

Listener as Producer

Minga Peru's Intercultural Radio Educative Project in the Peruvian Amazon



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Social Justice Dialogue and Publication Series
Sam Donaldson Center for Communication Studies



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Other publications on the Minga Peru Project available from the Donaldson Center:

Arvind Singhal and Elizabeth Rattine-Flaherty, Pencils and Photos as Tools of Communicative Research and Praxis: Analyzing Minga Peru's Quest for Social Justice in the Amazon.

Arvind Singhal and Lucia Dura, Listening and Healing in the Peruvian Amazon: An Assessment of Minga Peru's Intercultural Radio

Educative Project to Prevent and Control Domestic Violence and HIV/AIDS.

Executive Summaryⁱ

In the past few years, nearly ten riverine communities in the Peruvian Amazon, spurred by their own initiative and with help from Minga Perú, a non-governmental organization, have established loudspeakers to amplify their favorite radio broadcasts.ⁱⁱ In April, 2008, when we alighted from the speedboat to enter one of these communities, called San Francisco, we could hear announcements on the loudspeaker echoing all the way to the Marañon Riverⁱⁱⁱ.



The community loudspeaker in San Francisco to amplify radio

broadcasts and more

A community member noted: “Before the loudspeaker we used to call for peoples’ attention by blowing into bottles, and before that we used animal horns. Today, we use the loudspeaker to call town meetings, gatherings of the *madres artesanas* (artisan mothers), or to remind people that it is time to feed their buffaloes.”

In communities outside of San Francisco that have installed loudspeakers, we learned that the loudspeaker is also used to extend school-based lessons about HIV/AIDS and family violence to everyone in the community. A teacher in one of the communities noted: “Through the loudspeaker, we are addressing sexuality issues and in our schools. Each grade has a loudspeaker-based broadcast program. The third grade broadcasts its program on the loudspeaker on Mondays at 5 p.m. It is called ‘Student Sunset: The Voice of the Marañon River’.”

Commenting on these home-brewed, community-centered broadcast experiments that use the most basic amplification technology, the loudspeaker, Eliana Elías, the executive director of Minga Perú, noted: “Previously, communities earned credibility through the construction of schools and roads, but now a community also gains visibility and credibility through media consumption and production. When people can listen to their voices, they begin to realize that everyone has the right to listen and to be heard. By hearing themselves in public, their way of speaking is legitimized.”^{iv}

In 2008, the Minga team is highly pleased with these new community-engendered discourses in the Peruvian Amazon, and she should be. Ten years previously, in 1998, Elías, a graduate of the department of social communication from the University of Lima, and her husband, Luis González, an Argentinean social worker who has worked in the Amazonas for over 15 years, established Minga Perú. Its objective: to improve the lives of people living in the Peruvian Amazon -- one of the poorest, most inaccessible, and most neglected regions in Perú.^v “Minga” in the local language means “collaborative community work,” and Minga’s interventions, from day one, have been consciously guided by a culturally-respectful, participatory communication framework (Table 1).

Table 1. Minga Perú’s Theoretical Framework

Principles Underlying Culturally-Respectful Participatory Communication Framework
<u>Listeners</u> as producers
<u>Process</u> of dialogue and democratic participation
<u>Long-term</u> process of sustainable change
<u>Collective</u> empowerment and decision-making
<u>With</u> community’s involvement
<u>Specific</u> in content, language, and culture
<u>Consciousness</u> raising and critical action

The purpose of the present chapter is to analyze how Minga’s participatory communication framework promotes the practice of interculturality through on-air and on-the-ground programs in the Peruvian Amazon. First, we provide a background on Minga’s Intercultural Radio Educative Project as well as on our methodology and data-collection procedures. We then examine, in detail, the practice of interculturality in the production of *Bienvenida Salud* (Welcome Health), Minga’s popular radio program in the Amazon, highlighting its unique listener-as-producer characteristics. Finally, we present our findings by privileging the voices of the principal actors of the Intercultural Radio Educative Project—students’, teachers’, and community members’ in the Peruvian Amazon.

Minga’s Intercultural Programmatic Interventions

From Minga’s organizational experience, intercultural communication for social change is a dynamic and creative process through which different actors contribute from their own cultural contexts to the creation of contents and meanings that give way to a new social discourse. This creative process is based on respect for local

culture and a positive recognition of the diversity with-in the Peruvian Amazon in order to promote human rights through communication.

In a society such as the Peruvian Amazon that has suffered and continues to suffer from multiple forms of discrimination, the first challenge in getting people from different cultures to participate has been to get them to recognize and value their own cultural knowledge and thus to consider it important to share it publicly and disseminate it widely. Minga aims do this through a combination of programmatic activities in the Peruvian Amazon. These include the production and broadcast of *Bienvenida Salud*; the training of a cadre of community *promotoras* (promoters) who organize group listening sessions around *Bienvenida Salud*, and serve as local leaders for Minga's various health and community development activities; and on-the-ground, environmentally-sustainable, income-generating activities through the establishment of fish farms, agro-forestry enterprises, small animal husbandry projects, as well as training in crocheting, and sewing to meet local needs.

The Intercultural Radio Educative Project

With funding from the UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women administered by UNIFEM, in 2007,^{vi} some 174 school teachers^{vii} in 24 rural schools in the Peruvian Amazon were trained by Minga Perú to integrate issues of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS in the secondary school curriculum, building on the cultural understanding of health in the region. So, the training exercises were designed to make the teachers think about *cutipa* (damage) and *icara* (the solution to repair the damage).^{viii} Teachers discussed among themselves the possible causes of *cutipa*, including its manifestations as HIV/AIDS and domestic violence, as well as alternatives and solutions to take care of the body, family, community, and the environment.

Building on these discussions, the participating teachers developed educative projects to be integrated in 10 subject areas of the school curricula, covering students in all five secondary grades.^{ix} These teachers, in their regular classes, systematically broached the topics of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS through a revamped school curriculum, reaching 283 primary school students and 4,254 secondary

school students. Minga also distributed relevant educational material on domestic violence and HIV/AIDS to teachers, including a CD of several episodes of *Bienvenida Salud*, which they could play in classes or in their communities.



Radio correspondents undergoing training in writing letters to the radio program

These ground-based, year-round educational efforts in rural schools were complemented with Minga’s popular on-air, intercultural radio educative program, *Bienvenida Salud*. Further, along with their teachers and Minga’s cadre of community-based *promotoras* several students in each participating school were trained as radio correspondents, in-charge of encouraging youth in their respective communities to listen to *Bienvenida Salud* and then provide feedback, including proposing new subjects for inclusion and treatment on the radio program. Presentations were also made to parents of students on domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, and community health issues in several participating schools. Through combined efforts, the programmatic intervention reached an estimated 3,600 families in the Peruvian Amazon.

Other key elements of the programmatic intervention included

- (1) designing a database to code and categorize letters sent by listeners, especially on the topic of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS, received in response to *Bienvenida Salud*, and the operationalization of a systematic methodology to select and analyze these letters to shape future scripts of the radio program,
- (2) expanding the audience reach for *Bienvenida Salud* by adding another new radio station to the broadcast footprint, supplementing the broadcasts on *La Voz de la Selva* (The Voice of the Jungle) and six additional radio stations in the region, and
- (3) announcing several contests – with attractive prizes – to promote the listening of *Bienvenida Salud*, including holding of raffles of radios, batteries, t-shirts, caps, and other mementos to sustain buzz about the program in riverine communities.

Method and Data Collection

In mid-April 2008 we spent a week in Perú collecting both primary and secondary data in Lima, Iquitos, and in the Amazonia on the impact of the curricular integration of HIV/AIDS and violence prevention in schools and riverine communities, as well as analyzing the treatment of these topics on *Bienvenida Salud*.

Our primary data collection activities included *six* focus group discussions, comprising a total of 57 participants, and *four* in-depth interviews. In addition to the primary data we collected, Minga provided us with reams of secondary and archival data sources on the UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women project. Most of this data was coded, categorized, and analyzed by Minga based on their ongoing feedback and reporting needs.

Bienvenida Salud and the Practice of Interculturality

Bienvenida Salud is a half-hour radio program broadcast three times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) at 5:30 a.m. – the time

when people are waking up in the Amazonas, and then repeated the same days in the evening. *Bienvenida Salud* is purposely designed to both entertain and educate to increase audience members' knowledge about reproductive health, sexual rights, and gender equality, creating favorable attitudes, shifting social norms, and changing overt behavior.^x By mid-2008, Minga Perú had broadcast over 1,100 episodes of *Bienvenida Salud*, earning audience ratings of about 40 to between 45 to 50 percent among radio-owning households in the rural area of the Loreto Region. Each show is taped and sent to local stations for rebroadcast. Tapes are also given to local school teachers as well as Minga Perú's community *promotoras* to play on audio-cassettes.



A poster promoting *Bienvenida Salud!*

Bienvenida Salud stories are based on real-life events, and sent to Minga by audience members as cards, hand-sewn letters, or even painted on bark with vegetable and natural colors used as ink. To encourage audience feedback and formative inputs to designing *Bienvenida Salud*, Minga has made arrangements with boat companies to ferry listeners' letters from the interior of the Amazon jungle to Iquitos City, where the headquarters of Minga is located. Letter-writers

do not pay for this “postal” service; Minga pays a small fee for each letter that is delivered. In encouraging listeners to write letters, Minga not only receives feedback on its radio programs, but uses these letters (as we detail later) to design its scripts for new programs. In this way, Minga views its listeners not as passive consumers of the program but rather as active producers.

Topics of health, violence, equality, and rights in general, are of great interest for the overall rural population. This is evidenced by the growing number of listeners and the more than 10,000 letters they have sent—an interest that has grown over time. During the initial phase of program transmission, people thought that only “experts” or “professionals” were qualified to speak about these topics. Experts were considered to be those who possessed scientific knowledge (Western), were academically trained, or knew how to speak because they had always been the ones to speak. For this reason, the language used in *Bienvenida Salud* is simple; technical terms are avoided.^{xi}

Another way the Minga team encourages participation is by telling listeners to write letters and not be afraid of making grammatical mistakes, crossing out words, or getting dirt on the paper. It is important that they know and believe that there is not just one way to write or a perfect way to speak, but rather, that it is much more valuable to share one’s knowledge and to enrich others. Minga emphasizes that these erroneous criteria should not get in the way of more than 120,000 listeners knowing what different Amazonian cultures know and experience with regard to caring for the body, the healing process, and the importance of a sense of community or relationship to the rainforest. These are the aspects of peoples’ lives that enable a fuller exercise of rights and compose part of the richness of cultural diversity of the region and country, and they are made possible through intercultural communication.

Thus, from the organization’s inception to date, Minga has worked extensively and in-depth on the development of the social imagination to instill in the minds of people the value of their ancestral knowledge and their personal and communal experiences as sources of wisdom—a wisdom that deserves, and has the right, to be shared publicly for the generation of knowledge.

While it may be obvious that the lack of habitual practice or difficulty in writing, the lack of resources, and the physical distance of the rural communities are obstacles to public dialogue and participation, an even greater obstacle is self-imposed restriction. It is precisely for this reason that Minga focuses on emotional and psychological dimensions in order to create an “emotional climate” in which listeners feel welcomed and that their knowledge is valued. With time, participation of listeners from diverse cultural backgrounds has become increasingly active and open as is evidenced in letters, interviews, and scripts developed by correspondents, and more recently, in radio programs produced by students in communities where there are loudspeakers.

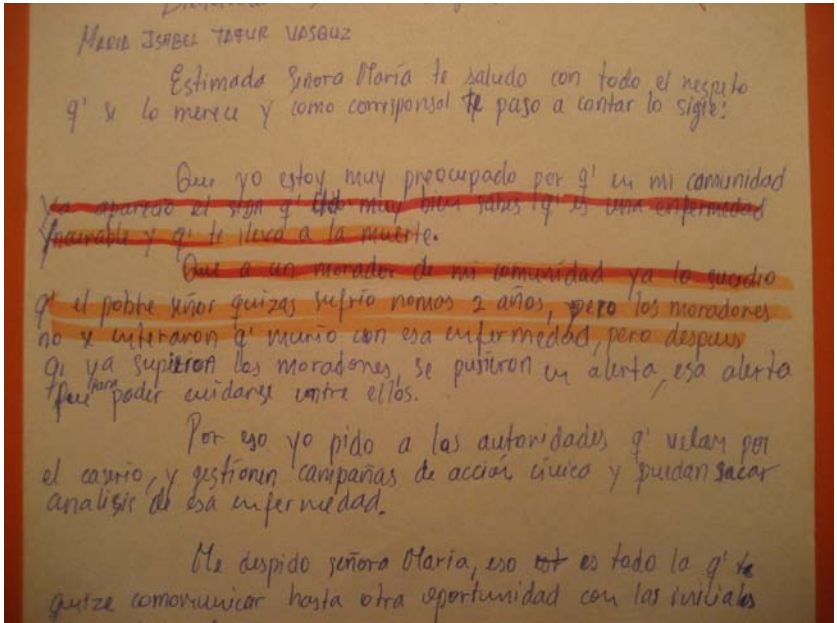
Listeners as Producers of the Intercultural Educative Radio Program

During the UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women –supported project from January 2006 to March 2008, Minga Perú broadcast 140 episodes of *Bienvenida Salud*, averaging 12 new episodes per month. Nearly half of these 140 episodes purposely (and thematically) focused on HIV/AIDS, sexuality, and reproductive health, and the other half emphasized issues of domestic and community violence.

As emphasized previously, Minga works with a deep understanding of the Amazonia culture, and hence *Bienvenida Salud* stays away from a prescriptive “do this” tone; rather it strives to be respectful of people’s world views and working within that cosmovision to make issues relevant. Thus, for Minga, it is important that each episode of *Bienvenida Salud* is produced with direct listener input.

How do the listeners contribute to the scripting process for *Bienvenida Salud*? Listener letters, for the most part, arrive in Minga’s Iquitos office by ferries and in part through visits of *promotoras*, radio correspondents, or community members. The letters are collated at the Iquitos office and sent to Rafael Vallejos in Lima, who manages the letters database and catalogues and codes each letter on several pre-established themes, such as HIV/AIDS or domestic violence. Rafael scours and analyzes the letters for nuggets and insights, forwarding them to the production team in Iquitos on a regular basis for the

scripting process. Before being recorded, scripts are reviewed by Minga's executive director and the Iquitos-based regional director, and when necessary, local experts or subject matter specialists are brought on board.



Each letter is carefully read, catalogued, and screened for possible inputs to the radio scripts.

In essence, Minga has instituted an information-based system of managing feedback, feed-forward, and culturally-resonant content development for *Bienvenida Salud*. By systematically analyzing audience letters, Minga can identify unfulfilled informational needs and gaps and accordingly provide timely information about service delivery, in particular to women and young girls and boys, who are often marginalized from such discourses. So, if a listener letter, for instance, suggests that there may be suspected cases of HIV in a particular riverine community, Minga would provide information about voluntary testing and counseling services on *Bienvenida Salud*, pro-actively address the issue of stigma and discrimination, and also put the community in contact with the regional coordinator of Sanitary Strategy of Prevention and Control of STD and HIV/AIDS so they can obtain governmental support services.

The process of cataloguing, transcribing, and distilling each audience letter deserves more detailed description. When Rafael codes and transcribes letters, he also analyzes them for possibilities to shape a future script outline. Structurally, a script outline consists of an overarching topic, an objective, transcripts of relevant letters, editorial comments about the letters, and suggestions for resources (such as local expert interviews) for a particular episode of *Bienvenida Salud*. Once the letters and outline is entered into a database in Lima, Rafael sends the outline back to Iquitos via e-mail where the Minga radio production team, led by Emira Montes who was once a listener and became a *promotora*, fleshes out the script, dramatizes the issue with narration or dialogue, and after a few iterative rounds of consultation and finessing, finalizes the program for airing.

Managing the Listener-as-Producer Communication Circuit

Here we describe this “listener-as-producer” communication circuit in detail for *two* episodes of *Bienvenida Salud* that dealt with issues of HIV/AIDS and domestic violence.

Episode #1130 of *Bienvenida Salud* focused on institutions and organizations that offer resources for HIV/AIDS prevention and intervention. The program objective was driven by listeners like Ednita Vega, a *promotora* from a town in the basin of the Ucayali river.

...this sickness has already taken over my village and that's why I had meetings often with my network of women, so that we could talk about these illnesses and the deaths we are seeing...the majority of [the women in my network] are young and single mothers so I talk to them about the conversations we have had in the trainings of Minga Perú...

After cataloguing the letter, Rafael commented that Ednita is very concerned about the spread of HIV/AIDS in her town and highlights the fact that it affects young women between 18 and 20 years of age – on whom the future of Perú depends. He also cited the need for partnerships with other community organizations that can

help with HIV/AIDS education, prevention, and treatment. The ensuing script then read:

Rosita: There's a time for everything, like studying, working, and watch out....there is no sense in being mischievous by you know, having sexual intercourse at an early age because we run a big risk of getting or transmitting an STI or HIV if we're not careful.

Emira: That's right doñita, you know today we'll be having a conversation with our listeners about HIV/AIDS and some institutions or organizations that come together to help prevent and confront HIV/AIDS and STIs as well as to support people who are undergoing treatment.

During this episode, the production team interviewed the person in charge of community education for the Amazonic Jungle Association. She spoke about HIV/AIDS education efforts and ways people could overcome their fears of testing and treatment.

....Many HIV patients don't seek care, one of the reasons is the fear of being identified. I think that with time, there's no reason why this illness should make us feel embarrassed because it can happen to anyone be they man, woman, or child, and we have to think that with antiretroviral treatment a person can keep on living and can be productive and take care of their families, their children, and not be dependent.

Episode #1143 of *Bienvenida Salud* focused on violence against women—making women aware that when they press charges against somebody who has been violent they have the right to follow through with the sentencing and its consequences. A listener wrote in:

In my community when a woman fights with her husband and presses charges with the deputy governor, and then the deputy follows through with sentence, but in the morning the woman goes and retracts the charges. That happens regularly....Women say that they feel bad when their husbands are put in the cell and [that they pressed charges] only because they were angry at the moment....

After cataloguing the letter, Rafael added the following comment:

The authorities have worked with the people of the riverine communities to come up with sanctions for men who commit acts of violence. In many cases these sanctions are never solidified because there are women who fear the repercussions of having to be single mothers or because they feel pity towards the men so they remove the charges. Unfortunately, the aggressor does not suffer the consequences and the violence is repeated, and in some cases compounded.

And the script directly addresses this issue of not following up on sentences:

Emira: But doñita, the authorities of the community have to seek justice. Against these cases of violence we women have to “wear the pants” and demand respect and follow through with the consequences of the law.

Emira: That’s why doñita today we will be talking about the issue of violence against women, so that many of us women can be aware and can report cases of violence because we all have the right to follow through with the punishment against the aggressor down to the last consequence.

The socio-drama in *Bienvenida Salud* featured the following dialogue:

Dora: (A little sad...), Oh Pasionaria, it’s been a while since our neighbor Peta’s husband, Pedro, well he has been hitting her and she says she wants to press charges.

Peta: Yes, but he tells me I won’t get anything out of it.

Pasionaria: Well what are you waiting for neighbor Peta, go to the community authorities and ask that he be punished for being a beater.

Peta: (Scared...), Oh no neighbor Pashuca, my poor old man, I feel sorry to see him sitting locked in the cell, plus he’s the father of my children so I just have to put up with it.

Findings From the Field^{xii}

Throughout the duration of Minga’s radio educative project with support from the UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women (January 2006 to March 2008), the staff of *Bienvenida Salud* received a total of 4,860 letters. Of these, 21% of the letters (N=1003) made a direct and explicit reference to issues of violence in the community or domestic sphere, or raised questions or concerns on HIV/AIDS. Adult women, the primary target audience of *Bienvenida Salud*, wrote most of the letters (45 percent) to the radio program. Many of the adult women listeners wrote in to share that they have either abused their children or been abused by their partners. Adult men and youth (both male and female) are increasing as an audience segment of *Bienvenida Salud* and also increasingly writing in to the program. This finding suggests increased involvement of men in the welfare of their families and their partners.

The newly-trained radio correspondents played a key role in spurring letter-writing. Correspondents voiced a sense of “pride” in that their school and Minga trusted them to receive the training and take seriously their role as providers of community feedback and conveyors of community joys and concerns.

Overall, Minga Perú’s intercultural educative project to prevent and reduce domestic violence and HIV/AIDS in the Peruvian Amazon has made a positive impact in the lives of participating riverine communities. While such deep-rooted beliefs and attitudes are slow to change, there is progress on both issues, at least in certain communities.

Students’ Perceptions of Impact

What have the students gained from Minga Peru’s intercultural educative radio project to prevent and reduce domestic violence and HIV/AIDS in the Peruvian Amazon, by listening to radio and participating in classroom-based, extra-curricular, and community-centered activities?

Our primary and secondary data clearly shows that students have learned about their rights as individuals, about different forms of violence, and about taking preventive measures for not contracting HIV/AIDS. As Johnny, a student from a community along the Rio Marañon, noted: “I learned to be cautious about diseases. I learned that we have rights as people and they must be respected.”

In general terms, students emphasized that they now talk about these issues with their friends and family members, especially about domestic violence. Thirteen-year old Mili emphasized: “Well yes, in the afternoons we sit and talk about these things [as a family] and my dad is aware and feels repentant because he used to hit my mom a lot. Now, no longer.” Many students said that they have noticed changes – both ideological and behavioral—in male-female and parent-child relationships. Many also cited improvements in relationships among teachers and students. For instance, 19-year old Emerson from another community noted: “In class, the teachers used to be more severe. Now they are calmer; they have a better way of reaching their students, for if they speak about violence they know that they have to set an example.”

Prior to the implementation of the school-based program, students noted that they had several misconceptions about HIV/AIDS. Many thought that it was “a small animal” that could be transmitted by touching someone. HIV was also attributed as being synonymous with having sex with homosexuals or prostitutes. Although some misconceptions still persist, the secondary school students show mindfulness in acknowledging that the person they have sex with may have multiple partners.

In our discussions with students, while acknowledging the difficulties in broaching these topics with their girlfriends or boyfriends, they expressed a desire for change, including delaying of sexual relations, limiting sexual partners, and using condoms in sexual encounters. A great majority of the students said that they are “better informed and less afraid”: that after talking to their teachers and listening to *Bienvenida Salud*, they now know how to prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections. Many emphasized that what they learned from their teachers, they share

with others in the family and community. Gertrudis, a 14-year old female student noted: [These conversations] have benefitted me a lot because thanks to the teachers I have shared what I have learned with some people, especially my younger brothers.”

Teachers’ Perceptions of Impact

What have the teachers gained from Minga Perú’s intercultural educative radio project to prevent and reduce domestic violence and HIV/AIDS in the Peruvian Amazon, by undergoing Minga’s training and by their involvement in classroom-based curricular and community-centered extra-curricular activities?

Our primary and secondary data clearly shows that after undergoing the Minga Perú’s training, several teachers feel a sense of pride, responsibility, and accountability in making a difference in the communities. The topics of violence and HIV/AIDS were closely incorporated into different subject areas through the integrated curriculum developed by the teachers. The most effective pedagogical techniques to convey these topics was student-centered classroom dialogue, followed by dramatization, role plays, and case studies. As one teacher noted: “We are the leaders that take a people towards their development and prosperity—what better way than by caring for their health.”

Many teachers highlighted the professional development, networking, and relational functions of such school-based health initiatives. As one teacher noted: “We are able to acquire accurate knowledge about health issues, form relationships with educational and development institutions like Minga Perú, and meet other teachers. In this way, we can learn together and get organized to mobilize entire communities and local educational and health institutions for the good of everyone.”

Community Members’ Perceptions of Impact

What have the members of riverine communities gained from Minga Perú’s intercultural educative radio project to prevent and reduce domestic violence and HIV/AIDS in the Peruvian Amazon?

An analysis of our primary and secondary data shows that Minga Perú's intercultural radio educative project to prevent and reduce domestic violence and HIV/AIDS in the Peruvian Amazon has made a positive impact in the lives of participating riverine communities. While such deep-rooted beliefs and attitudes are slow to change, there is progress on both issues, at least in certain communities.

More Communication, Reduced Violence

María, a woman in her late 30s, sat by her husband and two boys during a focus group session and noted: "When I got married I was very irritable—there was a lot of violence within me and I used to hit my children a lot. Many times as a woman you are marginalized in the home or the kitchen. It is nice for us as women to receive training through teachers and to improve our relationships through conversation."

Jorge, María's son, said: "It's true, my mom used to hit us—but it was good so that we would be respectful and study instead of play. It has its good points and its bad points. It helped me become obedient. That's why we ask her [jokingly] why she doesn't hit the younger children. But Minga has helped us have better familial communication."

Profesor Milner noted: "In the past 12 years I've seen a change in the amount of violence, especially after parties....ours used to be a rebellious community, and they used to make fun of Minga's *promotoras*. But through perseverance they started to convince and transform people so that they became more responsible and hard-working. Mothers used to suffer a lot with their *machista* husbands. They wouldn't even let them speak. Now women can speak. They can say what they feel. They have the same rights and responsibilities. This is especially effective through work with the students in classrooms and through radio correspondents because they bring about change."

Another indicator of deep-lasting change was the repeated acknowledgment by men of how "*paso a paso* (step by step)" they themselves have changed. Juan Carlos said: "I have been a listener of the radio program for one year. Since I didn't know about violence and all these things I used to feel *machista*. I thought because I was a man

all decisions were mine and any little thing made me blow up. My partner was a *promotora* and she told me I wasn't living the right way, but I didn't believe her. But it stayed in the back of my mind and I began to listen to the program a little harder. I think I have slowly changed, not completely, but still, now we dialogue, we talk. I have stopped gossiping and only talk about the joys and triumphs in our family and other families. I now feel a sense of commitment to these issues and have become a correspondent. This is an important and arduous job because we have the responsibility to talk about these issues."

Spurring Conversations on Responsible Sexuality, Healthy Passions

In the Peruvian Amazon, normatively, sexual activity for both girls and boys begins early. Profesora Nancy noted: "Young people here become sexually active when they are 12 or 13 years old. It is seen as normal in the communities and as teachers we try to talk about these issues, but we can only do so much. If we had more parental support, perhaps we could do better." Hence Minga's programs – both in the form of on-air broadcasts and community-based initiatives—are geared to create more conversations about the importance of "coming of age" before young people find themselves burdened with the care of children, especially as early pregnancy leads to poor maternal and child health, limits options for continuing education, and contributes to perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Profesora Nancy's statement exemplifies the challenges that undergird the prevention of sexually-transmitted infections in the Peruvian Amazon, including HIV/AIDS. In our interview with a public health official in Iquitos, she emphasized: "The greatest challenge here is getting information to rural communities. Our health centers are closer to the outskirts of cities. We provide condoms, but people are afraid to ask. Rural areas don't have easy condoms." Mariela, a 14-year old radio correspondent stated: "They are very young and need to prevent pregnancies and STIs. We can have access to free birth control and condoms, but the guys just don't think about who they are with;

they just think about having a good time. I hope we can be continually trained, not just we women but also men, because this way we can make changes.”

Juan Carlos, a radio listener credited Minga’s treatment of HIV/AIDS in *Bienvenida Salud* and through school-based programs as “opening the doors” for conversations about responsible sexuality to occur. But more sustained efforts in this area are warranted. As he noted: “We like to gather in the late afternoons or evenings to listen to cassettes of *Bienvenida Salud*, often played through the community loudspeaker. We want to hear more programs on sexually-transmitted infections. We would like to see a video about our bodies and body parts. This can help us learn about pregnancy and clear our misconceptions. We need to gradually build awareness about these issues and also self-esteem among young people which can lead to responsible sexuality.”

The teacher trainings and the school-based curriculum helped clear many misguided perceptions about HIV/AIDS: As an administrator of a Health Center in the Amazon noted: “In the trainings, there were several myths and misconceptions about HIV transmission. People were afraid of transmission through mosquitoes. They also asked if you could get it from the person who chewed the yucca and spit it in a bottle to make *masato*, a local brew. They wondered if, like gonorrhea, one could get HIV from a toilet or a towel. And they wanted to know if HIV/AIDS could be cured by eating vegetables and herbs because they saw that some people who were infected did that instead of seeking treatment.” These trainings also provided an opportunity to reframe the discourse of responsible sexuality not just as “safe sex” or “time out” in a passionate encounter, but also as an exercise in “healthy passions”.

Conclusion

....intercultural encounters need to go beyond a mere 'tolerance of the other' and should involve creative abilities that convert existing challenges into new respectable forms of expression. The 'shared space' in which such processes take place can be located outside of physical spaces, situated in the media or in a virtual environment.^{xiii}

Minga's strength lies in its mindfulness about, and appreciation of, the communication resources that exist in the Amazonia -- such as orality, expressiveness, and extroversion – to address issues that are sensitive and taboo. Minga's intercultural approach in the Peruvian Amazon demonstrates that it is possible to talk about, and to live, a whole sexual life with responsibility; and it is possible to enjoy physical closeness while preserving women's dignities and bodies.

Moreover, by ensuring that listeners are an integral part of the production circuit and by using local characters who speak using the local language and diction in its radio programs, Minga shows that it is possible to create "shared spaces" where stakeholders' voices are heard, legitimized, and valued. We see that Minga's innovative approaches to health and social challenges in the Peruvian Amazon are valuable in and of themselves. But perhaps even more notable is the desire for communities, starting with the very young, to produce their own, local programs and broadcast them through the loudspeakers. The marks of community ownership and continued interest beyond Minga's programming are proof that interculturality is a successful practice.

Endnotes

ⁱ A version of this publication is in press in Michael B. Hinner (Ed.) (in press), *A Forum for General and Intercultural Business Communication* (Freiberger Beitrage Zur Interkulturellen Und Wirtschaftskommunikation), Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang GmbH.

ⁱⁱ Minga's present work in the Peruvian Amazon is focused in the Marañon and El Tigre river basins (both represent major tributaries of the Amazon River and are easily accessible from Iquitos City, where Minga is headquartered).

ⁱⁱⁱ The data presented in this chapter was collected during a programmatic assessment by Singhal and Dura for Minga Peru in April of 2008. From this assessment a report was produced for the UN Trust Fund to Support Actions that Eliminate Violence against Women administered by UNIFEM. For more information see Singhal & Dura (2008).

^{iv} Personal interview conducted as part of data collection for Singhal & Dura (2008).

^v See Elías (2002).

^{vi} Minga received funding from the UN Trust Fund to Support Actions that Eliminate Violence against Women administered by UNIFEM from 2006 to 2008.

^{vii} Of these 14 were primary school teachers and 156 were secondary teachers.

^{viii} See Elías (2002).

^{ix} These projects were then monitored by an expert in rural education belonging to the Minga Peru team and an expert from the Unit of Local Educative Management (UGEL).

^x See Singhal and Rogers (1999; 2002); Sypher et al. (2002).

^{xi} See Farrington (2003).

^{xii} The names of students, teachers, and community members have been changed to protect individuals' privacy.

^{xiii} See ERICarts (2008).

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About the Sam Donaldson Center

The Sam Donaldson Center at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), named after its distinguished alumnus, was established in 2002 to provide academic enrichment for communication students and scholars, and training for media professionals. In conjunction with the Department of Communication, the Donaldson Center collaborates with other civil society organizations around the world to foster social justice, equity, and change.



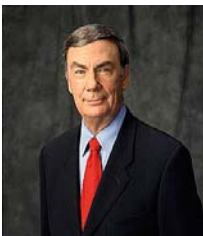
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