

**Peace Project for Cultural Support and Strengthening of Sustainable Economies
in a Project for Sustainable Development (PDS), Anapu, Pará, Brazil**

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This project provided a handicrafts training workshop for people living in the Project for Sustainable Development (PDS) Virola-Jatobá, an agrarian reform settlement in the Brazilian Amazon designated as an area of environmental conservation and community forest management practices. It is located 36 kilometers north of the Transamazon highway, in the municipality of Anapu, state of Pará. The 300 families residing in PDS Virola-Jatobá sustain themselves primarily through subsistence farming. Unfortunately, these small-scale farmers and others throughout the region are struggling to maintain their rights to the land in the face of violent illegal land claimers. The purpose of this *Project for Peace* was to strengthen the autonomy of the inhabitants of the PDS by providing an environmentally sustainable alternate source of income to members of the PDS through the workshop, teaching them to process non-timber forest products into hand-made jewelry creations. Additionally, resources were provided to strengthen the capacity of community organizations to support the land rights of farmers in this region.

The 10-day workshop involved twenty-six participants, predominantly women, ranging in age from 13 years old to 65 years old, and their enthusiasm for the project generated the participation of their children and husbands as well. The grant monies were additionally used to buy six sewing machines distributed between PDS Virola-Jatobá and PDS Esperança, both in the Anapu region. Further, the project brought a computer and a small law-library to the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (CPT) in Anapu to help support the local farmers in complex land-rights cases.

This project was conducted over ten weeks from June 2007 - August 2007. My initial weeks in Brazil were spent in the capital city of Belém and in Altamira where I developed contacts with local artisans, hired the two course leaders, researched marketing natural bead jewelry, and purchased materials for the workshop. Although I did not receive any additional funding, organizations such as the *Fundação Viver, Produzir, e Preservar* (FVPP), the women's movement (MFMLMA), the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (CPT), and *Associação Solidária Econômica e Ecológica de Frutas da Amazonia* (ASSEEFA) helped me enormously, providing transportation, food and shelter. Eve Bratman, a Fulbright Scholar in Brazil, provided housing in Altamira and invaluable linguistic, networking, and logistical support.

For five days at the beginning of July 2007, I visited PDS Esperança, where I raised awareness about the workshop. I also spent several days at the CPT office in Anapu, installing the computer and making final preparations for the project. The workshop took place in PDS Virola-Jatobá July 2-11. I worked with the members of the group ("SAFRA") for an additional 5 days after the workshop to oversee the assembly of the processed seeds into necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and other hand-made items. The project was officially "launched" during the 2nd Annual *Romaria da Floresta* (Pilgrimage in the Forest), July 19-22, where the participants in the project displayed and sold their products to the nearly 200 participants in the event, and were interviewed by two film crews working on documentaries about the struggle for land reform in Pará. Subsequently, I spent time developing a distribution network between the PDS, Anapu, Altamira, and Belem. As part of the ongoing activities related to the project, I am seeking locations in the United States to sell the jewelry over the long-term. I am raising consciousness about the PDSs and Brazilian agrarian reform struggles through video and slide-show presentations to the Macalester College community.

This *Project for Peace* was successful in its goal to economically and socially strengthen PDS-Virola-Jatobá, a community significantly affected by poverty and violent conflict, empowering the PDS in its mission of environmental sustainable land reform. I feel that my involvement in the community has made a permanent difference, fostering peace on a local level and becoming a model for community building and the empowerment of women throughout the region.

The jewelry workshop brought women together from all over the PDS and continues to

unite them in working relationships. Prior to the project, there were few opportunities for women to meet, as homesteads are far apart and transportation is almost exclusively by foot. A participant from PDS-Esperança also participated in the workshop course, and there is now strong interest in launching a similar project in her PDS. Additionally, interest in trading and collecting seeds was raised through the project, thereby heightening levels of education and consciousness about creative ways to sustainably harvest and benefit from local natural resources. The mission statement developed in the workshop supports my positive assessment of the project's success, because the participants successfully formed a collaborative (SAFRA):

"We, SAFRA [harvest] Seeds and Handicrafts from Amazonian Forest Resources – Dorothy Stang Women's Group, are committed to working responsibly with the forests' resources. We aim to progress always using seeds and other forest products in a sustainable manner, working collectively for our own well-being. Our workshop serves as an income source, allowing more financial alternatives principally for the women of PDS Virola-Jatobá. Brazilian nun Dorothy Stang (born in the state of Ohio, USA) dedicated her life's work to securing social equality and ecological well-being for us and other rural communities in the Transamazon region of the Brazilian Amazon. We dedicate our production of these natural artisan works to her memory. We hope that as you use these artisan goods, that it is in solidarity with us, symbolizing peace and environmental conservation in Amazonia and for its people."

Although the outcome of the project was a success, many obstacles had to be overcome in the process. From basic difficulties in mastering the delicate technique of fusing holes in the seeds to learning the various steps involved in bead polishing and dying, the development of a running workshop was not an easy process. Perhaps the biggest setback to scheduled events was when the electricity generator broke and the workshop came to a standstill for several days. Differences in individual commitment produced tensions in the group dynamics. With a road in terrible condition and limited sources of transportation, bringing finished jewelry products to sell in the city requires some effort. The members of SAFRA are continuing to refine their skill in producing seed jewelry. They are still working at attaining a stable entry into the marketplace and there is a lack of certainty as to how much income will be produced, although the levels of interest and profitability are very promising. In addition to SAFRA's commitment to pursuing this work in the future, the organizations who helped facilitate this project, especially ASSEFA, will work to ensure the continued success of the artisan workshop.

By undertaking this initiative for community development through income generation in PDS-Virola-Jatobá, the resultant cultural strengthening will be a deterrent for cattle ranchers who customarily harass this vulnerable community. Preliminary conversations with store-owners in the United States and in Altamira have indicated significant openings for marketing these products, pointing to the long-term viability of this initiative. My presence in the community, although only for a limited time, gave members of PDS Virola-Jatobá new hope and encouragement and inspired me with awe in their determination despite overwhelming adversities. The administration of a *Project for Peace* in PDS Virola-Jatobá proved that they are not alone in their struggles and empowered me because I have learned that a grassroots project can make a huge difference.

