

THE JUST WORD



THE IGNACIO MARTÍN-BARÓ FUND FOR MENTAL HEALTH & HUMAN RIGHTS

VOLUME VI No. 1

A PROJECT OF THE FUNDING EXCHANGE

Spring 2001

MISSION STATEMENT

The Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights was created to foster psychological well-being, social consciousness and active resistance in communities affected by institutional violence, repression, and social injustice. We believe that the scars of such experiences are deeply seated in both the individual and society and, therefore, seek to support projects that explore the power of community to collectively heal these wounds and move forward.

Through grants, networking, and technical support, the Fund seeks to encourage the development of innovative, grassroots community projects that promote progressive social change and community mental health. In pursuit of this mission, the Fund's goals are:

- ◆ To develop a holistic perspective for understanding the connections between state and institutional violence and repression, and the mental health of communities and individuals;
- ◆ To support innovative projects that explore the power of community to foster healing within individuals and communities trying to recover from experiences of institutional violence, repression, and social injustice;
- ◆ To build collaborative relationships among the Fund, its grantees, and its contributors for mutual education and empowerment; and
- ◆ To develop social consciousness within the United States regarding the psychological consequences of structural violence, repression, and social injustice.

INDRADEVI – DOING COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH WORK IN CAMBODIA

by Laura Wald



While living in Vietnam for the last six months, I had the opportunity to visit a project in Phnom Penh, Cambodia funded by the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund. The Indradevi Association, or IDA, is a grassroots organization of six people that works with sex workers and squatters in Phnom Penh. They offer STD and HIV education, and home care for people with AIDS. However, in the course of their work, the group noticed that many of their clients were coming to them seeking informal counseling for personal problems arising from their situations of extreme poverty, disenfranchisement, violence and crime in their communities. IDA thus sought funding from the Martín-Baró Fund to open a counseling center, train peer counselor volunteers,

continued on page 2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

• MISSION STATEMENT	page 1	• WE WANT TO RAISE OURSELVES UP, TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE	page 5
• INDRADEVI – DOING COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH WORK IN CAMBODIA	page 1	• JOE MOAKLEY ANNOUNCES HIS RETIREMENT	page 6
• COMMITTEE MEMBER PROFILES: SILVINA MONCHO AND CHIMI KAPUNGU	page 3	• GRANT PROCESS UNDERWAY	page 6
		• STRIKING FOR JUSTICE	page 7
		• HELP US MAKE A DIFFERENCE	page 7

continued from page 1

and run weekly mental health education workshops in the community.

Cambodia has been in a nearly constant state of civil strife since 1970. Half a decade of civil war was followed by five years of the Khmer Rouge "killing fields" during which an estimated 1.7 to 3 million Cambodians died. According to Dy Ratha, president of IDA, even after 1979, when the Vietnamese invaded and drove Pol Pot from power, the new government never returned the land that the Khmer Rouge had taken from the peasants. Now, millions are landless and have had to move to the cities where jobs and housing are difficult to find. Moreover, many girls and young women are sent to the cities to become sex workers as the only way to earn money.

Since receiving the grant from the Fund, the group has trained 15 volunteers, seven men and eight women, who now offer peer counseling in their communities, make referrals to the counseling center, and educate their neighbors about ways of coping with the stresses of living in an environment of extreme poverty where there is a constant threat of violence. IDA has also opened a counseling center located in one of the main squatter districts in Phnom Penh. It is open 3 half-days a week and by appointment, and an average of two to three clients a week come for individual counseling with problems related to domestic violence, substance abuse by a family member, insomnia, and other social and economic stresses. The staff note that there has been a good deal of resistance to the notion of mental health counseling, which may account for the low number of clients currently coming to the center.

Weekly workshops, however, are the main focus of Indradevi's community mental health work. During my

visit, I was invited to attend a workshop, which IDA held in the squatter area that sprawls out of sight behind the street on which their office is located. The poverty in Phnom Penh is striking; the city has few paved roads, run-down buildings and a general feeling of fatigue and wariness about it. In the squatter area shacks are made of wood, lending a false air of stability, since they can be razed any time residents do not pay regular bribes to local police and officials.

We made our way to an orphanage that was hosting this week's community mental health workshop, and were immediately flocked by children who hugged me and kissed me on sight, fascinated to see a foreigner. Some of the children are being trained in classical Cambodian dance, and they were going to perform at the Royal Palace that day. Demonstrating perfect grace and synchronization, they performed four intricate dances for us in full makeup and elaborate costumes.

After the dance, we began the two-hour workshop, which was attended by 23 community members. Two IDA staff led the workshop, and were clearly very skilled in drawing out participants and creating a warm and supportive environment. They talked about common symptoms of stress experienced by Cambodians, emphasizing common cultural metaphors and complaints such as headaches and "thinking too much." They emphasized focusing on tasks and goals that are achievable and helped participants brainstorm about their particular stressors and ways to address them while the group ate a snack of fruit and sandwiches. Most of the people talked about difficulties with housing, finding jobs, poor nutrition, children's illnesses, substance abuse, and domestic violence resulting from the stresses of poverty. Participants were eager to talk about their situations and were very recep-

tive to learning about basic problem-solving strategies.

While the president of Indradevi is very involved in human rights work and brings that consciousness to her work at IDA, the group does not talk explicitly about these topics in their counseling work. They note that they are afraid to do so in the workshops because they are never sure if there are government officials planted in the group to keep an eye on them, something that is apparently not uncommon. In Cambodia, even hinting that mental health is affected by immediate social conditions may be viewed as a threat to the state, and the mere act of doing mental health work can be considered subversive. This is especially the case when the model emphasizes psychosocial stress, the approach of Indradevi. Mental health is understood as a product not just of biology but also of immediate circumstances and stresses in this model, an assumption that acknowledges the sociopolitical in a subtle, unspoken way.

The work of Indradevi is admirable. The group has clearly developed a rapport with this community of the very poor and disenfranchised. The workshop participants continue to fill rooms after six months, and are beginning to be more open to seeking help and addressing the mental health needs of their community. As in many other countries throughout the world, what may be a foreign concept, mental health, is becoming a recognized priority as groups like Indradevi discover ways to define it in locally meaningful ways. ♦



COMMITTEE MEMBER PROFILES: SILVINA MONCHO AND CHIVI KAPUNGU

by Andy Epstein

Critical to the work of the Martín-Baró Fund are graduate students enrolled in the Clinical Psychology Program at U Mass Boston. Two of them are Silvina Moncho and Chivi Kapungu.

Chivi, at the initial stages of her dissertation, hopes to focus on the psychosocial impact of armed conflict on families from Africa. Born in Zimbabwe, her frequent travels to visit relatives in her native country have inspired her to become involved in human rights issues around the world. Aside from her academic responsibilities, Chivi is employed as a family/child clinician at Roxbury Comprehensive Health Center and is a volunteer for the International Rescue Committee (IRC), tutoring Somali refugee youth. It is her long-range goal to provide mental health services to organizations such as the IRC in the future.



Silvina is ending her studies at U Mass Boston and will be interning next year at the

Cambridge Hospital Psychiatry program. For the past two years, she has been part of the Latino Mental Health Team at

Cambridge Hospital where she has been providing supervised clinical services to Latino immigrants. Some of her work has been with survivors of political violence, and she has been involved in political asylum cases. She is interested in



pursuing cross-cultural research in neuropsychology with Spanish speakers.

The Just Word interviewed these two outstanding women right after this year's Bowl-a-thon, March 2001.

Why did you decide to join the MBF? What things motivated you?

C : I've been interested in human rights issues for a long time. In college I did fundraising for a Kenyan youth group to enable them to provide sports for local youth, for other African groups, and some feminist activities as well. Since then I was less involved so it's good to be doing this work. It's so refreshing to engage in work during my training as a graduate student that can have a significant impact on the community level.

S: For me, it started when I was recruited to bowl at a Bowl-a-thon and I began learning about the work of Martín-Baró. I became inspired and decided to participate. It's so easy in graduate school to put on blinders and get immersed in your own little world and not realize how being part of a community can help you to make a difference in people's lives. I found this was an excellent opportunity to get involved and learn about important social and economic issues around the world. Also the people are just wonderful; it's a big bonus to spend time with such amazing people.

Most psychology programs take an individual therapeutic approach to mental health. How does the work with the Fund fit into your training and your understanding of the social context of mental health?

S: I think that U Mass Boston does give you opportunities to work in communities where awareness of these issues is important. I've found that the work of the Fund translates into the work I'm doing. I have focused on work with Latino immigrants and some have been victims of

state sponsored violence in their countries of origin. Most have also experienced social and political stressors as minorities in the United States. So the work I do is definitely informed by a broader perspective that includes being very aware of and addressing the impact of people's social and political realities.

Although my intervention is typically at the individual level, part of my work is to identify and strengthen community – to translate individual growth into community growth.

C: Understanding the context of the lives of your patients makes a really big difference. In my work in Roxbury, it is easy to feel disempowered. There needs to be a more integrated response to the situation. When you think about communities that have so few resources, it can actually be empowering if you can be creative - working with limited resources, but finding ways to maintain your energy and have an impact.

An important goal of the Fund is to develop social consciousness of the psychological consequences of structural violence and injustice. Are there ways this can be done in the mental health professions through graduate training?

C: Sure, if you look abroad, especially in the Scandinavian countries, the role of the psychologist is one that can promote social action and social change. I think they do a lot of good work on the grassroots level and on an international level as well, and it would be great if this could be promoted more in the United States. Encouragement of graduate students to conduct research on the impact of social injustices and political violence from a psychosocial perspective is badly needed. Because communities are sometimes pressed to address other issues like education, food, housing etc., psychologists are needed who can promote psychosocial recovery.

continued on page 4

COMMITTEE MEMBER PROFILES: SILVINA MONCHO AND CHIVI KAPUNGU

continued from page 3

ery. I have met students from outside the U.S. who have conducted psycho-social research abroad that has contributed substantially to the community. In the U.S., I am aware of a post graduate program at New York University that trains psychologists to engage in applied research on the impact of political violence on communities. Programs like those at NYU and U Mass Boston which encourage interdisciplinary learning motivate students to become actively involved in communities recovering from structural violence and social injustices.

S: I think this is really an exciting time to be in graduate school especially since we are part of a new generation of psychologists where attention is finally being given to political and social oppression and their impact on both the individual and community levels. Change at this level poses a significant challenge to the field; but with awareness increasing and more training in sociocultural theory, changes will occur in how we understand the sequelae of sociopolitical violence and develop comprehensive community interventions.

Do you mean that collective action is therapeutic?

S: Certainly. I think that one of the roles of the psychologist is to promote social change, not only through group interventions but also through individual empowerment and direct mobilization of community resources.

With this consciousness, where would be a logical place for you to practice?

C: A community health center, partly because of the collaboration it encourages. At the health center

where I work, the team is interdisciplinary and this provides different expertise, from social work and public health, for example. In addition to the advantages this creates for responding to the community's mental health needs, collaboration means that I'm able to learn from all disciplines.

S: I do feel that my commitment to the Fund is a life long one and while I'm not sure how it will manifest itself in my choice of a job, I know it will inform my work.

How do you see your future work with the Martín-Baró Fund?

C: I travel a lot to Southern Africa, and there are a lot of grassroots programs that are not aware of the Fund. I would like to educate them about possible relationships with us and to spread the word that the Fund can be a resource.

S: It's difficult to say what my work with the Fund will look like in the future. The Fund is a dynamic organization. Who knows what new opportunities for work we will create for ourselves? Something I would be very interested in pursuing, though, is visiting some of the projects and trying to establish more direct contact with the people we fund.

A major purpose of the Fund is to do grantmaking. What has it been like to review proposals for support?

C: I have recently joined the Fund and begun to review proposals. I have been impressed by the ways in which overwhelmed groups have used their limited resources creatively to support their communities. Being involved with the Fund has not only alerted me to the violence and repression that has devastated communities but has given me the opportunity to support people in a manner that can be really helpful at the local, grassroots level. Being able to assist people's efforts to empower their

communities in the face of the most challenging circumstances, is an empowering experience, itself.

S: I feel as though my involvement in the Fund over the past two years has had a significant impact on my life on many different levels. There are many ways one can become desensitized to the atrocities that occur around the world. But it is so powerful to read proposals written by the people who have lived and survived these experiences. Reading these requests for assistance in journeys of healing touches you and mobilizes you to make a difference. Each time we offer support to organizations, it feels incredible to know that we are helping a marginalized group with few resources, to heal. It's at these times that I am reminded how much I love this work and how important our small organization is to hundreds of people around the world.

The Fund is fortunate to have talented graduate students like Silvina and Chivi as full partners in our work. They are vital to our ability to continue our mission into a second decade. ♦



The Association of Mayan Ixil Women – New Dawn, received its first grant for \$3,200 from the Martín-Baró Fund in 1994. The group proposed to develop a corn mill to provide a resource for the community of Chajul and generate income for themselves as widows and orphans who had survived some of the worst brutality of Guatemala's 36-year war. In 1997, having become a local NGO, they applied for and received a second grant of \$7,000 to support their ongoing workshops fostering women's well-being and a second economic development project. (See Fall 1999 newsletter for a description of the work of ADMI.)

Voices and images: Mayan Ixil women of Chajul, a book with photos and texts (in Spanish and English), was published by ADMI in 2000 and featured in our last newsletter. Here, **M. Brinton Lykes**, MBF member and collaborator in the PhotoVoice project, the basis for the book, reflects on the impact of this work on some of the participants.

In October, 2000, shortly after having presented *Voices and images: Mayan Ixil women of Chajul* to the Guatemalan public, Ana Caba Mateo, Coordinator of ADMI, and Ana Pérez Sánchez, member of ADMI and educator, journeyed to South Africa, joining a group of 40 other women leaders from 13 countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia/Pacific in a South-South dialogue. The dialogue was organized to analyze the impact of multiple forms of violence on women's development and to share best practices local women were using to overcome

poverty and the crisis of global ethics. For Ana and Ana such a trip would have been unheard of a mere three years earlier. But during that time they, 18 other Maya Ki-ché and Ixil women, and several internationalists, had co-developed PhotoVoice, a participatory action research project. One of the multiple effects of PhotoVoice has been for women of

years old during the last year of the project. She often walked a day's journey from tending her fields in order to be present for a training workshop. In the more than eight years during which I facilitated workshops in Chajul, she missed only one. Her life story is typical of women of her generation who were unable to attend school due to poverty. She

describes hiding herself in the temascal [traditional steam bath] when men came by her house to take the children to school since she knew her parents could not afford the school fees. She speaks of the pain she experiences even today "because I realize that I don't know how to read and to write." Married at 17, mother of 16 children, 11 of whom survived



Chajul to begin to "speak out" about their realities, to "give testimony" to the war and its effects, and their responses to it. One participant described how she saw the change in herself: "...now I am participating in ADMI and in the women's groups in the church. This has been important for me because before this I hardly knew how to think, and now I am thinking a lot and I feel important. You learn this with other people, just like daughters learn how to weave by watching others. This is the way that we learn" (p.98).

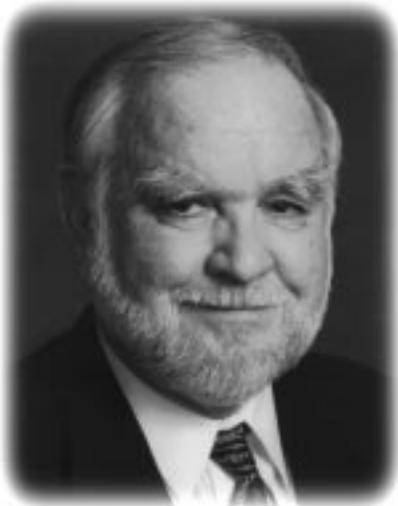
Participation and collaboration are core values as well as key outcomes of the PhotoVoice process. Of the 20 participants in PhotoVoice, one who stood out for me as someone whose life was transformed by her involvement is Maria, a photographer/researcher who turned 60

childhood, she told other women in the project about the murder of her husband by the police and the lies that they circulated saying that his death had been the result of a guerrilla ambush. Maria further asserted that the driver of the truck in which her husband had been riding when he was killed was "a witness to the truth and he gave an account about what the police had done and about their lies in the news that was circulated" (p.101). Despite the enormous emotional loss and its profound economic implications, Maria moved on, supporting her large family as well as she could within situations of ongoing war and extreme poverty.

She concluded her life story by describing her present joy - that despite her husband's death, her children have grown up, and there is now

continued on page 8

JOE MOAKLEY ANNOUNCES HIS RETIREMENT



by Ann Brian Murphy

Congressman Joseph Moakley (D-Mass) announced that he will not run for re-election in 2002, for reasons of health. Elected in 1972, Moakley represented Massachusetts in Congress for almost thirty years, serving on the powerful House Rules Committee.

Friends and supporters of Ignacio Martín-Baró honor Moakley especially for his extraordinary work on behalf of justice in El Salvador.

In the early 1980s, after meeting with constituents who were sheltering Salvadoran refugees, Moakley became active in the fight to amend the Immigration Act of 1986 to include Extended Voluntary Departure (EVD) Status for Salvadoran Refugees. EVD status eventually allowed thousands of these refugees to remain and work in the United States while the violence continued in El Salvador.

Several years later, Moakley was appointed head of a Congressional Task Force investigating the 1989 murders of Ignacio Martín-Baró and his Jesuit brothers, their housekeeper, and her daughter. The Moakley Commission issued a report establishing that several high ranking Salvadoran military officials knew

about and possibly ordered the murders. Following the report, Moakley worked to end American military support for El Salvador. In 1991, the U.S. Congress voted for the first time to stop military aid, and on January, 16, 1992, a peace accord was signed.

Moakley has continued to fight for justice in Central America and the Caribbean. In 1996, he and his then aide, now Congressional colleague Jim McGovern, traveled to Cuba. Concerned about the plight of the Cuban people, denied basic and essential services because their food is rationed and they have limited access to medicines and medical equipment, Moakley advocates lifting the current embargo on food and medicine.

Martín-Baró Fund members and supporters owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Congressman Moakley for his unstinting efforts on behalf of social justice. His leadership in Congress will be sorely missed. ♦

GRANT PROCESS UNDERWAY

by Ben Achtenberg

As a part of its plans to develop closer relationships with its grantees, the Steering Committee of the Martín-Baró Fund decided not to fund any new organizations this year. Instead, we invited grant recipients from recent years to write us expressing their interest in receiving funds either to continue or expand their previously funded projects, or to engage in new work. We received more than two dozen letters of interest and, from those, selected twelve organizations who were invited to submit complete funding proposals. The largest group (five) came from Central America and the Caribbean, two each were from Mexico and Africa, and others were from groups in South America, the Philippines, and the Middle East. Since all of these groups have done what we consider to be valuable work with Martín-Baró Fund grants in the past, we expect to have a difficult (though very interesting) time narrowing these down to the five to seven projects we will be able to fund with available resources. It has been very encouraging to us to have this confirmation that so many of the grassroots groups we have supported over the years are still out there and, often against enormous odds, are continuing to work to improve mental health conditions in their communities. We look forward to announcing our grantees in this fall's Just Word. ♦

Co-Editors: Ramsay Liem, Andy Epstein. Contributors: Ben Achtenberg, Francine Cardman, Alden Jackson, Chivi Kapungu, Joan Liem, M. Brinton Lykes, Silvina Moncho, Ann Brian Murphy, Laura Wald. **MBF Website:** www.fex.org/mb.html

STRIKING FOR JUSTICE

by Joan Liem

The Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund annual Bowl-a-thon was held on Sunday, March 11th at Lanes and Games in Cambridge, MA. Seven spirited teams including several graduate student



and faculty four-somes from UMass-Boston, Boston College, and Assumption College, a group

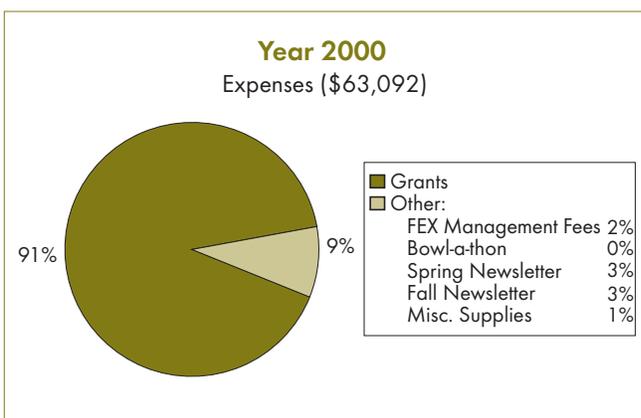
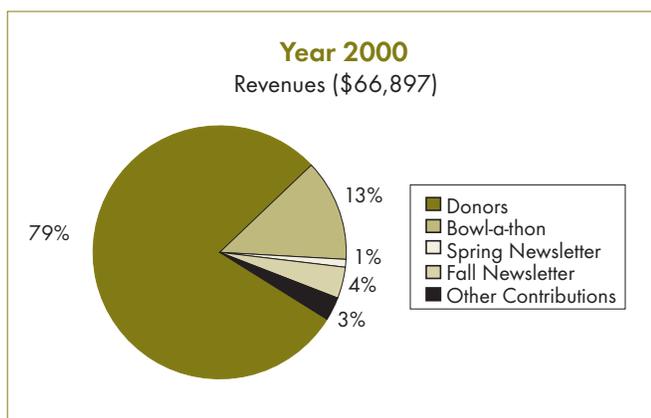
from BBN Technologies, and the multi-generational family team in the accompanying picture, participated in this now familiar winter ritual to raise money for the Fund's grantmaking activities. As always, the event was an opportunity for a lot of laughter, a lot of gutter balls, and much cheering over every strike and spare.



This year's participants raised over \$5,000. The members of the Fund wish to express their sincere appreciation to everyone who collected pledges for the event and to all who made contributions in support of the bowlers. The Bowl-a-thon has become a time for members of the Fund and their families, friends, and colleagues to enjoy themselves and reaffirm their activism; but it is also an important means to raise funds for projects that are doing challenging human rights and mental health work around the world. We invite your continued support of the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund throughout the year and hope to see you at the Bowl-a-thon next winter. ♦

HELP US MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Because the work of the Fund is done entirely by volunteers, over 90% of our resources goes directly to grantees. We are extremely proud of this unique accomplishment and hope it will encourage you to support the Fund as generously as possible. Contributions, letters, or inquiries can be sent to: Martín-Baró Fund, PO Box 2122, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130. Checks should be made to: FEX/Martín-Baró Fund and are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by IRS code. ♦



Charts by Alden Jackson

**WE WANT TO RAISE OURSELVES UP, TO
BUILD A BETTER FUTURE...**

continued from page 5

peace. She reflected upon the project, on changes in her own life and in the lives of women of Chajul: "Before, we women didn't have the right to [do the] work of our choosing. Moreover, the Association, ADMI, is a right that we women have and we are exploring our feelings more, developing our thinking, and expanding what we know. This is a change for women and in this same way there will be more changes in life. Our values and taking part in meetings are important for being able to communicate, for not letting anyone deceive us anymore.

Furthermore, we used to remain

silent, but we know more now and now we are not so silent. ...even though we women may not know how to read or to write, still, with our words, we can present the stories of our lives so that people far away know about the life of the people of Chajul" (p.101).

Participation is thus a core value as well as an outcome of PhotoVoice and of the many projects ADMI has generated during its nearly 10-year history. Ana Caba Mateo concludes the volume with another statement about the meaning of action and participation in ADMI: "The work we have done, well, perhaps it is not much, but for us, yes it is. Here in Chajul, there is no other women's group;the reason why the projects we have are such a major accomplish-

ment is that [others] are seeing that we women can work and can do the things that men do. This is why we women feel so good, we feel so encouraged and confident. We want to raise ourselves up together, to build a better future and support our children. This is the need that we see: this is the reality that we observe with great hope for the future" (p. 103). ♦

All proceeds from the sale of *Voices and images: Mayan Ixil women of Chajul* go to ADMI. The book is available from EPICA in Washington, D.C. (epicabooks@igc.org) for \$25.

IGNACIO MARTÍN-BARÓ FUND
P.O. Box 2122
JAMAICA PLAIN, MA 02130

 Printed on recycled paper. 

PRST STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Boston, MA
Permit # 59215
