be working with an organization that called them there to improve domestic spaces with natural lighting. They make a hole in the roof, place a water bottle in it, and through the physical process of refraction, it produces a light that turns the once-dark space into a more welcoming one.

*“Eight guys and gals installing a single device? Not the most productive endeavor,” they think. But at least it's something. They have fun and help out.*

Jenifer Colpas and Alexander Durán are there, among many others. These two youths are active, enthusiastic, and eager to provide more than just a little natural lighting during the day.

By now, they know that energy, sanitation, water, and access to basic services are fundamental in searching for better living conditions for millions of people worldwide. They had helped many families have a nicer living space during the day until then.

## Jenifer Colpas and Alexander Durán are there, among many others. These two youths are very active, enthusiastic, and eager to provide more than just a little natural lighting during the day

That September, the global community would discuss how to move from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations proposes new development goals for the countries in the region. New challenges and goals will be developed for 2030.

The installation of that natural floodlight is insufficient and precarious but prophetic. As if imagining the future, Jenifer and Alexander know that energy is and will be a crucial matter for people's wellbeing. They also know that States must provide basic services to their communities, but while social and non-governmental organizations will help, it won't be enough.

At this moment—this Sunday—however, they suspect that it's not enough to spend one's life trying to provide charity for others. They will want to do something different. They won't finish conceptualizing it this Sunday, but they know they want to do more. But what, exactly? Could it be that their partners also share their dream of change on that day?

Project members in a benefited community



That Sunday's volunteers will continue to meet. Fifteen at first, then eight. They will meet on occasion and talk about their priorities and develop ideas. How to do things differently and obtain better results?

"Long-lasting results," Alexander would think. "Better suited to these communities," Jenifer will say. Many will agree over several meetings, making notes in their priority journals.

Foundations and NGOs spend a great deal of money, provide little aid to communities and eat up most of the available volunteers. Though they can sometimes make a change, the group thinks there is room for improvement on this model.

"There's an untapped market niche here," Alexander will think, conveying it to his partners in future meetings.

They will meet in parks, houses, or cafés. As commitments begin to crystallize, the number of people in the group will dwindle. The remaining eight turn to four, becoming two: Jenifer and Alexander. They will want to name this thing they are about to create, which is how "Tierra Grata" will eventually come into their lives.

But all of this will be in the future because today—Sunday, September 20, 2015—while they toil away on roofs to light up dark spaces, this idea hasn't occurred to them yet. Today, while doing volunteer work, Alexander recalls how he lived in similar spaces and conditions, lacking many things in his childhood. He knows from personal experience how fixing important issues like clean water access and electricity can be a path to other opportunities.

Jenifer looks at the bottle; it needs to protrude a little on top and bottom so it can capture enough light to multiply inside the house. "This is a daytime solution," she thinks. "It doesn't work at night." She will remark on it after the activity is done and the volunteers get together to discuss the day's experiences and think about the future.

Alexander and Jenifer believe in the concept of cooperation, but they also believe that it should be done from a business point of view. Altruism falls short, and they will want to start a business to create jobs while ensuring their work impacts the territories they operate positively to improve the quality of life of their communities.

That Sunday in which they started their conversations came and went. Over the following months, they will continue to do voluntary work and think of new ways to move forward. They will install lampposts with solar panels in communities such as Palenque, near Cartagena, one of the first free cities in the Americas. There, they will explain to the townsfolk how to use different solar technologies—sometimes going as far as using their limited financial resources to pay for technologies that are better suited to their specific situations.

In other communities, they will install bathrooms—something that seems so basic yet is essential to daily life. Going even further, they will turn what they do into a small, feasible, and sustainable product, to turn it into a business.

They're not looking to line their pockets, focusing instead on improving people's quality of life by offering affordable solutions to all who need them. That is how Tierra Grata begins to develop. They will abandon volunteer work to create a business that provides development to communities at a low cost. Aside from being his organization's name, Tierra Grata is also the name of the small community where Alexander grew up. A place that also needed power, sanitation, and water. A motivational life allegory, Alexander thinks.

They had thought of another name, "Cactus," because they are resilient, store water, and grow in inhospitable places. Alexander couldn't quite wrap his head around it.

By June 2017, Tierra Grata will have an accomplishment under its belt, and its business will begin to take shape, shying away from the voluntary nature of the work it had previously done. This will be Tierra Grata's big year. They will agree to international meetings, innovative ideas, and establishing relations with many people. Still, Jenifer will have to wait until 2018 to dedicate herself full-time to the fascinating world of environmental and social enterprise.

Meanwhile, Alexander finds a job outside of Cartagena, which doesn't allow him to work on the organization full-time. Jenifer will have to take charge of the organization and keep it together on a modest salary.

**In other communities, they will install bathrooms, something so basic yet essential to daily life. Going even further, they will turn what they do into a small, feasible, and sustainable product, to turn it into a business**

Good news will soon follow, however. Tierra Grata becomes a finalist in RECON's 2017 call for support proposals, obtaining scholarships for two training courses: Values Transformation with the Dalai Lama Center for Ethics and Transformative Values and Strengthening of the Social Business Model, supported by Impact Hub, Athena, and RECON.

They manage to win prizes that provide them with resources to generate resources. It won't be a stroll through a rose garden. Rather, it will be— thorns and all. They will manage to produce a complete, viable work plan that includes providing basic clean energy, potable water, and safe sanitation services to rural communities.

The project provides women with training in water sanitation best practices through participational methodologies. It also installs low-cost bathroom infrastructure, which includes eco-friendly bathrooms that reduce water waste by 270,000 liters per year and prevent the contamination of water sources. They create seven prototypes across three communities in Colombia. In addition to creating natural fertilizers, they reduce infections and circumvent the sexual harassment resulting from a lack of private sanitation spaces.

A whole world of productivity opens up to these communities when people have access to guaranteed basic services. Suppose people have to walk great distances just to go to the bathroom. In that case, simple things become torturous and generate discomfort within the community. Making people feel like their house is a home, that they can relax because their needs are met. This is an important objective that needs to be met if conversations about sustainable development are to behold.

The lack of electric power is an obstacle to personal, family, and community development. Jenifer and Alexander will create Tierra Grata, but they will also create Energía Grata later on, a project that provides households with solar energy solutions. Residents will be able to connect up to four lightbulbs, charge their cellphones, and even plug in a television.

With Energía Grata, communities will stop wasting time and resources on such simple matters and have access to a technology that makes their lives simpler. It will require an investment, of course, but they will pay for it in affordable monthly payments. Keepers of the power sources will be trained, families that will have access to the small amount of knowledge required to perform the necessary repairs on the installed systems.

The community becomes empowered when results are produced through effort and a part of the investment, which gives it an incentive to care for them.



Transportation of the water filters to reach beneficiaries.

**The community becomes empowered when results are produced through its effort and a part of the investment, which gives it an incentive to care for them**

Energía Grata sells the solar energy system to families. It is delivered directly to their homes that are no longer only illuminated during the day but can now satisfy other needs besides access to light at nighttime. They can now access information, entertainment, and connectivity.

The project receives financing and uses it to subsidize the cost to the families, which provides them with generous repayment installments and conforms to rural workers' pay schedules.

The people don't necessarily want handouts, and they like knowing that they can get ahead on the merit of their effort. In some cases, Alexander and Jenifer have noticed that people are unappreciative of what is given, and there are few noticeable changes in their way of life. Bringing that desire for change closer, to make it real by understanding its possibilities using a trust-based credit is part of Energía Grata's work.

They used to spend money on candles, fuels, and everything else needed to produce rudimentary illumination—amounts that could be invested in technologies that provide greater benefits when taken as a whole. Now they can spend the money they are saving on solutions that generate greater positive and sustainable effects on their lives. Besides, these are not handouts for the community; they earned them.

Tierra Grata and their project Energía Grata have innovated on their own practices along the way: the volunteer force that the organization's work can harness does not come out of the cities. It is found within the very communities they work with.

Energía Grata brings the technology closer to them, a device with several components that include a converter, solar panel, control panel, and some switches and cables that will slowly evolve in their design.



A project member works on the completion of the sanitary structure

sustainability of its results, not providing any handouts, and avoiding creating a dependency from communities, empowering them instead.

4% of Colombia's population doesn't have access to power or has access to poorly distributed power. Meanwhile, 14% of Colombians have no clean water access, and 30% lack sanitation services. By taking on this challenge, Tierra Grata has provided over 200 installations that have improved the health, hygiene, and general quality of life of approximately 1,800 users.

Tierra Grata has worked with 40 communities and installed close to 1,300 technological devices adapted to their surroundings in total, improving the quality of life of over 11,000 people.

In 2020, they won the Lead2030 contest, a platform that provides resources for business startups that work towards the wellbeing of impoverished communities.

In 2021, Energía Grata—Tierra Grata's program—won the International Fund for Agricultural Development's (IFAD) Rural Youth Innovation Award in the category of Recycling and Renewable Energy Sources. The prize was awarded for their work in bringing electricity to small, marginalized rural communities and improving living conditions in the countryside, as well as allowing sustainable access to technology through solar energy.

That Sunday, September 20, 2015, a group of young volunteers had no idea that they were starting to imagine innovations in the field of social action, and that for some, tracing their futures.



The Energía Grata team in the La Cañada community

On the day that it all began, after nightfall, Jenifer closed her eyes without knowing that not only had she contributed a liter of light that day. She was also about to imagine a future full of energy. She did know then that she had dedicated her day to improving a few families' lives a little and that she wanted to continue doing so. She went to sleep imagining that it would be wonderful if she could make a career of it instead of simple voluntary work. And so, she decided to make her dream a reality.



**Energía Grata, Colombia**

Facebook: @tierragratacol

Instagram: @tierragratacol

Web: <https://tierragrata.org>

E-mail: [info@tierragrata.org](mailto:info@tierragrata.org)

Phone: +57 321 229 5209

PERU:

**Putzkan**

# VALUE FOR THE PEOPLE



I was sitting in the college classroom, studying Administration. It was a course on commodity chains. I was eager to learn these concepts so I could apply them in service of a productive project involving communities. I'm a communal person. I want what's best for my land and opportunities for those living in it.

I am Milly Alvarado. I studied in the Universidad Nacional Santiago Antúnez de Mayolo—also known as Unasam—in Huaraz, 400 kilometers north of Lima, Peru.

"A commodity chain is the combination of planned operations for the transformation of predetermined factors or raw materials into goods or services through the application of technological procedures," our professor would explain.

I wanted to share my knowledge with rural workers since they are often the final link in that chain and benefit the least from it.

However, I was unsure of what shape my project would take back then. I wasn't sure which products we would be commercializing or to which commodity chain we would be adding value.

I would sometimes distract myself by imagining myself creating a business that benefitted rural women. They fight women, living in a world full of problems, scarcity, and needs. These were often single mothers or women who suffered abuse at the hands of their spouses.

"...it consists of a series of consecutive stages throughout which several raw materials undergo some sort of change or transformation until a final product is created" the professor would go on.

**"...It consists of a series of consecutive stages throughout which several raw materials undergo some sort of change or transformation until the final product is created..."**

Yes, that's it. We'll take raw materials and transform them. We will establish a commodity chain, I thought.

With a pencil in my mouth, I stopped paying attention to the professor. I already imagined myself in a different time and place. I sold products that other women created. But I was still in the classroom, and the professor continued to speak.

"It is, therefore, a succession of integrated design, production and distribution operations, carried out by several interconnected units, involving a series of physical, technological, and human resources. Such as...?"

To understand the concept, we look at sample cases in college. For example, Peru sells much raw material but adds no value to it. We have so much wealth, but we sell our raw materials, and other countries process it to sell it at a higher cost, with an added value. "Such as?" the professor asks once more.

Textile production  
center located  
in Caserío la  
Esperanza, Peru



I wasn't exactly paying attention, but I heard a question. Design, production, distribution, physical resources? I thought of wood. Peru produces wood. "That's right, Milly," he responds. Whew, I wasn't as lost as I thought.

Wood? Could be. But what else does Peru supply the world? Sheep, alpacas! Wool has a commodity chain, and value can be added to it. I can help people; it can be sold and create jobs. Exporting the cattle implies a profit, but exporting wool could provide even more. Now, exporting products made out of wool can have an even greater added value. I started to drift, always getting lost in my imagination in search of something that could change people's lives in rural communities.

Later on, I will have to develop an investigative project for my final project. I will think of how to generate synergy with communities to create work that improves people's living conditions, particularly working men and women.

For now, still in class, the professor continues: "Industrial businesses have supply chains with complex logistics that depend on the raw materials they use, the commodity chains they rely on, and the market segments they are targeting."

I have to write this down, I thought. It will be useful. Much later, while outlining our investigation project, we will think of things to which we could add value.

I will get together with friends from different communities and specialties to do this. Together, we will work to create the idea of that value chain that I am now studying.

We will meet with friends and colleagues during these chats, where we imagine productive processes for our communities. People like Maycol Maguiña in Tourism, Marisa Huaman and myself in Administration, Edwin Giraldo and Milton Camillo in Environmental Engineering. We seek to contribute to traditionally vulnerable sectors. We will even have a wild idea, a dream. Something big: to see a model community is operating sustainably while using its resources to create added value.

We will visit the Caninaco community with this idea, looking to do our investigation work in an interdisciplinary fashion alongside the community. We will find valuable resources for the community, such as the alder forests, wool-producing cattle (alpacas and sheep), and Incan archeological sites.

Through my investigation, I will attempt to show how, for example, quality fibers are obtained to produce a thread that can produce a sellable product. This work will help me outline the shape of a productive business. Wool, thread, design, tailoring, and sale. That is the chain that I want to create.

We will be unable to complete the investigation due to budget constraints. That same obstacle, however, will be a good experience for us.

**We will be unable to complete the investigation due to budget constraints. That same obstacle, however, will be a good learning experience to us**

“We need a business model based on local resources,” Edwin and I will comment. Thus, Putzkan is born from that search. A chain of solidarity that serves many people, utilizing resources sustainably, considering future generations.

The drive provided by our investigation project will be essential to the foundation and realization of Putzkan. As our professor taught us, we know that a supply chain is composed of all the processes involved directly or indirectly in satisfying supply needs.

That’s why we had the idea to create a value chain that improves the fiber, processes the wool, and produces quality thread. Who better to do all this than members of these communities? There will be work for the women who produce fabrics, providing them with a source of income for their work.

We will show that it is possible to add value to a product while valuing people’s work. The challenge will be implementing it and making sure that everyone wins.

*“A value chain is a series of activities that businesses develop to create value, including the steps required to produce the end product, which is developed throughout different businesses and locations,”* I recall my professor saying, which made me think that value should be placed on people.

To realize our project and make it useful to communities, we will have to dedicate ourselves to the topic. We will visit the communities and study the material, theoretical procedures, and wool production concepts.

For example, sorting the wool that comes from different parts of the animal can help to improve quality. Abdominal wool is softer than leg wool. Selling these wools helps to increase their value separately, which slowly improves the end product.

“Every function in a supply chain is destined to serve and fulfill a client’s request,” my professor would say, which is precisely what we will want to do. Our chain will lead to a satisfied customer, having bought quality product.

We will take the wool produced in Catac, which women-headed households in Huaraz will thread to dye it, design the piece, and weave it locally. In every step of the process, everyone will benefit and add value to the end product.

We will use dye-producing plants to make the most of nature’s bounty. We will reforest using those same plants to guarantee the project’s sustainability, restoring or maintaining the natural equilibrium.

“It won’t be easy,” Edwin says, “But we’ll take a chance together.”

“And who will be our client?” we asked ourselves.

We will start out selling to friends and family over the internet, but the people of Huaraz will eventually inquire about a shop, which we will set up.

We will sell caps, scarves, purses, backpacks, decorations, and many other pieces. We will even sell souvenirs.

We learned the importance that workers and businesses provided to the chain, but we wanted it to be the other way around—value for workers, communities, and also value for the chain. Value for the people, we will say. Our innovation was right there, in the inclusion of women in collective work and valuing people in commodity chains.

The name Putzkan came naturally, from the Quechua word for threading. That is what I will do. We will thread commodity chains with a purpose.

Traditionally, women produce thread and fabric. However, they will need training so they can spend the appropriate time on each task, so they can produce what’s needed and receive appropriate compensation for their time. We want to weave a sustainable future.



Sheep wool dyeing process with a local plant called Chilca

The women who participate in our business will receive training. For example, we will set up a weaving workshop, working for most of the day and playing a little sport afterward. We will have to unite the group, get to know each other, our problems, and help each other.

Threading and weaving will be at the core of our activity. It will be done by women who will receive payment for their work at affordable prices. We will establish workshops to help the women improve their techniques and talk about their situations as heads of household, mothers, and workers.

In these workshops—which can last an entire day or more— we will learn to make fabrics, learn about colors, combinations, and the meaning behind each design. We will learn finance, how to improve our economy, the importance of savings, and equitable ways to interact amongst others and ourselves. We will learn about rights. As humans, women, and mothers, the right that we have.

Topics of misogyny in local communities always crop up amongst the local women. An abusive husband, a father who abandons his family. A deadbeat father. Valuing people also means caring for their emotional, physical, and mental health. Building self-esteem, empowerment, work, and administration skills—even self-defense and sports—will be part of the workshops. These will be threading and weaving workshops, but we will discuss so much more.

Once the end product is sold, I need to be honest with the final consumers. Often tourists, usually a local, but it doesn't matter who. Once in the shop, I will explain to them that the value chain's process involves the same community in which the wool is produced, where the women then turn it into thread. I will show pictures of the people behind the product, the communities, the sacrifice, the delivery, and everything that these purchased products will provide to the people who worked on it and their surroundings.

The customer will notice that these products are elaborated with quality fibers, that they have an added value, that it is our wool, and that it uses labor force that seeks to progress. Handmade, eco-friendly, 100% natural—including the dyes—products. All of this holds value, which makes the difference, and the customer will understand and pay for it.

One of the added values, for example, is that the colors are not merely another decoration. We produced them using wood bark. These are natural, eco-friendly products.

Besides, many of these trees are planted by the same women who work the fabrics. This will contribute to the repopulation of trees that are threatened by deforestation.

**One of the added values, for example, is that the colors are not merely another decoration. We produce them using tree bark. These are natural, eco-friendly products**

Naturally obtained  
colored wool



That is also an added value that we will use to sell the end product.

We developed another technique traditionally used to dye fabrics by using an insect that nests in the main ribs of Tuna plants: the female of the species—the cochinita or cochineal—produces the carminic acid from which carmine is produced.

We use a lot of this colorant for its excellent capacity to produce dyes, from which a gamut of colors can be obtained. It's an ancient process that has been used for centuries. It even served as currency in pre-Incan times.

I will explain to producers and workers that we can increase earnings for all by improving their products, working with quality materials, and using select raw materials.

The pandemic forced us to close our stores, but we opened sales channels. In 2021, we began negotiations with novica.com to sell to an international market online.

That same year, we also received IFAD's Rural Youth Innovation Award in the category of Female Empowerment and Gender Inclusivity for leading an inclusive business that promotes the hiring of female heads of households as weavers.

Lastly, Putzkan laid the foundation for developing a sustainable model for the textile industry in the Peruvian Andes. Our eco-friendly pieces are well received by the people visiting our store. What differentiates us is our mission statement and the quality of our product. The sustainable business chain created by our project ensured that workers were valued—from an economic, social, and environmental point of view—and their efforts are now recognized with an appropriate payment that is distributed to each according to their contribution to the production process.



In the production center, the wool colors are naturally obtained

Our vision for the future is to grow and help even more people. On the one hand, we wish to help producers by planting dye-producing plants and restoring balance to the ecosystem. On the other hand, we aim to continue expanding horizons, showing that rural areas can be either a problem or a solution depending on one's perspective and vision.

The bell rings, class is over. All of this has yet to be built. I know that my life will take a turn and that innovation and the value of commodity chains don't only exist on paper. For now, they exist in my and my colleagues' imagination, but they will soon exist in stores and the hands of the women weavers who will support this project.



**Putzkan, Peru**

Facebook: @Putzkan

Instagram: @tejidos\_putzkan

Web: <https://putzkan.wixsite.com/tejidosputzkan>

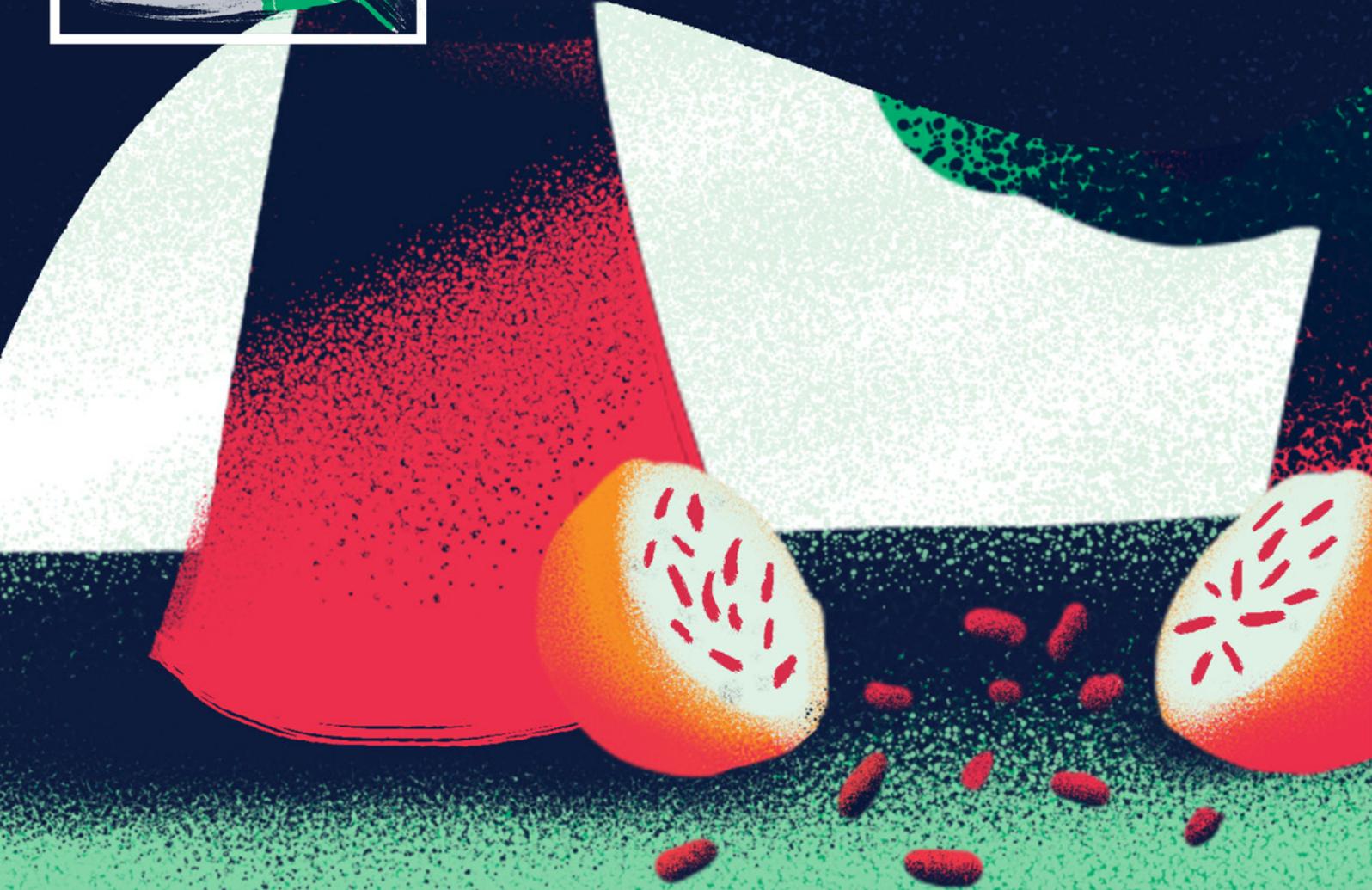
E-mail: putzkand@gmail.com

Phone: +51 928710724

COLOMBIA:

**Agroune**

# KNOWING HOW TO WAIT



“This is the moment,” I think, and I start to outline a plan with my wife, Ingrid. She continues to work while I quit my job and dedicate myself to our project. I am very hopeful.

Honestly, we had this idea a few months ago. We traveled through several European countries and noticed how a Colombian product called uchuva (Golden Berry) was well received. We studied the topic and saw potential. We thought it would be a great idea.

I was born in the countryside. My name is Weimar Mesa; it is 2018, I’m just under 28 years old, and I want to return to my roots, get involved with the earth, the fields, production. All of this was born from the idea of growing uchuvas, which gave us the hope of exporting.

At the Agencia Logística de las Fuerzas Militares, I worked in my field of study, Financial Administration, with an emphasis on the financial management of small and large organizations, as well as cost, expense, and projections planning. However, I still lacked something.

“I found it!” I think to myself once my wife and I decide to start a business focusing on the growth, production, and exportation of uchuva to the European Union. However, we had nothing, no land, no capital, no contacts. Nothing. All we had was our drive and our dreams.

My father helped us get the appropriate terrain, but since we were not large landowners, we decided to rent. We found an economically affordable terrain located relatively close to main roads so that it would be logistically viable to export our product.

## “This is the moment,” I think, and I start to outline a plan with my wife, Ingrid

Once our plan was properly outlined, we made a few phone calls until we managed to establish strategic alliances that would help us with the tasks involved in the exportation process.

*“Our savings will help, but we don’t have enough to cover the required investment,” Ingrid tells me frankly. She’s right.*

We envision a great project, we know it will be profitable and successful, but we are missing something. We know the market, administration, and that there are several lines of credit available across different banking institutions, so we decide to set up meetings with many of them.

The banks received our papers, ideas, and hope, but they rejected us one by one.

*“We won’t be able to do it,” I think. But I’m not one to give up so easily.*

Expectations are high, at first. You trust in the process, and you believe that the banks will, too. But the banks analyze everything, and most times, the answer is no.

We didn't know it then, but these denials were the seed of our next big project.

Agroune had nothing to do with uchuvas, though searching for a way to export them showed us the way.

Everyone knows that if you want to grow something in the countryside, you have to wait. In economics and finance, however, waiting can mean the loss of an opportunity. That is why we want to finance our uchuvas project, now is the time to find a way to make it real.

But just as it is for the more than two million agricultural workers in Colombia, the banks' denial remained a constant for us.

We are resolute; a few "no's" won't deter us.

*"What other alternative do we have?"*  
*Ingrid asks.*

*"I don't know," I answered. We don't know it yet, but we will find the way.*

We started to think that the whole project could crumble, that the investment, renting, my dedication, and spending all of our savings for nothing. We know that uchuvas will sell well in France and other European countries, but we have to get there, and without financing, we will stay here, in Colombia.

**— "I don't know,"  
I answered.  
We don't know  
yet, but we will  
find the way**

Talking to my father, he refers me to some friends and family.

*"There are some people who have some money saved up and could lend you some. If you can offer them some sort of benefit and security, they might trust your project," he told me.*

Confidence is key, confidence and knocking on doors, knowing how to wait. That phrase appears before us once again, like a mantra. Knowing how to wait could also mean finding new opportunities in economics.

Thus, with our uchuvas project in hand, we started knocking on every door we could. It was mostly friends, family, and people close to us. We're no longer interested in working with banks; we don't want any more "no's" for an answer. People close to you will refer you to others close to them. We rang many doorbells and made many calls.

It was probably over a hundred people. But we still lacked the security that we were looking for.

Later on, that will be my main priority once we develop an organization that seeks financing for producers who have no access to credit lines. For now, however, the whole process is a chore to me. Many say that they can, but when the time comes, they can't. Others will say that they will think about it, but they're not really interested.

But some people think about it, analyze your proposal, and say yes.

What a relief! Some people begin to trust our project. These are personal, informal loans, but we want to provide them with security.

At that very moment, we lack a legal framework that will help us shape that most important detail. But we do it our way, thinking of how they could collaborate with us and pay them back once the project is finished.

*"Is there any risk?" they ask us.*

*"Yes," we are forced to reply.*

Who knows of any safe investments in agriculture? That's precisely why banks don't want to take a chance on farmers or small producers who don't have farms to secure investments.

The positive responses gave us the push we needed to show other farmers alternatives to traditional institutions.

Other alternatives are equally viable and profitable, which allow us to achieve the same or even better results.

Once we ran the numbers, Ingrid and I saw everything we needed to invest. The project goes on as planned, the uchuvas are already planted, and the debts are paid off. We can begin.

And now we wait, again. Ensuring everything goes well with the crops is a new kind of wait. Finding a way to solve our project's financial problems was the deciding factor in doing the same for other producers.

That is how Agroune will be born, though we don't know that yet. We're still growing our uchuvas.

*"This could work for other projects," we think.*

Indeed, it could be, though we don't know if we'll be able to rely on any more people's financial support. It was hard enough to find the people that we did.

The idea was just a hunch for now.

Our project is taking shape. We hired more staff for the farm, and we started working on the exportation process through the agreements we established at the beginning.

We need to be careful, though. There are dozens of parameters that need to be met to export. It is not simply packing and shipping. To export, you have to invest, work, and know how to wait.

## The positive responses gave us the push we needed to show other farmers alternatives to traditional institutions

Agriculture teaches us the value of waiting because you plant something and can't expect to harvest the next day or week. Sometimes you have to wait months or well into the next year, but once you start to see the results, it means a lot, which gives us hope at last. We went through those stages of waiting, planting, waiting some more, learning, working, and eventually harvesting.

Uchuvas have their particular timeframe: you plant them, work them, care for them, and harvest them. You plant them and then wait about nine months before they start bearing fruit, lasting up to 15 months of harvest time. If you rotate your crops, you can extend harvest times even further. However, you have to prepare everything for export simultaneously. Product quality and certification. If you don't meet those parameters, your products will only be available for local consumption, making them cheaper and less likely to sell.

It's important to follow agricultural best practices, which leads to the farm becoming a certified exporter by the Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario. The Instituto guarantees that the farm meets the parameters for exportations provides you the approval document, and allows you to export as soon as the product is harvested.

Agroune with coffee growers from Huila



Agroune doesn't exist yet while we work the uchuvas, but the success of our exports leads us to what we once imagined:

*"What if we used the process we developed for ourselves to help other projects?"*

That hunch turned into a project, which turned into dedication, effort, and even more waiting. We would have to find investors on one end and producers on the other.

We wouldn't be a bank, but we would do something similar.

Our uchuvas project went well. The fruit was successfully exported and sold, and we achieved an 18% return on investment for the investors that trusted us. Since these were people close to us, there were no precise stipulations on what needed to be returned to them. We had made it dependent on the project's success.

The uchuvas project kicked Agroune off. The capital we obtained from that small but significant fruitful project was reinvested.

The idea not only came from the process we had developed. It also served as an economic booster that could finance Agroune's operations, given that we were starting out and in need of capital. That's where part of the investment came from.

The uchuvas were a personal project that led us to other things.

The project's success showed us that we had a business opportunity. It was a market gap: there was a flaw that the financial market could not solve, but we found the way to overcome it and developed the knowledge to do so. Our permanent dream is improving the countryside's quality of life and allowing rural people to do what they set out to do.

I still remember my mother and father's difficulties with their onion crops. When the market was doing well, our family was also doing well, but when prices dropped, and the bank payments had to continue, it hurt our family. I noticed these things, even as a child. It left an impression on me.

Agrone will do things differently. We have to turn this idea into something profitable for investors, producers, and us. But we have to do it while thinking how to best help farmers.

The formula is not easy to extract, but it shows up in our minds, and we put it to paper: investors who can wait until the project's end for their returns; dedicated and hard-working producers; and us, of course, with our new business, moving money from one end to another, preparing, training, and accompanying producers, convincing investors, knowing full well that waiting can pay off—knowing full well that results cannot come at the expense of the farmers or anyone else.

The stars align. We lived through the hardship, found a way, got ahead, and produced significant results.

*“Why not do the same for others?” Ingrid and I thought.*

From uchuvas, we moved onto our organization, bringing the countryside and the city together through meaningful investments. That is how Agrone was born.

The first people to trust Agrone took a leap of faith. It's not easy to trust a startup project, but we had the uchuvas' success to show for it.

At the start, we won't have any acknowledgments, awards, acceleration processes, nor will we show up in the media. Later on, we will have all of those.

Of all the doors we knocked on, the first to say yes wants to celebrate. It was an intimate party because it was a commitment more than a celebration. We receive an initial sum from an investor who trusts the countryside, who trusts Agrone. We also have our small amount of capital that came from the uchuvas project. Now we think of how to respond and ensure that the producer holds up their end of the bargain, and suddenly the celebration turns to concern.

It's a clash of mixed feelings, but it gives us the motivation we need to work.

Investors will not be receiving a monthly payment as they would with a traditional loan through a bank. This relationship is different. There will be dividends, returns, yes. Of course, they will be able to get their investments plus interests back. But all in due time. As we started our project, we received a contribution from a State accelerator, Innpulsa. It gave us sufficient funds to invest in a legal structure for our project, providing some degree of security for all parties involved.

## **It's a clash of mixed feelings, but it gives us the motivation we need to work**

There are many responsibilities at play. There is more than just the need for money behind every person who agrees to invest and who has a project needing investments. There are the dreams and effort in obtaining the resources, the work already done, and the work yet to be done; the effort continues. It is not simply a financial compromise; it is an interpersonal relationship.

That is what we do.

Our project innovates because it connects investors with the countryside in a way that had previously only been done informally. We provide a financial structure, a model, a way to make people relate to each other through solidarity and mutual aid, and through investments and returns on capital.

Working on Agrone, we now notice that it's not only about moving the capital from one place to another; we need a system in place for the development of farmers. We deliver the capital, but we also provide support by way of technical assistance that allows the receiving project to develop under high standards and also provides support with the commercialization of the harvest. We have to provide our support, experience, and expertise to make the project as profitable as possible, ensuring it sells at optimal prices. It is a process in which we are permanently involved.

Ingrid also works on the project now. We've hired several people we have many plans for the future.

The uchivas project gave way to another, with strawberries this time, before we focused on Agrone.

We keep investors informed about the development of their projects and the returns on their investment. We help farmers not only with obtaining the necessary funding but also with technical support so they can develop technologically refined agricultural projects. We also support them through a series of commercial alliances, helping to commercialize their products or harvests so the project can achieve a level of success where all parties benefit.

In 2021, we will receive IFAD's Rural Youth Innovation Award for our role as an agent of change and development for the rural sector. Because we showed that you could find resources that favor the prosperity of the countryside and its people. We won the award in the category of Financial Inclusion in Latin America.

**In the future, we will become more involved with the logistics and export processes to continue responding to people who decide to develop agricultural projects and those who decide to invest in them**

We look proudly to the past. We currently have \$150,000 invested, 15 projects supported, and over 200 kilograms of fruit produced in our years of work. We offer up to double percentage digits in profits and returns in under 24 months.

We know the challenges that the countryside faces are myriad since they're the same challenges we face. Agrone seeks to contribute to the countryside's financial and social sustainability, a close model to farmers and investors, offering guarantees.

In the future, we will become more involved with the logistics and export processes to continue responding people who decide to develop agricultural projects and those who decide to invest in them.



The uchuvas are already being consumed in France and, even though they don't know it, those who purchased them also formed part of a new to face financial problems in the countryside. Strawberries, our new project, are earmarked for the Colombian market.

Other regional fruits such as granadilla, gulupa, avocado, pitahaya, lime, and many others may wait for us further down the line. We will continue to insist that the wait is worth it!!



**Agroune, Colombia**

Facebook: @agrune colombia

Instagram: @agroune.inversiones

Web: <https://agroune.com>

E-mail: [proyectos@agroune.com](mailto:proyectos@agroune.com)

Phone: +57 3502750245

# PROJECT CLOSURE

Young individuals inspire this publication. They have accompanied us throughout the more than two years of the Rural Youth Innovation Award implementation, organized by the International Fund for Agricultural Development's (IFAD) South-South and Triangular Cooperation and Knowledge Center.

The ability to respond shown by the region's youth during the COVID-19 pandemic is a lesson of resilience for all. The youth had a strong, fast, creative, and effective response. The youth has once again shown us that they are not lacking in efforts to get ahead, that their ideas have the strength and enthusiasm required to crystallize.

We hope that this account of the 2021 Rural Youth Innovation Award's nine winning initiatives inspire other young entrepreneurs in the region.

The stories presented in the previous edition remind us that the road to success is not easy. They speak to the youth to tell them that obstacles are overcome through innovation, passion, and trust. We all know that rural development in the region cannot be carried out without local participants.

We wish to invite all the institutions and individuals who assisted the IFAD in implementing the Award's first and second editions to continue working toward a better future for Latin America and the Caribbean, just as the IFAD will do.

We once again thank everyone who allowed this grand celebration of the rural youth's inventiveness and importance. The award comes to an end but the South-South and Triangular Cooperation and Knowledge Center and the IFAD will continue to act in the interest of promoting a sustainable rural development upon which the youth can build its future.

For more information about the Center's initiatives and IFAD's projects, visit this webpage:

<https://lac-conocimientos-sstc.ifad.org/>





Rural youth developed nine innovative ideas that are essential for facing many rural challenges: building service stations in places where it seemed financially impossible, creating a virtual marketplace where countryside products are sold, providing electricity to communities forgotten by modern development, bringing specialized medicine to remote regions, delivering groceries to the doorsteps of those unable to leave their homes during the pandemic, leading workshops that can offer women financial opportunities, providing essential services to marginalized communities, generating value for the people involved in productive chains, and generating opportunities for agricultural projects to receive funding outside of the banking system. Ideas are the seed of any project and innovation.

The innovative ideas described in this publication were developed before and after the pandemic. All had to adapt to the new challenging scenario, and they share common roots: improving the life conditions and extending a helping hand to rural people seeking better opportunities.

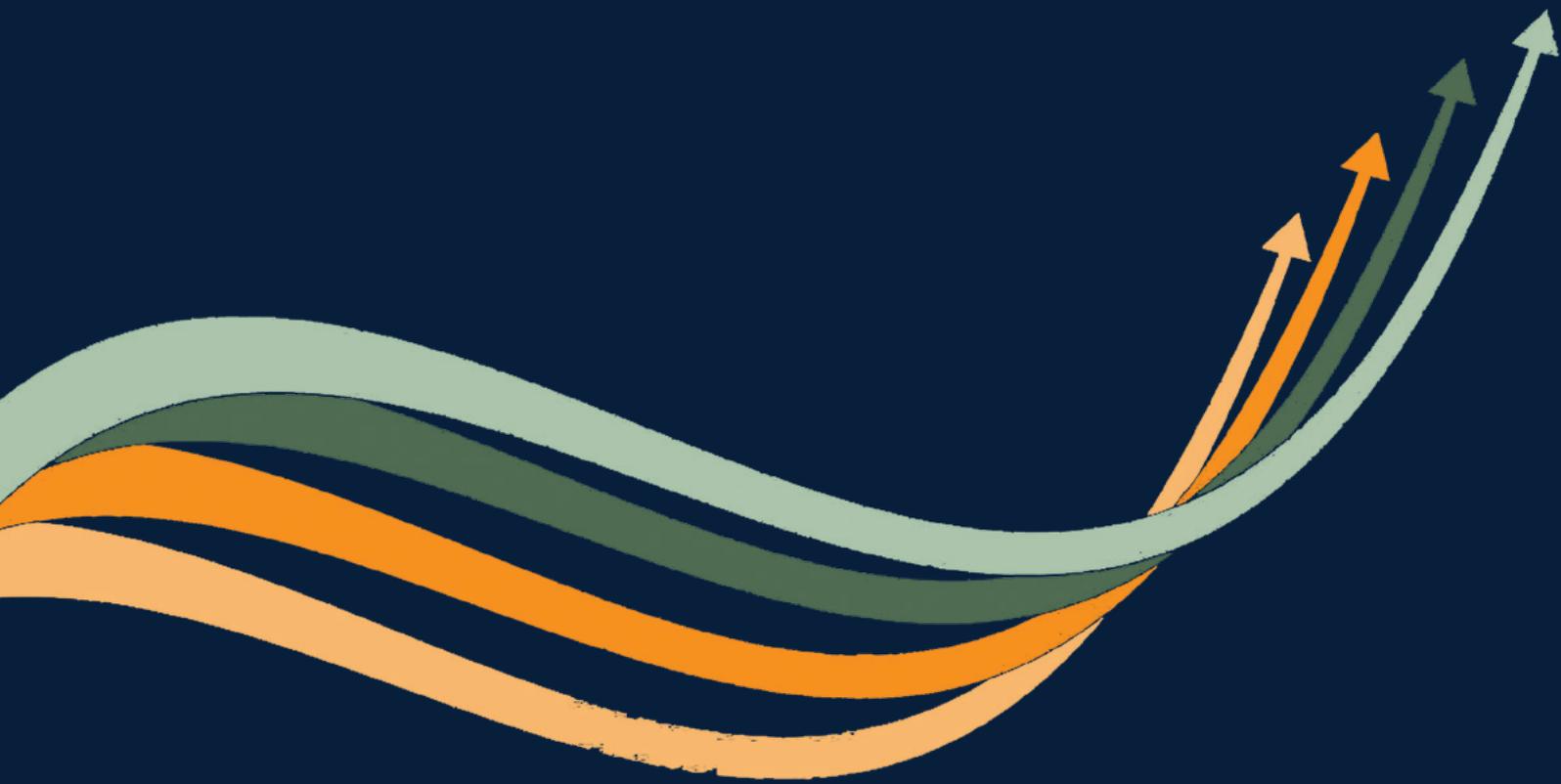
This book compiles nine stories that show us people who could implement their innovative ideas and contribute to rural communities' development in Latin America with their efforts and enthusiasm.

Caminnos in Bolivia, Raesy in Brazil, Comunidades Iluminadas – PowerMundo and Putzkan in Peru, Telesan in Honduras, Chao COVID 19, Energía Grata and Agrone in Colombia, and Mujeres de Cambio in Mexico were all winners of the International Fund for Agricultural Development's (IFAD) Rural Youth Innovation Award in 2021 and their stories are part of this collection of accounts.

Fernando Francia is a journalist, professor of communications and writing, investigator, editor, and audiovisual producer. He is also the author of "Caminos de innovación" (IFAD, 2021.) As a journalist, he has worked in written, radio, television, and internet mediums. He has worked as a consultant in strategic communications campaigns in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Uruguay. He holds university degrees in mass communications, journalism, and political communication.



Investing in rural people



**AWARD**  
RURAL YOUTH  
INNOVATION IN  
LATIN AMERICA &  
THE CARIBBEAN



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# INNOVATIVE IDEAS

**Fernando Francia**