

FISH THAT CREATE LIFE IN PUTUMAYO

Tired of the conflicts caused by coca production in Putumayo, a group of 12 farmers got together on February 1999 to turn their lives around. In a desire to make a legitimate living and earn their own money that would allow them to sustain their families, they decided to focus on the region's most important and productive activity: the breeding and raising of *cachama*, a fresh water fish. This is how they formed the Valle del Guamuez Fish Farming's Association (*Asopez* for its acronym in Spanish).

With the support of the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID) these small farmers' dreams came true. They received contributions for training, equipment for their facilities and channel resources to promote fish farming. The project began in the regions of San Miguel, Valle del Guamuéz, Orito and Puerto Asís (south of the Putumayo department), benefiting the families of 181 small farmers.

The impact on *Asopez* was significant. The group was able to organize their accounting and management. The support also provided spaces for communication and exchange of ideas among the beneficiaries. There was more attention given to human development, conflict management and self-motivation. Thanks to this support, *Asopez* evolved as an organization and managed to increase their patrimony, including their own site with two commercial spaces, an office and a warehouse. The latter includes a large freezer and machinery to develop a business plan currently underway.



An *Asopez* fish farmer collects his nets with *cachama*.

U.S. SUPPORT

Since 2000, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has been developing the Alternative Development Program to provide social and economic alternatives to the production of illicit drugs. To accomplish this, three types of activities are being carried out: the development of productive projects, the strengthening of local governments and the productive infrastructure and protection of natural resources.

Between 2003 and 2007 this program received almost \$60 million a year and in 2008 it skyrocketed to \$118 million.

Among the initiatives developed under this program is the strengthening and technical development of fish farming in the regions of San Miguel, Valle del Guamuéz, Orito and Puerto Asís in Putumayo. The program runs from April 2008 to December 2009.

The United States contributed \$914,797 to improve the living conditions of these small fish farmers, by upgrading their production system and promoting efficiency in the chain of production.

RESULTS

Improvement of 181 productive fish farming units

Creation of 336 acres of crops for the production of animal feed

Signing of 181 agreements to give up illicit crops

Strengthening a fish farmings' organization

Technical support to 181 fish farmers

Creation of 72 new jobs.

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LINO ARNULFO DAVID DÍAZ: FISHING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

At 19, Lino Arnulfo David Diaz left behind his hometown of Policarpa, a small town north of the Nariño department, with his brother and parents, in search of better options and a better life. In 1996 they reached La Hormiga, Valle del Guamuez in Putumayo, after hearing rumors of a land of opportunities thanks to increased mining and oil activities. To survive they resorted to the one activity that back then was the main source of income for most inhabitants in the region: *raspachin* (coca-leaf scraper). That was when Putumayo was the leading region in growing coca plant for drug production.

Both Lino and his brother would collect around 147 kilos of coca leaves a day, when the daily average in the area was 367 kilos. Their low yield caused them a lot of trouble with the coca-farm owners, and they were unable to make enough money to sustain their family. “We were so bad collecting coca leaves, we were continuously fired from our jobs” said Lino.

In 2005 Lino met one of *Asopez* founding partners and decided to become a fish farmer. He built a small pond but his lack of financial resources restricted his production to self-consumption. Other fish farmers were experiencing the same situation.

To overcome this obstacle, they got together and contacted USAID's technical team for alternative development in Putumayo.

Thanks to USAID's help, *Asopez* improved their local capacity, promoted



Lino Diaz and other *Asopez* members collect cachamas from their fishing nets.

projects before the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (Incodor), the Colombian Oil Company ECOPETROL and the Putumayo Governor's Office. It has also led initiatives with the presidency's Program for Social Action and International Cooperation (*Acción Social*), *Corpoamazonia* and the Department's Secretary of Agriculture.

Since then, the association has expanded from 12 to 102 associate fish farmers benefiting nearly 300 fish farming families. All by means of social investment projects between *Asopez* and other organizations in the area.

Lino is a major figure in these changes. He has not only received benefits as a partner, but his family has also improved its living conditions. Raising *cachama* has allowed Lino to increase his income and he now earns over five million pesos per year, when in the past he barely made two million. “We're going to try another harvest and if it works out, we will expand our pond and even my brother may give it a shot and go for his own pond...” says Lino proudly.



“The fish farm project gave us an opportunity to make our own living. We still have to think about selling them. But at least we've already started. We've been trained and they've accompanied us all through the production cycle...” explains Lino.