

## Profugo

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# The Kernel



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## What's Happening @ Profugo?

There's been a hustle and bustle of activity at Profugo—both stateside and at the Center of Development in Wayanad, India. Stateside, we've officially moved into an office, in Ardmore, PA. This has allowed us to bring in several interns and host regular events. The fall series of Café Profugo is being held monthly, so please come out to learn more about international development issues as well as updates on our COD.

One of our interns, Joshua Keeney, is currently with our community in India. He has been settling in well and has been well received by the people there.

He will be on site until mid-November. Please stay tuned for updates on his work.



English Language class in session with Teacher Jessy

The English Language School is progressing well with 34 students and many other interested parties. They meet on Saturdays and Sundays and the children have become proficient conversationalists. We sent them children's books for early readers, so they are enjoying learning and reading from American books!

The Tailoring Workshop has been divided into 2 training sessions to maximize the use of the available sewing machines and to add flexibility to the trainees' schedule. The 6th month of training has commenced and enthusiasm is growing in the community. Sample bags and patterns were sent from the US to share the design concept with Mary, the Trainer. The plan is to train the participants for the local tailoring market as well as create a line of bags that would be exported to the US. After 12 months of training, the successful tailors will be able to participate in a tailoring business. Exciting stuff!

We are exploring opportunities for a Water Project, Community Supported Agriculture, Poultry-farming, and Eco-tourism. Please stay tuned for details on these projects as we move further along. Though we have not rolled out a formal fundraising campaign as of yet, our community does need your financial support. Please consider supporting us! 100% of your gift will fund our COD in Wayanad, India. As always, we're looking for interested parties to become involved with our organization. Please drop us an email at info@profugo.org to express your interest. Keep in touch with us via Twitter, Facebook, or through our website.

~Greetings from one profugo to another!

## Back to the Basics = Food

### **Agro-ecology: Where our stomachs and our heads align**

A wise five-year old once said that everything starts from the ground. The fact that most of our basic necessities come from our soil is a simple but very often ignored truth. This is an ironic phenomenon given that one of the first greatest human inventions was not the computer but agriculture. Food and its source of origin is something most of us take for granted.

Today, as ecological changes become more evident, we are forced to make peace with Mother Nature and ask more of the basic questions: where does our food come from and why is food important? After many years of working against nature, humans are mending the relationship with the earth in hopes of finding a way to fix our past mistakes. Today, out of necessity (or maybe out of desperation), cosmopolitans are called to go back to the basics. For once, our heads and our stomachs align with one interest. We are forced to make informed decisions about the way we grow our food.

Many schools of thought have been involved in the process of rediscovery and reconnection to the land. Among these sciences, I find Agro-ecology to be a suitable model when thinking about development, health and efficiency.

### **What is agro-ecology?**

I met Frances and Rolando this summer in Puerto Rico during my quest to learn about the practicality of such farming techniques. Frances and Rolando is an energetic young couple that decided to use their agricultural science degrees to work in favor of their community. They turned their yard into a community supported vegetable garden. To better their yard's soil and to give nutrition to the crops, they use organic matter such as leaves, grass and homemade organic compost. To prevent undesirable vegetation from growing, they handpick weeds and place palm leaves on cleared spots. They save money by not having to buy chemical fertilizers or herbicides that could harm the soil, the animals and the streams. They also use non-toxic control of pests. Rolando prunes the plants that could attract pests and designed the garden modeling a natural ecosystem. In contrast to industrial agriculture, natural balanced ecosystems

do not get as many pests because there is not an unnaturally high concentration of the same plants in the same place (monocrop). Frances confessed that she has learned more about farming by observing nature's patterns than by spending 4 years at agronomy department. Based on this idea, they designed their garden in close resemblance of the local natural environment.

By following the Agro-ecology model, like Frances and Rolando, we become more conscious of our natural surroundings and the repercussions of our action. In other words, by becoming more conscious of our

***Agro-ecology allows us to become more conscious. It enables us to gather more information to be more efficient in the creation of a sustainable socio-economic development project.***

By following the Agro-ecology model, like Frances and Rolando, we become more conscious of our natural surroundings and the repercussions of our action. In other words, by becoming more conscious of our

natural community, we are able to have more information of the ecological systems and our land. Having more information increases our efficiency in agriculture. One is more effective because one acquires the knowledge necessary to work in harmony with nature instead of working against it. The renowned agricultural scientist Masano Fukuo-ka once wrote, "Observe Nature thoroughly rather than labor thoughtlessly".

### **How can agro-ecology be implemented?**

Small to medium agricultural production units should be part of the up-and-coming economic development plans. This is because communities have access to better foods, save money and earn income. Community-owned gardens are a great development project that is economically and environmentally sustainable. Permaculture is one of the many techniques of agro-ecology used to design such garden. Named after permanent agriculture, Permaculture looks to mimic "natural" ecosystem to grow products for human consumption. The idea is to work the land in cooperation and harmony with nature instead of working against it.

There are other technical approaches to Agro-ecology. Nevertheless, all share an intention to diminish the waste and the energy input. It also aims to protect the land from degradation by avoiding chemical pesticides and monocrops.

As we seek to become better global neighbors, we are starting to understand what it means to be responsible producers and consumers. We can do so with agro-ecology. Agro-ecology helps us to create effective, sustainable and fair sources of production by teaching us how to work within the natural system instead of forcing a natural system to adapt to our needs. Agro-ecology provides an efficient model for individuals to maintain a healthy land that sustains a healthy community.

*Isel Otero-Vera is an intern at Profugo and a current undergraduate senior at Bryn Mawr College pursuing a political science bachelors degree. Her passions for music, language, and culture inspire her to travel to india where she hopes to work with economic development and women empowerment."*



### What is Clean Water Worth?

By Joshua Keeney

Where I grew up it was not uncommon to see the construction equipment of a new well break the otherwise nature filled skyline. Upon returning home for the day every so often a new skinny cell tower like structure would force its way above the pine and oak trees that dominated the view. These new towers were accompanied by a slow 'clank-thud, clank-thud, clank-thud' echo. The sound of metal hitting ground is distinctive of the new borehole dig.

In a region where oil is a dominant force of the economy, this usually means a new oil well. However, a different type of well may soon become the choice of those looking to make a long-term profit. Many forward looking individuals and groups are already preparing for the day when gas prices will not be nearly as troubling to us as the price of water.

Those who are in charge of the water systems of major cities worldwide already see this clearly. These cities—the United States is not immune—are looking for new and expanding sources for potable water. However, their searches are not returning promising results. Local water sources are often already being used at capacity of smaller towns, other large cities, irrigation of agricultural crops, or are simply unusable due to pollution or natural problems (cleaning salt out of salt water is very expensive, as is various other natural unhealthy substances). The forerunners of the current forward looking people themselves predicted a day when we would pay more for a gallon of water than a gallon of fuel and some quick math of name brand bottled water proves this true. However, the prophecy is not yet completely fulfilled as the US still sees cheap tap water. With the US dollar weakening, the demand for potable water rising in both the US and internationally, and clean, usable supply sources becoming fewer and fewer, even a cursory understanding of the economics of supply and demand show that the price for water will be on the rise.

While this is very concerning to us on a personal level, we need to also remember our neighbors who are less well off than ourselves. In many places in the world, potable water is already an issue. Getting 'clean' water can take hours a day for a family member, as they must travel to and from a community well. And I emphasize clean because clean for these communities is often far from acceptable to many in developed countries and regions.

By having easily accessible water sources, individuals gain time, sometimes hours, to their days; usually this time is received by the women. This time can be used by getting a job and earning a wage independent of the man, it can be used talking and organ-



izing with other women who would also be blessed with more time - having discussions about jobs, joint ventures, community development, or women's rights in the community. Any one of these discussions can lead to steps that will not only put their families on more solid economic standing, but also assist the community as a whole, and build the rights and privileges of the individual women. Access to clean water would add value to their lives.

Water related issues cause more deaths than anything else in developing communities. From dysentery to water-born illnesses, clean water could make the difference between a full life and a life that ended too soon for our neighbors. Access to clean water would make a marked difference in the health of individuals and families.

This is why we hear so much about water projects in developing nations. Clean water can add years of life, it can add vitality and health to those years, it can add equality to those years, and it can add more financial resources to those years. Next time we turn on the faucet, let's not take our water for granted. What is clean water worth to you?

*Joshua Keeney is an intern at Profugo and finishing up his M.A. in International Development at Eastern University. He is doing his field placement at Profugo's Center of Development in Wayanad, India. He will be 1) connecting with the community, 2) conducting preliminary study for potential water and CSA projects, 3) guest teaching at Profugo's English Language School, and 4) checking in on the Tailoring Workshop. On top of the above projects, Joshua will also be documenting the area and community members on film. He will have a busy month!*



## Heal the Soil: An Introduction

By Andres Umana

"One Seed At A Time, One House At A Time" is the motto for the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprise, Heal the Soil, a back-to-basics agricultural initiative, which is the focus of this article. Heal the Soil operates in the Kottakarai village in Tamilnadu, India, but counts on an extensive network of collaborators and volunteers around the globe who host programs and raise awareness for their permaculture programs.

"With the help of organic farming experts, community leaders and volunteers, we help start-up small vegetable gardens in village homes, provide seeds and permaculture training to local people which enables them to grow their own organic vegetables and fruits in their own premises." <http://www.healthesoilcsa.org/about-us.html>

Permaculture stands for permanent agriculture, but with a number of interesting, and very unique twists. First, permaculture avoids monoculture planting, making it easier to control pests without the input of agrochemicals, relieving rural farmers from unaffordable expenses and avoiding long term damage to their land. Secondly, it turns trash from a liability into a valuable resource by reintroducing organic waste and gray water into natural cycles that fertilize the land and feed the crops. Finally, it is designed under a collective scheme, where small vegetable gardens are shared by villagers, providing food for locals, and at the same time producing enough surplus to sell in farmers' markets and nearby cities.



The concept is revolutionary (although traditional organic agriculture has been around for millennia), Heal the Soil innovates with its open-source philosophy, simplicity and broad empowerment of communities. One of the goals at Heal the Soul is to share and spread their successful traditional farming know-how with potential communities around the world. They do not expect government hand outs, private enterprise sponsorship nor NGOs to hold their hands. They are ready to pull up their sleeves, get their hands dirty and get to work. Self-reliance goes hand in hand with the idea of sustainable landscapes, productive spaces that closely mirror natural ecosystem, zero-waste, and healthy living.

Heal the Soil invites everyone around the world to learn and share in their success. To heal our impoverished and isolated rural communities, the land they depend on must be rest- waste approach that nature has given us. Being a creative commons initiative, Heal the Soil's invitation is to share and learn together by adopting, improvising and implementing similar concepts in each one of our communities.

*Andres Umana is a Biologist and Financial Specialist with a Masters in Environmental Management. He is a Socio-Ecological Identity researcher and advocate for community resilience through sustainable agriculture, water management and adaptive governance.*

## Upcoming Events & News

### **November 19, 2011, 2-4pm — Café Profugo, 9 Rittenhouse Place, Ardmore, PA**

Christine Koggel, Philosophy Department Chair from Bryn Mawr College, will give an informal lecture on ethical issues in development and how development empowers women. Refreshments will be served. Please join us!

### **Tailoring Workshop Update**

Profugo friend Kami Olmstead created 3 sample bags that were sent to Profugo's Tailoring Workshop in Wayanad.

These will serve as models for the bags that the tailors-in-training will be sewing for sales in the US. *Thank you, Kami!* 🍷