



# Sowing Seeds of Change

## What Is "Right Sharing of World Resources"?

by Johan Maurer

*A new well for Canton del Niño, El Salvador*  
Photo Miguel Figuerola

- Graduates of Hlekweni, a Friends vocational training center in Zimbabwe, seek seed money for their metalworking shop which will provide employment for them and equipment and furniture for their rural area.
- In the mountains of Luzon, the Philippines, a community which has few sources of livelihood needs money to expand a new activity — growing commercial quality mushrooms — for which a community member has received training at a tribal academy.
- A village of displaced people in El Salvador has no well; they walk four miles or pay a day's wages for water, though it flows only two hundred feet away... straight down through volcanic rock. For less than \$6,000 they can get a well plus storage tanks, delivery pipes — and the experience of organizing and running their own utility.
- Villagers near the south India

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temple city of Madurai organize dairy and poultry cooperatives. They need seed money to start revolving loan funds so that very poor people can acquire these animals, take care of them, improve family nutrition, learn organizing skills and civic rights, earn income ... and pay back their loans so that others can benefit as well.

In all of these cases, the need was met through Friends all over North America who contribute to the Friends World Committee for Consultation's Right Sharing of World Resources program. Right Sharing of World Resources began twenty-two years ago at the Fourth Friends World Conference in Greensboro, North Carolina, with an invitation to Friends to give 1% more of their income to the Two-thirds World poor, and a challenge to governments to do the same. Right Sharing money was to go as directly as possible into the hands of poor people through self-help programs managed by the beneficiaries themselves. The seed grants provided by Right Sharing, \$5,000 or less per year, are combined with local re-

sources and initiative to make possible new ways of earning income, learning skills, and organizing for self-determination.

Over the years, Right Sharing has had its share of successes and troubles. Comparatively few took up the challenge of giving one percent, and for some years income stayed at a plateau of around \$25-30,000. In 1980, after almost being laid down, Right Sharing was reorganized as a program committee directly under FWCC Section of the Americas, with a set of goals to promote development education and advocacy as well as project support. From 1985 to 1987, income doubled from about \$40,000 to over \$80,000 — the 1989 goal is \$90,000. Over the years, annual project budgets (aside from administration, education, salary) has ranged from as low as \$6,500 to as high as the current year's \$64,000.

Aside from income, RSWR faces a variety of challenges. When does our assistance really help empower poor people, and when does it just fund development careerists or keep the peace in a place of pervasive exploitation? How do we respond to organizations' needs for help in developing their human resources and administration when effective fund-

raising seems to demand packaging work into discrete "projects"? Do we spend more on follow-up and evaluation of past work, or put the money into new projects and simply hope they do well? The projects themselves, of course, are not guaranteed to succeed — and in one case at least, in spite of our safeguards, a project turned out to be an outright fraud.

On the positive side, Right Sharing was an early source of support for Partnership for Productivity and Habitat for Humanity, for work in Africa in both cases. In more recent years, grants have normally been made directly to community groups or their umbrella organizations in the project location. In the examples above, the Luzon mushroom growers were assisted through the Philippine Association for Intercultural Development, and two groups, the People's Service Society and Build Rural India, worked with the cooperatives near Madurai.

Among the legends of Right Sharing history is the very special relationship we have had with T. Gopal, a remarkable development worker in South India and the president of the People's Service Society. In addition to the work of T. Gopal and his co-workers in their own area, they have freely shared what they have learned with many other village development groups and have provided wonderful hospitality to a stream of Quaker visitors.

Another rewarding relationship was with the Zabaleen scavenger community of Cairo, Egypt. A revolving loan fund set up with a matching grant of \$500 in cooperation with Cairo Friends raised the community's visibility to the point where the U.S. government offered a grant of \$5 million. Friend Carol Reilley Uner, a prime mover in the Cairo project, also introduced Friends World Committee to the Badda Women Self-Help Cooperative in Dhaka, Bangladesh. (*Quaker Life* readers met the Badda Women through Carol's article, "Lazarus at Our Gates," in the May 1986 issue.)

The emphasis has been on reaching out to the wider world beyond Friends, but occasionally Right Sharing cooperates with International Quaker Aid, FWCC's channel for

Quaker-to-Quaker assistance, to help a Quaker development project. Currently, Right Sharing funds are helping the Agricultural Committee of the National Evangelical Friends Church in Peru and the vocational training project of the Ciudad Victoria Friends Church in Mexico.

The 110 groups which have worked with Right Sharing at one time or another since 1974 have found this Quaker program through a variety of ways. Traveling Friends have referred many worthy efforts to FWCC for consideration. For example, the community in El Salvador which needed a well was referred by Miguel Figuerola of the Monteverde Meeting, Costa Rica. The American Friends Service Committee, Quaker Peace and Service and other organizations have referred groups whose projects did not meet their guidelines. Other groups have heard about Right Sharing through word-of-mouth, or, less frequently, from directories listing FWCC as an international organization. If the relationship does not start with a visit, then Right Sharing works hard to find a visitor, a requirement before any money is sent.

The reports which these partner groups send — not just listing how the money is used, but explaining the daily realities which affect their work — are the raw materials for Right Sharing's educational work. As much of this reporting as possible is printed in *Right Sharing News*, sent to all Friends meetings and churches in North America and about 3,000 individuals. Other education takes place through conferences, visits to local and yearly meetings, Right Sharing study tours (so far, to Guatemala and Jamaica), and bibliographies for church libraries.

FWCC has assigned one staff person half-time to the Right Sharing program. Obviously, this level of activity would not be possible without many volunteers, especially the Right Sharing of World Resources Committee of FWCC. The committee currently includes Anke Bakker (New England YM), Margaret Willits (Pacific), Kimberly McGee (Central Alaska), Nancy McIntyre (Baltimore), Patricia Edwards (Wilmington), Sally Miller (New York), Del Coppinger (Iowa FUM), and Eliza-

beth Moen (Intermountain); the clerk is Jane Laessle of South Central YM. Another factor which multiplies Right Sharing's own resources is the cooperative relationships we have with other Friends organizations (particularly with our counterpart in the British Isles, the Committee on Sharing World Resources of Quaker Peace and Service) and such non-Quaker groups as the International Development Exchange of San Francisco. Several yearly meetings have their own Right Sharing Committees, including Baltimore, New York and Philadelphia.

What makes Right Sharing worth keeping when so many larger groups are doing seemingly similar work? One answer lies in the high priority of RSWR's first goal: *to clarify and express the religious basis for the Right Sharing of World Resources*. Providing channels for Friends to go beyond checkbook charity to building community with poor people implies encouraging a spiritual discipline. The Bible seems to come alive as Friends learn more about economic justice and injustice at the level of individual human beings.

This priority of spiritual identification over secular values and ideological dogma means that RSWR grants, small as they are, come without strings attached. This is the second special quality of Right Sharing. The money is made available, not because some political agenda is being tested, but because Friends cared enough to give to little groups and communities they have never met.

Right Sharing wants to see well-thought-out proposals and comments from financially disinterested visitors, but the relationship is built on human communication rather than forms and audits — and ultimately rests on Right Sharing's willingness to trust the wisdom, experience and initiative of those most closely invested in the project.

Many thanks to the supporters and contributors of Right Sharing, who persist in thinking that in this age of bigger-is-better, there is a place for a human-scale outreach to economically poor people who need just a boost to try out their own ideas in the service of their own survival. Q