



USC Founder, Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova, made it her task to share her travel notes with USC donors and friends. USC continues to publish stories from the field - to keep donors informed about the progress of our ongoing work. We hope these Jottings bring you closer to the people you have chosen to support.

TAKING STOCK AND TALKING JUSTICE

I just returned from an intensive two weeks in Ethiopia. It feels good to be home and to reflect on the gathering that took me to Ethiopia's northern highlands – breathtakingly green and lush, nearing harvest season. For two weeks, I joined 50 seed savers from 16 countries – farmers, community workers, scientists, NGO folk, government officials – for a field school of sorts; the first gathering in several years of our Seeds of Survival (SoS) partners and colleagues from related networks. We met to take stock of our achievements, lessons learned, and next steps.

On bus rides along steep and winding roads, in farmers' fields with 10-foot-high sorghum plants, and over meals of local curry dishes, we discussed the needs of small farm families and our shared belief that farmers need to be in control of their farming systems.



Workshop Participants in Ethiopia

Photo by Faris Ahmed

We learned a tremendous amount from each other, particularly from the farmers who joined us. They said our support helped them breathe new life into community livelihoods. On landscapes that would challenge the most skilled Canadian farmer, they feed their families and grow enough to sell in local markets. They now have cash for clothing and school supplies,

and are no longer indebted to seed companies for expensive products that offer only short-term benefits.

Our group's recognition of farmers' expertise and intimate knowledge of their seeds, land and environment made our farmer colleagues feel truly valued. As Don Luis Alfonso, a Honduran farmer, proudly noted, "Farmers are also capable scientists!"

(See 'Citizens' on page 2)

HARVESTING WISDOM: THE SoS GATHERING IN ETHIOPIA

To explore sustainable agriculture and food justice challenges, this November USC organized a gathering in Ethiopia – a hands-on workshop and an opportunity to reflect on 18 years of the Seeds of Survival (SoS) program in the country where it began.

Although our SoS partners are from diverse backgrounds, they are all united on one thing: that conservation of plant genetic resources on the farm is a critical strategy in the battle against genetic erosion, food insecurity, and environmental degradation.

Since we recognize that millions of small-scale farmers are at the

forefront of this battle to preserve the planet's genetic wealth, it was clear that farmer participation would be key to a successful workshop – farmers like Ali Angoiba, who joined us from Mali.

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CITIZENS FIND THEIR VOICE

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The farmers' reports were not all rosy. They had concerns over land ownership issues, pressure to switch to introduced seeds along with fertilizers and pesticides, and legislation and laboratory seeds that could prevent seed saving – the heart of their production systems. They asked for help, specifically with understanding the big picture so they can better organize and advocate for their right to have control over their own production systems – a concept called food sovereignty.

You might have noticed that recent USC publications have emphasized this policy and justice side of our work. We're listening carefully to the farmers we support, and want to keep their best interests central to our programs. We know development without justice can be a Trojan horse – attractive outside but with hidden agendas that promote the interests of others.

We still target most of our resources at community-led initiatives, but we're also compelled to address system-wide injustices – whether government policies, economic barriers, or social structures – that limit what farmers

can achieve. By considering the connection between local initiatives and broader policies, our work contributes to lasting solutions. Enhancing diversity in a farmer's field won't matter much if national policy limits her ability to save seeds. On-farm activities and advocacy work really go hand-in-hand.

Equity and Development

Today, influential organizations like the World Bank are also beginning to understand the central place of equity and justice in development. In October, I heard the World Bank's senior vice president and chief economist, Francois Bourguignon, speak in Ottawa. He argued that, while it has taken time, the World Bank is now convinced that, "with social justice, society will grow faster."

That's a lesson USC Canada has understood for some time, and we've been able to apply it to the work we do with all our partners.

Helping Citizens Find Their Voice

In Indonesia, USC's partners help communities understand how to access their rights as citizens. Since 1997, USC has worked

with the Civil Society Alliance for Democracy (known as Yappika), to promote dialogue between community-based organizations (CBOs) and local government. With training, CBOs learn how to scrutinize policy and take an active role in the political process.

SATUNAMA, another Indonesian partner, trains local leaders and CBOs in management systems and strategies for healthy and vibrant community

Enhancing diversity will not matter if national policy limits the ability to save seeds

life. Well-trained local leaders implement effective development activities in ways that give every person a voice in development.

Abroad and at Home

In Canada, USC engages the government in policy issues of importance to the people we assist in the South. With our partners in the Ban Terminator Campaign, for example, we have encouraged Canadians to support farmers from all over the world in their efforts to secure national bans of Terminator technology. A ban in Canada would set an example, benefitting not only Canadian farmers, but their fellow seed savers around the world. (see p.6 for more on Terminator) ~

*By Susan Walsh,
Executive Director*



Photo by Yappika

Yappika trains local organizations the skills needed to represent public interests

DEMOCRACY, ONE STEP AT A TIME

In December 2004, a major earthquake shook northern Sumatra causing a tsunami that devastated communities all along the coastline of Aceh Province in Indonesia. The human toll was massive, and media coverage about the disaster remains vivid in our minds.



Photo by Terry Asma, 2020 Studios



Photo by Celia Borgatti

Rebuilding the physical infrastructure devastated by the tsunami is only half the job. USC is focusing on the other half: rebuilding society.

Most of us still have strong images of destroyed homes and shattered lives. We shake our heads at all the work that goes into rebuilding so much physical infrastructure.

The tsunami affected more than just the physical infrastructure of Aceh. It also had a major impact on social services and local governance. Two years on, with reconstruction work well underway, it's critical that communities focus on restoring social infrastructure – ensuring citizens have a say in public policy.

USC is now working with Yappika on a program to strengthen Acehese civil society organizations and help the people of Aceh build a stable local governance system.

Following the post-Tsunami relief effort, Yappika, assessed tsunami-affected districts in Aceh

and found that, aside from meeting basic needs, communities were most concerned about restoring social infrastructure. According to the assessment:

- Communities recognize how important local organizations are in representing their needs to decision makers, but they don't feel the organizations have the skills to do that.
- Communities are aware that government is responsible for basic services like health and education, but need to understand their rights and learn to demand government action.
- Communities lack a clear understanding of the channels of government and need to learn ways to participate and influence decision-makers.

Through training and technical assistance, Yappika works with local organizations to address these concerns and help the public take an active role in rebuilding their society. These organizations learn how to interact with government and shape policies that address public interests.

The Tsunami wreaked havoc on Acehese civil society but it did not destroy the spirit or skills of those determined to revive it. This program provides an opportunity for the Acehese people to participate in their own governance and society building. Democracy will be achieved one careful and thoughtful step at a time. ☛

*By Ron Cross,
Communications Officer*

HARVESTING WISDOM

(Continued from page 1)

"My head is so full of information and ideas," said Angoiba. "I can't wait to share them with my community."

Angoiba lives in Petaka, in the Douentza region of eastern Mali. Douentza is on the edge of the Sahara – an ecosystem threatened by desertification, drought, and poor soil conditions. Government and industry practices, like the propagation of hybrid and genetically modified seed varieties unsuited to local conditions, have further marginalized Petaka's farmers.

Nevertheless, the community-run market gardens of Petaka are a resounding success, inspired by work begun through SoS in Ethiopia so many years ago. With USC's support, the people of Petaka are not only growing vegetables for the local market, but are also preserving endangered crop varieties. In addition, they run



Photo by Faris Ahmed

Aisha Saeed and Animat Imam, two of the farmers visited during the workshop

seed and gene banks to ensure a stable and diverse seed supply.

Never having left Mali, Ali and his colleague Haoua (also from

Douentza) were proud to share their achievements with workshop participants and Ethiopian farmers – and to learn how much they had in common with farmers elsewhere.

BUILDING LOCAL MARKETS

In the fall of 2006, Université de Montreal student Guillaume Denommée spent three months as an intern in Nepal. He wrote a report after his visit to USC Nepal's Rural Civil Society Empowerment Program (RCEP) in Rasuwa. This excerpt highlights some of the development challenges when access to opportunity is limited – in this case by physical barriers.



According to Murai Prasad Lamichhane, a USC Nepal field coordinator, "the biggest hurdles to development in Rasuwa are natural factors." That's easy to believe, considering we walked more than a kilometre along the roadside leading to our destination. The only road linking Rasuwa to the rest of the country had been washed away by rains.

The road has since been rebuilt, but climate and geographic peculiarities in northern Nepal still isolate this region. Most communication happens through

messengers who go by foot on steep paths. Lamichhane says, "In such harsh conditions each small result comes from hard work."

Despite the terrain and other socio-political factors, the communities involved are in good shape and harvests are sufficient. Dhunche is a dynamic small town in Rasuwa, and the market there offers possibilities for farmers. The market already works well for craft-sellers, but "we want to use the same system for agricultural products," says Shree Ram Shrestha, Director at USC Nepal.

On a field trip to Debre Zeit in central Ethiopia, workshop participants saw how small-scale

“Small farmers are at the center of the effort to save the planet’s genetic wealth.”

farmers are working to preserve and strengthen local varieties of teff, wheat, and other crops. A community-run seed and gene bank, supported by USC’s partner, Ethio-Organic Seed Action (EOSA), is helping meet seed supply needs year after year.

In Wollo region – the heart of Ethiopia’s ‘sorghum country’ – Ali couldn’t contain his excitement on

seeing dozens of traditional sorghum varieties growing without the use of chemical inputs.

Workshop participants greatly enjoyed the rich exchange with their peers, during field visits and discussions on farming techniques, challenges, and ideas for the future.

They pledged to continue sharing information, research, and advocacy work for food sovereignty and justice. This gathering merely strengthened their belief that farmers must retain the ability to choose how they manage their food and agricultural systems, to the lasting benefit of their communities, and the planet as a whole.

These two weeks marked a defining moment for Ali in many ways. “I’ve been to farmers’ gatherings before,” he said, “but the difference this time is that I could actually take notes – I’m

also a graduate of USC’s literacy program in Petaka!” ☺

*By Faris Ahmed,
Director of Canadian Programs*



Photo by Faris Ahmed

Ali Angoiba studies sorghum in Ethiopia

Photo by Courtney Clark



Guillaume Denommée visiting projects in the Rasuwa District of Nepal

There’s a big market in Kathmandu, 150 km away. It offers a place to sell local goods, but “there’s a lot of competition as products from the plains swamp the market,” explains

Lamichhane. Moreover, the rough paths and roads drive up transportation costs. Access to local markets would be best.

Local farmers have proven it’s possible to practice organic agriculture in the area. Kep Chhiring, a local farmer, received training from USC Nepal in 2003. He said that, before USC started working there, few farmers in Rasuwa subsisted on selling vegetables. Now, they have a surplus to sell. Communities are more optimistic for their future.

Community development initiatives can have a real impact – as shown by the growth in popularity of organic agriculture in Rasuwa. But without equal opportunity – access to local markets in this case – communities can have trouble realizing their full potential. USC Nepal is working with other NGOs to establish a network to help farmers showcase and sell their products without having to travel to Kathmandu.

ENGAGING CANADIANS

Two Villages Share a Common Path

Clarenville, about two hours' drive from St. John's, Newfoundland, serves as a centre for many surrounding smaller communities. Throughout the day it's a bustling hub of activity. Most of the 8,000 residents earn a decent living and are happy to help when they see a need, but the issues surrounding global development don't tend to make the local headlines.

Clarenville residents Troy Mitchell, a social worker, and Krista Percy, who works for a local health organization, are no strangers to helping those in need. But while both are involved in local activities, they've turned their eyes to the rest of the world.

Percy and Mitchell see themselves as global citizens, connected to others around the world. They knew that if they could share that understanding

with their community, together they could find a way to promote global development in their own town.

Their idea was to involve Clarenville residents directly in the lives of people half a world away. Through an initiative called *Two Villages*, they called on Clarenville to raise funds for USC's People's Empowerment Program (PEP) in Sindhuli, Nepal.

(See 'Two Villages' on page 8)

Ban Terminator in Canada!

We're calling on Canadians again – this time to demand a ban on Terminator here at home! Terminator (or Genetic Use Restriction Technology) uses genetic engineering to render seeds sterile after first harvest, thus preventing farmers from saving and re-using seed – forcing them to buy from seed companies year after year. This technology has been widely condemned as a threat to farmer livelihoods and agricultural biodiversity.

Last March, your letters stopped the Canadian government from helping end the global moratorium on Terminator. Due to public pressure, our government supported the moratorium, but they never actually stated a position on Terminator. Now we've learned that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is working with industry to pave the road for Terminator!

Demand that the government state its unqualified opposition to Terminator and take immediate steps to legislate a ban on field-testing and commercialization in Canada. Write to your Member of Parliament and the Minister of Agriculture and tell them to support a ban.

We need your voice to make sure terminator never becomes a reality. Keep watching www.usc-canada.org for more information about the ongoing campaign to ban Terminator in Canada. ♪



We Want Your Jottings!

“It must be your conviction that mankind is one, made up of many faces.”

– Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova



Photo by USC Canada

Is Lotta's message relevant today?

As global citizens, we're all responsible for one another. USC's founder, Lotta Hitschmanova, brought that belief to the work we do; a belief that still drives our work. Does that idea inspire you? Tell us!

USC, in collaboration with the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC), has launched a national writing contest for young Canadians, aged 12-20. We'd like to hear your opinion: Is Dr. Lotta's message relevant today?

Youth across Canada are eligible to enter, in either official language. Submissions must be received by noon on March 5, 2007. There are two age categories: 12-15 (max. 750 words) and 16-20 (max 1,500 words). The two winning entrants will get an iPod Shuffle and have their articles published in both USC's and CUC's Newsletters. For full rules visit www.usc-canada.org, write to writingcontest@usc-canada.org, or call 1.800.565.6872.

In a Neighbourhood Near You

Every spring, there are more than 40 **Seedy Saturdays** organized in Canada to celebrate biodiversity. USC will attend many of them to share our commitment to food sovereignty. Join us!

Feb. 10 – Salt Spring Island, BC	Mar. 3 – Ottawa, ON
Feb. 11 (sunday) – Montreal, QC	Mar. 10 – Thunder Bay, ON
Feb. 17 – Victoria, BC	Mar. 10 – Halifax, NS
Feb. 24 – Kingston, ON	Mar. 17 – Toronto, ON
Feb. 24 – Vancouver, BC	Mar. 17 – Lindsay, ON

USC often joins Unitarian congregations across the country for **speaking engagements**, sharing information about our programs. Look for us this spring.

Feb 11 – Salt spring Island Unitarian fellowship (Salt Spring Island, BC)

Feb 12 – First Unitarian Church of Victoria (Victoria, BC)

Feb 18 – The Capital Unitarian Universalist Congregation (Victoria, BC)

Feb 18 – First Unitarian Congregation of Waterloo (Waterloo, ON)

Feb 25 – Kingston Unitarian Fellowship (Kingston, ON)

Mar 4 – Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough (Peterborough, ON)

Mar 11 – Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship (Thunder Bay, ON)

April 1 – Unitarian Congregation of Niagara (St. Catharines, ON)

April 1 – Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa (Ottawa, ON)

Apr 29 – Unitarian Church of Montreal (Montreal, QC)



Photo by Farris Ahmed

USC Staff attend to a display at one of many public events

USC will co-sponsor a **Food Film Festival** in Ottawa in February/March. For details on these events, check our website or contact Kate Green (1.800.565.6872 or KGreen@usc-canada.org).

TWO VILLAGES

(Continued from page 6)

Photo by Two Villages



Krista and Troy got help from Clarenville residents like Morgan and Sophia

The nearest edge of Sindhuli District is a day's drive from Kathmandu, but with poor roads, it can take two days to reach the first village. For years, PEP has addressed many community needs, like food, health care, and clean water.

This year, the people of Sindhuli decided to build a new school for children in the area. The entire community was involved in the decision, so there is a sense of ownership of the project.

The goal of *Two Villages* is much the same – to build a sense of community and find supporters to help the people of Sindhuli build their school. Mitchell says, "Because building a school is such a tangible thing, the people of Clarenville have embraced this project."

In April, all four schools in Clarenville took part in a lunch program to exchange their lunch money for rice. This event raised about \$2,300, but the kids didn't stop there. When middle school students put on a talent show to raise money, it was clear the message was getting around.

And it was more than children helping. At Percy's high school reunion, a former teacher's call for donations raised nearly \$500. Word of mouth spread, and dozens of local businesses and individuals contributed.

With a goal of bringing the total over \$10,000, *Two Villages* held a benefit concert in October. The concert, which featured local performers, was a resounding success, raising more than \$2,600 and bringing the grand total to more than \$10,750.

It's a perfect demonstration of how, with a little effort, we can each have an impact on the lives of our global neighbours. The school construction was successfully completed – a wonderful gift from the people of Clarenville to their friends in Sindhuli: two villages, separated by thousands of miles, but connected by understanding and compassion. ☺

By Ron Cross, Communications Officer



Jottings

A publication of
USC Canada

CONTACT US

Feedback is important to us. Please feel free to contact us with your opinions about *Jottings*, and let us know how we can improve future issues.

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Charity registration No. 11927-6129-RR-0001

USC Canada was founded in 1945 as the
Unitarian Service Committee of Canada

IN MEMORIAM: IDA WEISSE

We at USC Canada are saddened by the loss, at 92 years of age, of one of our greatest supporters: Ms. Ida Weisse of Victoria, BC. Ida was an extraordinary volunteer. Dedicating more than 10,000 hours to USC, she was involved in speaking tours, and served on the USC Board of Directors. Ida was well recognized for her volunteer work, receiving the City of Victoria's Honorary Citizen Award, the USC Canada Volunteer Award, and the Caring Canadian Award. We will all miss this wonderful woman and offer our sincerest sympathies to her family and friends.

Photo by USC Canada



Ida Weisse receiving the USC Canada volunteer award