



Inter Pares

BULLETIN

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The Future is Now

As Kalissa admits, her story is different than that of the typical farm family. Growing up in rural Saskatchewan, she has seen many farms disappear and never dreamt of becoming a farmer herself.

Like many other farmers, Kalissa's parents encouraged their children to keep their options open, get a university education and leave the farm. Kalissa's older siblings all became engineers and she ended up in British Columbia, first studying horticulture, and later, jazz. It was on campus, and not on the farm, that Kalissa started to really think about food for the first time. As she puts it, "As commercial grain growers, we don't eat what we grow. Farmers are often just as disconnected from their food as others."

Kalissa began thinking about food in terms of the environment and social justice. One afternoon, as she was planting a small garden in her rented backyard, it hit her: she decided to go back home to farm – but not to any kind of farming. For the past ten years, her family's farm was only breaking even and her parents' side business kept them afloat. "I knew they were never going to sell the land because they are too attached to it. We have enough family history here. So my parents ran the farm just for the sake of keeping it going. They farmed in ways that took the least amount of time. This is why they began growing genetically modified crops – it's a huge time saver – you just throw it in the ground and spray it."

When Kalissa came back home, her parents understood that she was serious about farming, but they also understood that she was not interested in farming their way. The environmental and health risks associated with this type of farming, along with the dependence on expensive seeds and chemicals, were important considerations. "My parents were supportive, and still open to learning and experimenting. We struck a partnership and over the course of six years, turned the farm around. It is now a certified organic farm that grows golden flax, red lentils, rye, oats, barley, spring wheat, and hempseed." The soil that had been planted with genetically engineered crops recovered from the application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and today Kalissa's family's farm is ecological, producing healthy and nutritious food, and is profitable. Some neighbours started to take notice and have also begun the transition to organic agriculture.



Kalissa Regier enjoying a day of harvesting in the prairies.

Kalissa's enthusiasm to share her story has taken her far beyond her own community. As the National Farmers Union (NFU) Youth Vice-President, she has travelled across the country, and even to Benin, Mali, and Mozambique, building solidarity with other young farmers who are actively changing the face of farming.

"When speaking to other young farmers it can get pretty depressing. The situation is the same for farmers around the world. We've lost family farms at a huge rate over the past forty years. And when we lose a family farm, it will never be a family farm again – it gets eaten up by huge corporate industrial farms. But with the NFU Youth, the outlook is different; they are very positive about farming." Indeed, at a time when there is increased demand for ecological and local food, this new generation of farmers is breaking away from the bondage of financially and environmentally costly chemicals; they are growing food ecologically, and selling it locally.

For many years, Inter Pares has been a close collaborator of the NFU. The NFU has been a staunch defender of the family farm in Canada and has also been instrumental in building the international family farm and peasant movement *La Via Campesina*, which has become one of the most important movements for social justice in the world. This year marks the NFU's fortieth anniversary. With young people like Kalissa in its ranks, its future is more than promising.

This *Bulletin* features stories of how young people in Peru, in Sudan, in the Philippines, and in Canada are building the future they want, now. ☞

Salmmah: Sudanese Women Challenge Taboos

Once among the most emancipated in the region, Sudanese women have spent the last twenty-six years subject to shariah law, which is based on a conservative interpretation of Islamic principles. Under the guise of religion, Sudan's fundamentalist military regime legitimizes the violation of women's legal rights and civil liberties. Many of these restrictions manifest around controlling women and girls' sexuality: strict dress codes, no penalization of rape and "honour crimes," decriminalization of female genital mutilation, victimization of sexual assault survivors.

The political crackdown that accompanied the 1989 military coup led by current President Omar El-Bashir drove opposition parties, unions, and social movements underground, including the women's movement. Fahima Hashim, director of the Salmmah Women's Resource Centre and an Inter Pares collaborator, explains that "gains made by Sudanese women in the 1960s and the 1970s were reduced considerably."

Since the coup, times have slowly changed. Opposition parties have reassembled and joined Parliament, and the women's movement has resurfaced and is rebuilding its strength. Young people on university campuses are talking about peace, human rights, and sexuality; young women are beginning to voice indignation about the double standards they face because of their gender. For example, universities

are rejecting women for not wearing modest "Islamic uniform"; special guards have even been hired to measure the length of dresses and sleeves, and to assess the thickness of scarves. At the same time, university administrators turn a blind eye to the rampant sexual harassment of women on campus.

As part of a coalition called MOTIVE, Salmmah is launching a campaign promoting policies against sexual harassment on campuses. They are reaching out to the brave female students who are already trying to organize on these issues. Salmmah has met with some of them, and together they will be assessing the best way forward. Given the conservative political and religious climate, this sensitive work is slow and careful in its planning; seasoned activists are all too familiar with government harassment directed at those who publicly defend women's rights. This careful strategy will also create space for Salmmah to adapt to young people's ways of organizing in Sudan – not through traditional means such as conferences and debates, but through music, Internet, and mobile phones. By combining the experience of older activists with the innovation and emerging leadership of young women, Salmmah aims to promote campus environments that respect women's rights, while supporting young women to take their place in the Sudanese women's movement. ❧

Working Together as Equals Across Generations

"Inter Pares," *among equals* in Latin, is not just a name – it's the philosophy that guides our internal and external relationships. Inter Pares is run by a co-management team, in which all full-time staff share equal responsibility for the organization's management and receive equal salaries. It's a non-hierarchical structure that has proven well-suited to welcoming and nurturing younger people's leadership.

Having decided several years ago to hire younger people, nearly half of Inter Pares' co-managers are now under the age of thirty-five. The small team size and high degree of internal collaboration create daily opportunities for younger staff to contribute skills and past experience, to offer views and ideas, and to learn from seasoned colleagues, some of whom have worked at Inter Pares for over twenty years. The generational range helps bring a diversity of experience and perspectives to our programs. This approach is also building our future, recognizing that the future starts now. ❧



Inter Pares staff team, summer 2008.

Likhaan: Taking it to the Streets

The slums of Metro Manila are not easy places for anyone to live. This is true especially for young people, whose yearning for the “good life” they see presented in the media runs up against the grinding poverty in which they live. It is in these neighbourhoods where Inter Pares’ counterpart, Likhaan, has formed a strong and vibrant youth organization known as PiLaKK Youth.

Young people in these communities face diverse and major challenges. Teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), gender-based violence, and teen prostitution are all serious problems, unfolding within a strict Catholic culture, which makes even talking about such issues very difficult. Undeterred by a very conservative political and religious climate, PiLaKK Youth have decided to discuss sexual health in a more public way. They have organized community parades with banners and songs, shouting out for all to hear that these problems can no longer be hidden, and inviting youth to talk about them more openly. Last year, during national debates on a reproductive health bill, the PiLaKK Youth campaign was documented and aired on national television. They also distributed free condoms to side-step store owners, who often report youth to authorities when they buy condoms. Though schools are prohibited from teaching young people about reproductive health, youth

leaders met with secondary school principals to request workshops on the issue. In most cases they were yelled at and told to leave, but in one school they did succeed, and a workshop was provided.

Recognizing the difficulty youth have in getting information on reproductive health, PiLaKK Youth is using information technology to open up a dialogue with their peers. They created a hotline where young people could send anonymous text messages from their mobile phones. Questions about contraception, STIs, and even relationships are answered by youth leaders, in consultation with the medical staff of Likhaan. They have also established a blog where they keep youth up-to-date on issues and campaigns, and where teenagers can read the stories of their peers and enter comments and questions. The use of technology is complemented by community discussions, allowing youth to talk to other youth about the problems they face.

Inter Pares’ long-term support for Likhaan has contributed to the creation of this vibrant youth organization. These strategies required the bold energy of youth to succeed in drawing public attention to sexual health. Attitudes change slowly and the young people of PiLaKK know that, but they are convinced that even small changes have an impact today and will benefit youth tomorrow. ☘

Dig In!

Dig In! is an interactive workshop that explores the concept of food sovereignty. This concept means ensuring food for everyone; building food systems that are controlled locally; and honouring ecosystems and traditional knowledge.

The workshop was developed by youth from across the country including young farmers, urban youth, aboriginal youth, and food activists. Food sovereignty is a lens through which we can better understand the food system and explore how to build stronger connections between people and food, between urban populations and farmers, and create more just food and agriculture policies. The workshop’s goal is to expose participants to this concept and provide them with the knowledge they need to use it as an organizing principle in their work.

The *Dig In!* workshop was created through a collaborative project of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, the youth education network Check Your Head, and the National Farmers Union Youth. If you would like to lead a



Dig In! workshop in your classroom or workplace, or in your community, download the *Dig In!* tool kit available here: www.cban.ca/digin or contact Lucy Sharratt: (613) 241-0147.

Sample delicious footage of a *Dig In!* workshop on YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/DigInCanada

Facilitating Transformative Action in Peru

“Welcome to the weekly broadcast of *Youth Hour*, your radio program informing Huancavelica’s community about human rights, governance and other hot topics.” The launch of *Youth Hour*, a radio program researched and hosted by members of the Network of Facilitators (REDFAH), is now well-known in Huancavelica, a mountainous region of Peru profoundly marked by twenty years of armed conflict. REDFAH was founded in 2004 by a group of young professionals who were among the first participants of the Diploma and Leadership School on Human Rights, Governance, and Democracy offered by a coalition of Inter Pares’ counterparts. As Fanny Cusi, one of REDFAH’s founding members, explained, “We wanted to create a space to continue our reflections sparked by the training and share our new knowledge with other young people.”

The youth of REDFAH are teaching themselves to become facilitators who can guide and support social processes, help resolve difficulties and conflict in communities, and find solutions to foster local development. Their skills are increasingly recognized and valued by local authorities and organizations in Huancavelica. Members of REDFAH have been invited by mayors to help them set up consultation processes required for participatory budgets. Network members working as nurses, teachers, or even engineers are better able to apply a holistic analysis to their work and raise tough questions. Network members are also creating international linkages. One member was part of the Latin America youth delegation to the Organization of American States General Assembly in June 2008 focused on the theme “Youth and Democratic Values.”



Members of REDFAH.



Central square in Huancavelica.

REDFAH has evolved into a mutual learning space, where its members teach each other skills and share knowledge on human rights, participatory budgets, governance, and the local political context. According to REDFAH’s coordinator Ronald Ramos, these subjects “are not taught in school or university but we need to learn about them, to change how things are done, to actually improve peoples’ lives.” The Network is open to all. Current members of REDFAH include students, engineers, nurses, social workers, psychologists, teachers, lawyers, and anthropologists.

Those who decide to join REDFAH sometimes face resistance from their partners, families and friends. When Inter Pares staff member Nadia Faucher met with REDFAH last April, Network member Wilder Esplana explained that his friends and family had been skeptical of his involvement at first. They wanted to know “why I was participating in the Network, why I was spending so much time there, since democracy, human rights, and political participation are not useful subjects – they are worthless.”

REDFAH has become like a family now, and members grow both personally and professionally as they challenge the way things have been done in the past. Together they are creating a peaceful and just society in Huancavelica, Peru. ✂

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With the support of thousands of Canadians, Inter Pares works in Canada and around the world with social change organizations who share the analysis that poverty and injustice are caused by inequities within and among nations, and who are working to promote peace, and social and economic justice in their communities and societies.

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