

All for one, one for all

*When community members
create business opportunities
together, everyone can benefit*



Peredo

by Peigi McGillivray

When most of us think of entrepreneurs, we think of individual risk-takers who are motivated by the prospect of personal achievement and financial success. But according to University of Victoria business professor Ana Maria Peredo, entrepreneurs can also be communities working together for the collective benefit of all their members.

Peredo is a pioneer in the field of community-based entrepreneurship, sustainable development and alleviation of poverty. She explores how poor and Indigenous communities around the world have created business activities aimed at benefitting the whole community.

“If we stop looking through Western eyes,” she says, “we can see that poor and Indigenous communities around the world work in a multitude of entrepreneurial ways that honour and preserve their existing culture and community structures.”

Peredo’s interest in community entrepreneurship began in her native country, Peru, where she was a journalist with one of the country’s largest daily newspapers, and later an anthropologist conducting research in the high Andes. “I saw poor communities using economic opportunities to build community

resources and improve collective well-being rather than individual wealth,” she says.

Peredo tells about an impoverished mountainside village in Peru that turned its small plot of communal land into a weekly market. There, people from higher up the mountain could meet and trade with people from villages lower down. The village charged a small rental fee for market spaces and used the money to build a school and health centre.

“This kind of entrepreneurship springs from the community itself and benefits everyone in the community,” says Peredo. “It draws on local history and culture to produce increased well-being for the whole group. Entrepreneurship takes on a whole new meaning in that context.”

In Canada, Peredo is working with poor and Indigenous communities, including First Nations people in Rankin Inlet in Nunavut. “Elders worried because young people were leaving to work in nearby mines, and traditional skills like caribou hunting were being lost,” she says. To reverse this trend, the community established a business to market caribou meat across Canada.

“This not only keeps young people from leaving, but also strengthens traditional skills and ties between old and young,” says Peredo.

Peredo believes it’s important to bring her

research into the classroom and to bring her students into the community. “When students are working directly with communities and business organizations—across disciplines—they can break out of their academic bubble,” she says. “They feel more connected to their work and their eyes are opened to new ways of thinking.”

Peredo’s expertise with community entrepreneurship around the world—she has worked with communities in New Zealand, Canada, Central and South America—has earned her many awards, including the Canadian Bureau for International Education’s Internationalization Leadership Award and the Ascendant Scholar Award from the Western Academy of Management.

“Traditional ways of supporting Indigenous and impoverished communities through what is called ‘entrepreneurship’ are built on an outdated idea of what an entrepreneur can be,” says Peredo. “And we often impose solutions upon communities without considering what is already there.

“Broadening our perspective and learning from the people we are trying to help may well lead to improved outcomes—as well as happier, stronger and more cohesive communities.”

EDGEwise

Ana Maria Peredo is director of UVic’s Centre for Co-operative and Community-Based Economy, which promotes research and learning on communal and collaborative ways of meeting community needs. For more information visit www.bcics.org

Central to these collaborative approaches are co-operatives—autonomous associations of people united to meet common economic, social and cultural needs through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

According to the United Nations, co-operatives provide important services to three billion people, or one half of the world’s population. Within Canada there are 16 million members in 9,000 co-operatives with assets of more than \$225 billion.

UVic researchers were awarded nearly \$100 million in outside research grants and contracts in 2009/10—more than triple the amount achieved 10 years ago.



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