



## Hand to Hand

## Questionnaire

Hand to Hand is a WARP initiative that attempts to link textile groups in the U.S. to textile groups in other countries for mutual support and learning. In order to do this to everyone's advantage, we need to know as much as possible about your group. Please answer the following questions and return your answers via email if possible or surface mail. Add any information you would like others to know about you.

1. *What is the name of your group, contact name, mailing address, email address, phone number, and website if available. In short, who and where are you?*

Project Artesanía Zona Andina (PAZA)  
Dorinda Dutcher  
Casilla 837, Cochabamba, Bolivia, S.A.  
[dkdutcher@hotmail.com](mailto:dkdutcher@hotmail.com)  
Blog: [www.pazabolivia.org](http://www.pazabolivia.org)

Project Location: Town: Independencia  
Province: Ayopaya  
Country: Bolivia

Municipality: Independencia  
Departamento (State): Cochabamba

- Project Manager: Dorinda Dutcher
  - U.S. Citizen, homebase on Record: Bozeman, MT
  - Resident of Bolivia since arrival with Peace Corps in August 2007
  - Since July 2008, has worked as a technical assistance volunteer without institutional affiliation

2. *Please describe your group in your own words.*

### *PAZA – “A Brighter Future through Technical Training”*

PAZA began as Dorinda's secondary Peace Corps Project in 2007, when the rural weavers of Huancarani asked for technical assistance to rescue natural dye techniques and help market their traditional weavings. Dorinda Dutcher settled in Independencia, Bolivia to continue providing technical assistance after completing her Peace Corps service in 2008. Prior to Peace Corps, Dorinda worked for 27 years in tourism in Katmai and Denali National Parks and Crater Lake National Monument. Because much of the work was seasonal she traveled internationally during the winters developing a passion for indigenous textiles. Although unskilled in the fiber arts, she has become increasingly interested in experimenting with natural Andean dyes.

Doña Máxima Cortez, the PAZA Coordinator, is a master weaver from the rural community of Huancarani. She and her family moved to Independencia in 2004 so her 5 children could continue their education beyond 5<sup>th</sup> grade. She has grown into the position through her weaving skill, motivation to experiment with natural dyes, rapport with the rural weavers, and adopting interactive teaching methods. Doña Máxima arranges the workshops, is the PAZA natural dye and weaving trainer, and translates the Quechua to Spanish for Dorinda. She has managed the PAZA store since July 2008.

Dorinda and Doña Máxima developed a series of 5 natural dye workshops, which are available to rural communities upon written request. Trainers from a well organized weaving association presented the first workshops introducing cochineal and mordants. PAZA used the information to develop its workshops. To continue the momentum a natural dye expert was contracted twice in late 2009 to present intensive “train the local trainers” courses involving weavers from each of the participating community. During 2009, 5 communities received workshops and weavers of 3 of the communities began producing weavings to sell. There are 84 weavers registered with PAZA, but the majority of high quality weavings are produced by the weavers of Huancarani.

3. *Please give a brief description of the community where your group is located.*

Independencia is a town of 3,000 nestled in a valley at 7,850’ in the eastern range of the Bolivian Andes. Cochabamba is the nearest city and can be reached by daily bus service, an 8 hour trip over the mostly unpaved one-lane mountain road. There is electricity, Internet service that closes for weeks at a time, cellular phone service, and a water and sewer system. The hospital is staffed by Bolivian and Cuban medical personnel. The parish high school focuses on academics and college prep, while the German supported school system has a vocational high school track.

The rural communities are 30 minutes to an hour outside of Independencia. Migration has hit the rural areas, the 2002 census for Huancarani states 130 families; however, there are only about 60 today. A community center consists of the local school which operates through 3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade, a communal meeting house, a church, and perhaps a grain mill. None of the communities working with PAZA have any commercial enterprise operating. There is a government budget to provide transportation to bring the farmers into Independencia to sell their produce at the Sunday market. None of the communities working with PAZA have electricity, although the cable has been strung. Not all rural homes have running water to a spigot in the family compound. The majority of rural weavers did not have the opportunity to attend school and speak only Quechua. Their skills and abilities honed over a lifetime of a farmer subsistence lifestyle are awe-inspiring.

4. *What kind of textile and/or fiber work does your group focus on in particular? E.g. weaving, knitting, embroidery, basket weaving.*

The weavings are made by the primary material on hand which is criollo sheep wool. It is the responsibility of the women and children to shepherd the sheep, and the women spin with drop spindles while pasturing. Because the children old enough to shepherd now attend school, the duty falls to the women. The biodiversity of the Andes provides a plethora of dye plants, over the course of the workshops the women have begun to remember more about their natural dye heritage. Many of the figures worked into the weavings can be seen in museum pieces; however, knowledge of the figure symbolism is fading.

The rustic weavings are functional and include *ch’uspas* (shoulder bags) *incuñas* (small squares of cloth to carry food or coca leaf), *fajas* (belts/straps), *tapa bancas* (runners), *aguayos* (squares of cloth, the ubiquitous Andean backpack), and *ph’ullus* (blankets). Woven items are very much in evidence in the rural areas. Occasionally a large woven 100 lb. bag for carrying produce is spotted, however, machine made woven plastic bags have become the norm. Braided sheep and llama fiber are braided and used as rope and to fashion slings.

The weavings are done on rustic looms which consist of 2 notched poles about 10' long. The poles are laid on the ground and sticks (beams) tied on at either end. Warping commences by tossing balls of yarn back and forth passing around the beams. The traditional figures are warped using natural black and white yarn and picked separately from the weft. A llama bone is used to beat the weft, and the physical stress limits the time spent at the loom. Because the warp is portable, PAZA includes warping at the final natural dye workshop. Doña Máxima with her keen eye for color coordination helps weavers set up their initial weavings using the natural dyed yarn. Narrow straps are woven without a loom using a stake or toe to anchor one end, and strings serve as the sheds.

Knitting needles fly in the hands of the women, and many crochet while walking around town or country. The knitted ch'ulo, Andean cap with ear flaps, is very much in evidence in scratchy local wool or blended with llama wool. Brightly colored ch'ulos made from synthetic yarn are part of the "traditional" costume for dancing in festivals. The rural dress of the Quechua cholllitas (rural women), is a pollera (above the knee pleated skirt to accentuate the hips), white eyelet blouse, acrylic cardigan, wool leggings, beaded ties woven into braids, sandals or rubber flats, crocheted or flannel shawl, and a bowler or large straw sunhat natural or painted white. All items are purchased, and the polleras and blouses are a considerable investment. Cheaper western wear is becoming more common for girls.

*5. What is the history of your group and how is it currently organized and operated, e.g. co-operative, working group, other type?*

The rural communities were born out of the agrarian reform of 1952, which divided up the large haciendas. A social syndicate structure was established at the community, municipal, state, and federal level. PAZA works with the women's organizations at the community level. The President of each organization plans workshops with Doña Máxima.

Any Organization of Women may request the natural dye workshops by submitting a written request to PAZA. The curriculum developed for the 5 natural dye workshops has proven to be sufficient to motivate interested weavers to experiment on their own. The 5 workshops over 5 months builds a working relationship between PAZA and the weavers. The past three years have been a slow but steady process of rescuing the natural dye techniques, improving the quality of the weavings, finding markets, and slowly raising the sales prices which due to the national market remains below a fair price for the weavers. There are only 12 rural weavers producing top quality weavings, and each can comfortably produce 12-18 shoulder bags a year. Although weaving is an integral part of the rural lifestyle and it generates income it does not take priority over other farm chores.

PAZA is in transition forging relationships with the new administrations of the local government and Campesino Syndicate, as well as discussing collaboration with the vocational high school. PAZA's mission is to provide technical assistance. The local government plans to open a store of products produced in Independencia. PAZA will close it's local store and support the government's sales efforts. PAZA is negotiating with the local government for space to open a training center and offer regularly scheduled workshops to build production capacity.

*Is any income generated from activities directly organized through your group? If so, how is this done and how is this money then distributed and/or used?*

The beauty of commercializing the weavings is that the women have the primary material on hand, the activity of weaving is built into the lifestyle, and no investment is needed to get started. The road to standardizing the pricing in relation to quality has been rocky, but the weavers have been involved in the price setting. PAZA adds 10% to help support the cost of sales.

The two necessities the women mention the most frequently are school supplies and medical needs. The western medical system is viewed with suspicion, so there is usually a serious illness for the weavers to pursue that route for a cure. The necessity for cash will continue to increase as the modern world encroaches on the subsistence farmer lifestyle.

Part of PAZA's success was due to the lack of financial resources which necessitated the formation of partnerships and the seeking out of existing resources. Foreigners are viewed as a source of "gifts", so Dorinda has steered the Peace Corps path of being viewed as a training not a funding resource.

*6. What are your group's goals? What are the challenges in achieving these goals? How could others help you achieve these goals?*

**Training Diversification:** PAZA's past focus was on working with rural women to help revive the natural dye techniques and market the traditional weavings. Only a handful of weavers produce high quality weavings for the international market. More women would benefit from a variety of vocational training in the fiber arts. The local government supplied many communities with manual sewing machines but insufficient training in maintenance and operation. There is an underutilized sewing training center in Independencia with manual, electric, and industrial sewing machines. PAZA is negotiating space in the same complex for the natural dye training center and use of the sewing center. Training is never wasted, if not used as an income generating activity; the new skills will help make the harsh rural life a bit more comfortable.

**CHALLENGES – Lack of trainers and social progress:** By training more trainers, PAZA could provide part-time work for uneducated but talented women living in Independencia. It has been rewarding to watch the growing respect and empowerment of Doña Máxima, who has accomplished so much with a 4<sup>th</sup> grade education. Her rise in status has created envy, but she is a natural born leader and handling her trail breaking position with grace.

**HELP NEEDED - Support and Promotion of the Volunteer/Intern Program:** Because PAZA's main activity is to provide training; it has managed to be effective with few resources. The Volunteer program is directed towards youth development. The Intern program is geared towards the fiber arts. Technical assistance is needed to train the PAZA trainers and expand the PAZA workshop offerings. The cultural and technical exchange will be rewarding for all, interns should arrive expecting to learn as well as teach. Dorinda's life in Independencia is sustainable through this program.

**Increase Production:** Production is limited because of the farm and livestock priorities of the rural weavers. The women weave at home and because the farmsteads are so far flung trying to fill orders with stringent specifications has proven not to be practical. Each rural weaving is unique and that is how they should be marketed. PAZA plans to expand its focus to include:

- The rural weavers and their one of a kind weavings

- Weavers in town where quality and specifications could be monitored to meet order requests
  - Weavers have migrated to town where there are few jobs and although there are no farming responsibilities there is no harvest to put food on the table. Entire families will uproot from their farms when the majority of their children must attend school in town.
  - The rural high school girls living in the dorms are missing out on the passing of the weaving tradition from mother to daughter. PAZA hopes to start a weaving club to entice those with interest to develop the skill as an option to migration upon graduation. The club will also offer the opportunity for PAZA to identify future leaders.

CHALLENGES: Building a core production group. Balance between production and market. The Quechua textile heritage being passed onto the next generation.

HELP NEEDED: The national market lacks appreciation for the Andean textile heritage. Foreigners are the target market. Design help is needed for product diversification to tweak the traditional rustic weavings to meet that market.

**Pricing and U.S. Market Access:** The national market will not bear a fair price for the weavers. Access to the international market is difficult from Independencia.

CHALLENGES: PAZA has grown beyond Dorinda's capabilities. Lack of reliable Internet and high phone rates from Independencia make it difficult to communicate and do research.

HELP NEEDED: A market study is needed to determine the price the export market will bear for the Independencia weavings. With the limited current production, if PAZA could partner with an import enterprise to fill 2-4 small orders a year, the top weavers could plan their production and project their income.

## 6. What would you like to know about a group in the U.S. that you might link to?

1. Basic information to get a sense of the group.
  - a. Historical information of group
  - b. How active as a group, types of activities
  - c. A ranking (estimate) of how the group's interests are divided among the fiber arts
    - i. What is the natural dye interest/experience within the group?
2. What are the group's aspirations in partnering with the Quechua weavers?
3. What kind of technical exchange does the group envision with the Quechua weavers?

I'd like to thank WARP for providing this opportunity. Rural Bolivia is in the process of a much needed transition into the modern world. However, their ancient weaving tradition is under siege. Although PAZA has done a bit to help rescue natural dye techniques and help women to help themselves through sales of their weavings, much more could be done. Outreach to a U.S. textile group should prove to be an enriching experience for all.

*Dorinda Dutcher*