

Above the floodwaters in Bangladesh | Growing together in Rwanda | Healing land, communities in Colombia



A Common Place



A Common Place

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And all the trees will clap their hands

ANN GRABER HERSHBERGER
MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

(Isaiah 55:12 NIV)

Beauty! As I read the stories in this issue and watch related videos, the beauty of 3D and floating vegetable gardens and reclaimed land delight my imagination and flood my being.

This imagery leads me to the beauty and hope of Isaiah 55, even more striking as a message written for a people in captivity, discouraged and suffering.

The times of Isaiah are not unlike the time we live in today — with poor stewardship for the earth by those who could protect it, with raging conflicts and the destroying of land, homes and families. Each of the stories in this issue begins with degradation, with creation groaning as the Apostle Paul describes in Romans.

But there is hope. Each spring we celebrate the reason for that hope — the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, the first fruit of the new heavens and the new earth, evidence of the reconciliation of all creation to God. And we are privileged and called to participate in this reconciliation.

In these pages, I invite you to reflect on the multifaceted approaches that are bringing renewal to land and communities from Bangladesh to Rwanda to Colombia. Savor the proliferation of gardens and the many ways MCC partners are helping families sustain themselves as they face the threats of changing weather patterns.

Day is dawning as I write this on my front porch. New life is bursting forth; woodpeckers, cedar waxwings, song sparrows and many other birds greet the morning. A bluebird stops by. Recognizing the peace of these moments, and the privilege I have, sparks for me a renewed commitment to participate in God's work of reconciling all creation, including humans.

Together let us consider new ways to protect and repair the earth and its beloved children of God.

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Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation. mcc.org

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Cover story

4 Above the floodwaters

With guidance from an MCC partner, families in Bangladesh have found new ways to grow food along a flood-prone river.

10 First person

Shamima Akter reflects on her role helping women in Bangladesh adapt to increasingly frequent floods.

Features

12 When communities grow together

Rwandan farmers are increasing their yields and strengthening their relationships through conservation agriculture.

16 Healing land and communities

In Colombia, an MCC partner helps farmers diversify their fields and cultivate peace.

Departments

3 MCC news

18 On assignment

Serving in Bangladesh

19 Hello Bangladesh (for children)

MCC news

Find more news at mcc.org



Cambodia

Putting plans in motion

Young adults in rural Cambodia often face a difficult decision: stay close to family in an area with few job prospects, or leave their loved ones to find work in Phnom Penh or even in another country. But through trainings offered by MCC partner Organization to Develop Our Villages (ODOV), youth have a third option. Vocational and business trainings let Hun Rortha of Prey Veng province establish a stable career in motorbike repair close to home. Rortha, shown working on the suspension of a motorbike at his



Syria

Centering joy and friendship

Al-Safina center, an MCC partner in the Old City of Damascus, Syria, provides a safe space for adults with intellectual disabilities to find community, learn new skills and freely express themselves. Through daily workshops, Rita Al-Samara (third from left) has learned to make handicrafts and has formed cherished friendships with other participants.



School Kit Challenge Transform young lives

Take note! The School Kit Challenge is here. This spring and summer, join congregations across the U.S. to assemble kits with school essentials, and MCC will send them to families worldwide. Every pencil helps young people like Gabriel Gol Makoi, Sofia Cholhok and Hellena Nyandur Marial in South Sudan write their own success stories, and every ruler provides hope beyond measure. How many kits can your congregation or family make? Visit mcc.org/school-kit-challenge to learn more.

Seeking sewing kits

When you assemble MCC sewing kits, opportunities burst at the seams for families worldwide. These kits help recipients earn much-needed income through sewing and tailoring businesses.

Based on feedback from international partners, we recently updated our specifications.

Contents (NEW items only)

- 4 spools white thread (all-purpose; cotton/poly or 100% polyester; minimum 250 yds)
- 4 spools black thread (all-purpose; cotton/poly or 100% polyester; minimum 250 yds)
- 1 sewing tape measure (plastic or fiberglass; 150 cm; inch markings optional)
- 1 thimble (metal; medium size)
- 1 pair dressmaker shears (good quality)
- 1 seam ripper
- 1 package needles (minimum 25; assorted sizes)
- 1 package straight pins (minimum 80; round plastic heads preferred)
- Shirt-style buttons (minimum 24; both 2 and 4 holes; black or white; size 1/2-1 in)
- Sew-on snaps (minimum 36; assorted sizes)
- Safety pins (minimum 25; assorted sizes)

Instructions: Sewing kits are distributed in a useful double-drawstring cloth bag (11 3/4 x 16 3/4 in). You may sew the bag yourself, request bags from an MCC collection center or donate contents that we will place in a bag.

Go to mcc.org/kits/sewing to learn more or find drop-off locations. Or contact your nearest MCC office (see p. 2).





Cover story

Above the floodwaters

With guidance from an MCC partner, gardeners with small plots along a Bangladesh river are looking up.

STORY BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
PHOTOS BY FABEHA MONIR/MCC/FAIRPICTURE

Hena Khatun has a courtyard full of reasons to believe that she will be able to feed and care for her daughter and sickly husband, despite the floodwater from the nearby Jamuna River that threatens to cover the land where she lives.

Every rainy season in Bangladesh, usually between June and September, the Jamuna—one of the world’s largest braided rivers—floods several times. Sometimes the floodwater just threatens to enter her courtyard, but at the worst of times it crosses the courtyard, climbs the stairs and covers the concrete floor of the tin house where she’s lived for 11 years. She, like most in the area, can’t afford housing or land further away from the river.

Until the 2023 rainy season, Khatun didn’t even try to plant vegetables on her postage-stamp-size property 30 miles from the city of Bogura, in northwest Bangladesh. Flooding aside, she figured her 870-square-foot courtyard was too small to grow much of anything anyway.



Scan here for video of these ducks and other ways families adapt to flooding.

Ducks, like the one Nikhil Chandra Mondol holds, can survive floods by swimming.

At right, MPUS staff and local women mix compost and soil to use in hanging planters.

animals from being washed away. Ducks, which MPUS provided, are the poultry of choice because they can swim in their enclosure if the water rises. A raised platform built inside Khatun's simple shed creates a second floor, so the female goat that MPUS gave her has a safe refuge from rising water.

"I am proud about this garden," Khatun says. She points out a lemon tree. "Earlier, I used to buy lemons from the market, but now I don't need to buy them." So far, she is cooking what is growing, but as the garden matures and her skills improve, she hopes to sell extra produce.

"Other women, they are very impressed to see my garden," Khatun says. "They also are learning. They never saw vegetables growing in sacks. So, they are also very happy and interested."

Curious neighbors are exactly what MPUS hoped for when they helped Khatun transform her empty courtyard into a demonstration plot, called a climate-smart house. If neighbors see the new ideas working for Khatun, they are more likely to try the methods themselves.

Learning to grow food in a small area is critical for the health of the families living along the river, many of whom are malnourished, says Arefur Rahaman, food security and livelihoods coordinator for MCC in Bangladesh. And the need for flood-resilient gardens will keep growing as climate change continues.

According to Rahaman, in the past three years, the frequency of flooding has increased because of climate change. "It was once or twice a year, but now it is happening four or five times in a year," he says, citing data and farmers' observations. Floods used to come only during the rainy season, but in 2023, some properties were flooded in October as winter crops were being planted.

In response, MPUS holds weekly yard meetings for women—organized into 36 groups of 20 women each—so they can see demonstrations of gardening techniques like the ones used at Khatun's climate-smart house.

Men in the region typically travel to find jobs in construction and to work on large farms. However,

Then, staff from MCC partner Maitree Palli Unnayan Sangathon (MPUS) taught her to look up. The local NGO showed her techniques they'd learned from MCC's agricultural team in Bangladesh.

Now Khatun has eggplant, chiles and cabbage growing in sacks that sit on the ascending shelves of an 8-foot-tall, triangular bamboo structure, called a 3D garden. More eggplant grows in hanging bags, which are out of reach of rising water and can be moved if necessary. Bottle gourds, a favorite ingredient in Bengali cooking, grow on vines that spread across a bamboo canopy.

Families can even take measures to prevent their

this income barely pays for a family's basic needs. The gardening approaches that MPUS teaches help women boost their household income while staying closer to home. In turn, men learn new techniques from their wives, or through additional, coed gatherings held throughout the year.

One technique that families are learning is how to make floating gardens on still water near the river. The gardens—made with naturally buoyant water hyacinth—will rise when the river overflows or when rains are heavy.

In 2022, Zahidul Islam planted two floating gardens and the following summer, he had four. He added a bamboo canopy atop the gardens to grow bottle gourds.

Islam and his neighbors work together to construct their gardens. They start each bed by piling up armload after armload of water hyacinth, with their intertwined roots and leaves, until a rectangular base is formed.

Then, one person will walk on top of the bed and use a machete to chop the upper layer of water hyacinth into smaller pieces. More water hyacinth will be added and the upper layer chopped again over the course of two to three weeks. Then they add compost and plant seeds for crops.

Although the pond will dry up by December, Islam says he can still plant chiles on the structures during the winter and rebuild the beds in early summer for the rainy season.

He can grow enough to feed his six-member family, plus extra to sell at market. "These vegetables are growing without pesticide and extra fertilizers, so this is helping our health," he says. "People know I am growing safe vegetables, so they come to me to buy them."

“[Flooding] was once or twice a year, but now it is happening four or five times in a year.”





Floating gardens in Bogura, Bangladesh. Scan here to learn more about them.



Below, Maloti Khatun, Zahidul Islam, Majeda Begum and Mahmuda Khatun build a floating garden.



Ovagini Rani says she cares for plants (such as this bottle gourd) like they are her children.



The chance to sell extra produce has also benefited Nikhil Chandra Mondol and his wife, Ovagini Rani, who have seen five of their homes get washed away into the river.

Each time, Mondol says, they found a place to build a house by the river again. “We work very hard. We are farmers. We are used to it.”

Three years ago, at the family’s current location, he used river sand to build a plateau about 50 feet above water level. Each year he tops off the plateau with more soil. It has sustained three years of flooding, including two years when the river rose so high, it brought fish to their doorstep.

MPUS helped Mondol and his wife turn this .08-acre property into a climate-smart house. In addition, MPUS staff taught Mondol how to grow seedlings in balls of water hyacinth and compost, which he can sell to other farmers.

Rani says she tends the plants like they are her children. “I feel good, and I feel happy,” she says. “I stay busy with these things, with our livestock, poultry and with our garden.”

Three years into the project, Mondol says he’s still amazed at all the food he can grow on such a small property by planting vertically.

“I like this technology very much because we are getting a profit, and it is totally new and interesting to us,” he says.

Mondol says that he and his wife can earn 5,000 taka (\$45) most months to

add to the 10,000 taka he can make from day labor. They can also give some money to their children, including their youngest who is studying at a university in Dhaka.

While they’re earning more, they’re also spending less. Instead of buying fertilizer, they use earthworms to create compost, and they grow more of

the food they are eating instead of buying from the market.

“Now vegetables, fruits, other things, everything is here,” Mondol says. “Now I am getting enough.” ■

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S. Fabeha Monir, a freelance photographer in Bangladesh, supplied photographs through Fairpicture.

“Now I am getting enough.”

Give a gift - Where needed most

When you give to MCC, you are helping families like these in Bangladesh grow more food and earn income they need to sustain themselves and build a brighter future. Give in the enclosed envelope, online at mcc.org/donate or by contacting your nearest MCC office (see p. 2).



Shamima Akter, above, helps women adapt to flooding along the river where she was raised. Below right, she and colleague Jannatul Naim address a group of women.

First person

Shamima Akter

A field organizer for an MCC partner shares about her work with women living along the Jamuna River in northwest Bangladesh.

AS TOLD TO CHRISTY KAUFFMAN AND LINDA ESPENSHADE

From my childhood, I have lived by the Jamuna River. I love this place. Many faces I know from my childhood, and my relatives are living here.

But my family has moved four times because of flooding or erosion. In 1993, when I was in fourth grade, our village was washed away into the river. It took only seven days for the whole village to be underwater. I still cry when I think of it.

We took shelter on an embankment. All the people were in the same situation, so we could not help each other. Eventually my mother's uncle bought land for us where we took shelter and built a house.

Later, in 2011, a cyclone swept up everything from our family's homestead. I was in Dhaka at the time with my brother and my sister-in-law. When my mother called me to tell me that everything was gone, I fainted.

We went home, but we couldn't use the roads because everywhere there were trees, housing materials and other things that blocked the road. We used the fields to get there. Some people had given my parents bread, so they had only that food and the clothes they were wearing.

I have a bachelor's degree in social science, and I once worked with the Bangladesh Department of Women Affairs. I have been with Maitree Palli Unnayan Sangathon (MPUS, an MCC partner) since April 2021, but I worked with other organizations that partnered with MCC for nine years before that. Now I am married and have two children, and I can walk from my house to the river in five minutes.

When I see women in the communities where MPUS works, I feel for them. When the floodwaters come, they can't sleep at night, and there are no employment opportunities. When there is no work, there is no food.

In this time, people also suffer from

diseases or health problems, especially the children or older people, and there's no way to take them to the doctor. There are not enough boats. Also, if someone dies during the floods, there's no place to bury them. That is a very hard time.

At present the flooding is coming four or five times a year, but earlier it was not like that. Now, with more frequent floods, people are struggling more and suffering with the prices of food. But they cannot afford to live somewhere else.

As part of disaster preparedness, we encourage women to have some first aid materials, such as medicine. We also ask them to keep some dry food in a dry place in case of a disaster.

We advise people to make raised trellises where they can stay during floods, and to have candles and matches and mats to use at nighttime. If someone is sick and there's no boat to get to the hospital, we suggest they make a boat with the banana tree.

We have employment programs like vocational training and are trying to involve the youth with some income-generating activities. They are receiving skill development training, and some of them are working.

I am responsible for nine groups of

20 women each. MPUS is not able to help all the women in the same way. So, if there are 20 members in a group, maybe two of them receive a goat. Two get ducks. Two get hanging vegetable gardens. If a woman receives a goat, she gives the first female kid to another woman in the group. In this case, the first woman can sell the next kid from her goat in the market.

I'm thankful to MCC and MPUS because when people are suffering and passing hard times, we are able to help them. I feel good when I can stand by their side. Sometimes, though, when my help is not enough for a family, I feel really bad.

I am motivated to work for the people because I also have gone through this hard time. When I see the women's suffering, I can feel it very well. I can help them. I can make suggestions. When I am busy with this work, I can forget all my past sufferings.

When the beneficiaries from my nine groups and members of other groups come to the office and see me, they hug and talk with me. That feels good. I am having a good life because I'm working in the project. ■

Shamima Akter is field organizer for MCC partner Maitree Palli Unnayan Sangathon (MPUS). She helps women living along the Jamuna River develop their skills and support their families despite poverty and increasing flooding.

“It took only seven days for the whole village to be underwater. I still cry when I think of it.”



When communities grow together

With guidance from an MCC partner, Rwandan farmers are improving their yields—and their relationships with each other—through conservation agriculture.

STORY BY SIENNA MALIK
PHOTOS BY DENYSE KAMUGWIZA UWERA/MCC/FAIRPICTURE

Jean Bosco Nsanzimana, shown with wife Marie Chantal Nyiramvuyekure, was initially skeptical of conservation agriculture, but has since seen major changes in crop health.



Jean Bosco Nsanzimana was used to getting food from the market—“even though I was a farmer,” he says.

Practices like intensive tilling had left his land, in the Kayonza District of Rwanda’s Eastern Province, depleted and unable to produce much food. And in this region of Rwanda—hotter and lower-lying than much of the country—changing weather patterns have brought additional challenges.

“We face the issue of climate change,” Nsanzimana says. There are times of drought, which destroy crops and lead to hunger. “Or sometimes there is a lot of rain which destroys plants on the farm.”

The cloud-kissed highlands to the north of the country have also experienced erratic, and increasingly heavy, rainfall. “This period used to be sunny, but seasons have

changed,” observes farmer Vincent Hategekimana on a drizzly January day in Northern Province’s Burera District. The rain has changed the planting and harvesting schedule that he and his wife, Verena Nyirantezimana, followed for years.

Hategekimana gestures to a damp heap of beans in their courtyard. “If it was sunny, we could be grinding these beans, however, we can’t because they are not yet fully dry for today.” Downpours can even bring destructive landslides that can carry away months’ worth of work in minutes.

Conservation agriculture training, provided through MCC partner Peace and Development Network (PDN), is helping these farmers, and others throughout Rwanda, find steadiness amid the uncertainty that climate change brings.

Now, when growing conditions are right, these farmers can grow enough to sustain their families, with extra to

sell. Even when conditions are subpar, farmers who follow conservation agriculture practices get at least some crops, whereas neighboring farms may not harvest anything.

The techniques also stabilize the soil, helping to prevent erosion and landslides.

Since 2015, PDN has collaborated with MCC and Canadian Foodgrains Bank to help conservation agriculture take root in the country.

PDN is a network of five organizations from different parts of Rwanda. Each formed in the years following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, seeking to foster unity. As ethnic tensions defused, PDN saw that poverty and food insecurity were becoming the main sources of conflict in the country.

PDN and its member organizations teach farmers the three principles of conservation agriculture: to till the land

as little as possible, to keep the ground covered in mulch or cover crops, and to alternate the types of crops grown on their land. Farmers switch between cash crops like potatoes and nitrogen-fixing legumes like velvet beans, and give land time to lie fallow and restore itself. PDN’s member organizations also distribute live-stock so that farmers have access to manure.

To help these practices spread, PDN establishes farmer field schools of 30 farmers and provides each school with a communal practice plot. After the harvest, each member can take a share of the produce home, and the rest is sold. The farmers decide together how to use the proceeds. Participating farmers are then expected to apply the new practices to their own land and to teach the techniques to five other farmers.

As Rwanda is one of the smallest countries on the African mainland, most farmers look to maximize yields on small

“We face the issue of climate change.”

plots. Conventional agriculture has been the norm for so long that some techniques, like leaving land fallow, can feel counterintuitive for increasing productivity. Nsanzimana learned conservation agriculture techniques from PDN member Collectif des Artisans de Paix et la Reconciliation (CAPR; Collective of Peace and Reconciliation Builders), which operates in Eastern Province. He admits that when a farmer field school came to his community, he was skeptical and joined, “but with dragging feet.”

He recalls that after a short while, “We saw how plants were growing... We started realizing that the method works.” PDN staff note that crops grown following conservation agriculture are greener, fuller, taller and more likely to withstand droughts and heavy

rain. Nsanzimana observes that his maize yields have increased tenfold.

And, through PDN, support was close at hand, he says. Farmers can approach field staff from their local PDN member organization with questions on conservation agriculture, and they have access to veterinarians who can offer advice on livestock.

In the communities it serves, PDN also establishes village savings and loan associations. These allow farmers to save money, accrue interest and obtain loans. Participants have been able to build and repair their homes, purchase large livestock like cows and pay for their children’s tuition. Those who once rented farm-

land often use the money to buy property.

And farmers can withdraw or borrow the money their families need to survive. “When there are effects of climate change and crops are destroyed, we can get a loan...to solve any issue at that moment,” says Jeanne Francoise Maniragena, who lives in Northern Province and is secretary of her association.

The goal is that farmers don’t just live in harmony with the land, but also with each other. Anastase Nduwayezu, assistant project coordinator with PDN, explains that scarcity can lead to discord, but also, “When there’s a good harvest, sometimes there is conflict in the house related to how

“ We started realizing that the method works.”



Techniques like mulching help Vincent Hategekimana and other farmers grow healthy, productive crops.

they manage the yield.” In response, the five organizations offer trainings on topics like conflict resolution and gender equality.

Before attending these trainings, Hategekimana recalls, “I would make decisions on my own. I would decide what and where to cultivate. I would decide to plant beans whereas she wanted potatoes.” Nyirantezimana adds, “We would do it in disarray and it was not giving us any result.”

The trainings taught them how to make decisions about the farm together, which has transformed both the health of their crops and their relationship. “I cannot do it alone, neither can she,” Hategekimana says. “We complete each other.”

Other farmers, like Marie Mukamana of Kayonza, have used what they learned to help neighbors mediate disagreements. “If I had never been trained in conflict resolution among families, I would not be able to help. I would help myself.” But the trainings equipped her with a sense of duty to help others, and with the skills to do so.

Staff hope that one day, the techniques will spread nationwide. Those in farmer field schools are likewise thinking of the future. Five of Mukamana’s six sons are farmers, and she envisions a day that they, along with other community members, all experience the benefits of conservation agriculture.

“The future of agriculture is bright,” she says. ■

Sienna Malik is managing editor of A Common Place magazine. Denyse Kamugwiza Uwera, a freelance photographer in Rwanda, supplied photographs through Fairpicture.

Marie Chantal Nyiramvuyekure, at left, and her family have seen increased yields since adopting conservation agriculture.

Healing land and communities

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ANNALEE GIESBRECHT



“We call this place Eden,” says Eduardo Rodríguez, gesturing to the location he has suggested for our interview. It isn’t hard to see why. A small stream winds its way through lush tropical foliage and smooth boulders; long vines hang from the canopy and dip into the crystal-clear pool created where the stream cascades in a small waterfall. Every now and again, a brightly colored butterfly flutters past. Up near Rodríguez’s house, the temperature is pushing 100 degrees Fahrenheit, but here, the air is fresh and cool.

Rodríguez, pictured above, views his farmland in the community of Vereda Brasil, in the Montes de María region near Colombia’s Caribbean coast, as a paradise today, but that hasn’t always been the case. When he arrived over 30 years ago, he, like many farmers in the area, cleared the land, then primarily planted money-making avocado trees.

His farm withstood the years of conflict that fractured his family and community in the early 2000s.

But then a plague hit his avocado trees in 2008, followed by a devastating drought. The death of the trees left the soil

exposed to the hot Caribbean sun, which, combined with the drought, killed whatever crops remained.

Rodríguez knew it was time to start doing things differently.

In this area of Colombia, climate change is an undeniable reality—vividly apparent in extreme heat and unpredictable rains. Farmers used to expect light rains to arrive in the spring, a signal that it was time to plant. However, in July 2023, rain had yet to fall. The prior year, by contrast, unexpectedly heavy rains caused a creek in the nearby communities of Pichilín and La Florida to overflow, catching residents, unaccustomed to flooding, unawares.

As a result, plants no longer produce the way they did in the past.

“Before, when we planted a soursop tree, we used to get tired harvesting all the fruit,” says Rodríguez. “But now, with these changes, a big tree that used to produce a lot of fruit hardly produces anything.”

These changes to the climate not only threaten individual livelihoods, but the ripple effects can cause a fracturing of communities. When a major drought or flood knocks out a crop for the entire year, farmers may look elsewhere for money, including to illegal mining operations or armed groups.

This area of Colombia, like many others, has experienced decades of armed conflict, and the continued presence of

MCC partner Sembrandopaz encourages farmers to increase their food security by growing a variety of food, including fruit like these oranges.



these groups threatens the fragile peace that MCC partner Sembrandopaz (short for Sembrando Semillas de Paz, Sowing Seeds of Peace) and people like Rodríguez have worked so hard to build.

Sitting by the side of the stream, Rodríguez remembers life during the height of the armed conflict in the region in the early 2000s.

The conflict was highly complex, involving the Colombian military, paramilitary groups and leftist guerilla groups. Entire communities were identified as being supporters of one group or another and threatened, displaced or massacred by that group’s enemies.

During these years, collective action and community organizing were seen as threats and perceived as supporting the guerilla groups.

Rodríguez had been a community organizer. After he was falsely accused by a government informant of aiding the guerrillas, he was held prisoner in Cartagena, a coastal city nearly four hours away, for six months. While he was in prison, he worried about his crops, his livelihood.

In a different incident, Rodríguez and many neighbors were displaced to San Jacinto, the nearest town, because of threats from armed groups. The armed groups were patrolling the highways, and farmers transporting food were sometimes intercepted by the military.

“They said we were going to bring food to the guerillas, and of course that wasn’t the case, we were just trying to

bring it to our families.” But eventually people returned home because, far from their crops and without income, it had become hard to access enough food.

While the conflict in this area of Colombia is no longer as intense as it was in the early 2000s, armed groups are still present, and traumatic experiences of massacres and displacement linger in the memories of its residents. Some communities have remained fragmented, their social fabric frayed by mistrust.

Rodríguez is part of a farmers’ association that, after the 2008 avocado tree blight, started seeking assistance, eventually finding MCC partner Sembrandopaz.

With Sembrandopaz’s support, Rodríguez and the other farmers have learned practices that build resilience to climate change—and also help build peace, because in this region, climate resilience and peace are closely intertwined.

For example, in what Sembrandopaz refers to as “economies for good living,” staff work with farmers like Rodríguez to promote farming techniques like agroforestry and companion planting. This not only helps ensure a steady supply of diverse food available on farmers’ own land, despite increasingly extreme and unpredictable weather. It also means less need to travel elsewhere to pur-

chase food, which is especially important if travel is limited by insecurity.

Today, rather than land full of only avocado trees, Rodríguez’s farm is diverse and full of a variety of trees. His fields are full of staple crops like yams and yucas that grow interspersed with mango, guava and other fruit trees.

Other activities, like reforestation and tree-planting days, not only increase climate resilience but also bring people together in communal decision-making and foster a sense of community care.

And Sembrandopaz and community members teach environmental care to the next generation, so that communities can continue to thrive long into the future. There is hope that children who learn to live in peace with their surroundings—humans, plants and animals—will be less likely to join armed groups or get involved in criminal activities as they grow up.

“If we don’t do anything to change the situation [climate change], the next generations won’t have a place to live out their rights,” says agricultural engineer Etel Salas, part of the economies for good living team. “You can’t have peace where there’s hunger.”

Rodríguez agrees. “We’re trying to do good through conservation of the environment,” he says. “Everything we can to create peace.” ■

Annalee Giesbrecht served with MCC in Latin America and the Caribbean and now works with MCC Canada’s Peace & Justice Office.

“You can't have peace where there's hunger.”



On assignment



Chad Stout delivers a presentation during a training on planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting in Rajshahi Division, Bangladesh.

MCC photo/James Kisku

Serving in Bangladesh

Name: Chad Stout

Hometown: Lewisberry, Pennsylvania (Zion Lutheran Church)

Assignment: I am the planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting coordinator here in Bangladesh. I am based in Bogura, in the north of the country. I visit project sites and communicate with partners, helping to facilitate discussions about the goals, practices and impact of our projects, and about any changes that may need to be made.

Typical day: On some days, I join other MCC staff in conducting monitoring visits with partners. Our partners are up to two hours away, so we leave the MCC office in the early morning. We have short meetings with partner staff, then go out to visit people benefiting from our projects. We'll talk with them, look at project activities and their impact, and listen to feedback until 2 or 3 p.m. After a late lunch at the partner's

office, we sit down with project staff to prepare for upcoming demonstrations, share partner feedback, discuss what we saw in the morning and review project documentation. Around 5 or 6 p.m., we head back to the MCC office.

Other days, I work at the MCC office, which is a five-minute walk from my apartment. I often read the news and schedule my day before our office comes together for prayers at 8:45 a.m. Office days are filled with collaboration. My co-workers and I see how we can improve our projects, learning from project feedback and challenges. After work, I like to stop at the nearby snacks and tea stall for a treat on my way home.

Joys: Rediscovering my mother's and my country and culture. Seeing the full process of intervention from donation to project activity and the results of that.

Challenges: Missing family back in the U.S.

THREE GENERATIONS of Stout's family have served with MCC in Bangladesh, and his mother is from Bangladesh. Scan the QR code to learn more about



him and his family's journey with MCC.

FIND YOUR PLACE

MCC is always looking for people to join our work of serving others in the name of Christ. Go to mcc.org/serve or [linkedin.com/company/mccpeace](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mccpeace) or contact your nearest MCC office to find MCC service opportunities.

for children

hello BANGLADESH

How can you greet someone in Bangla?

Namaskar

(Say "nah-mahs-car")



My name is Sangita Sarkar Nodi.

Age: 9

Lives in: Dhunot, Bogura, Bangladesh

My mother and father and I live along the river. I am in grade four and the third best in my class. After school, I like to play with my friends, especially hide-and-seek.

We have a vegetable garden and mango trees. I can get mangoes from the tree by using a large stick to knock them down.

Sometimes the river floods, and we stay inside. I am afraid of floods because sometimes there are snakes in the water.

I like our baby goats. Sometimes I carry them or feed them. I like to watch them jump.

My favorite food: mangoes **My favorite subject:** English **What I want to be:** doctor

Let's write a Bangla greeting!

People in Bangladesh write using the Bangla alphabet. Using the Bangla alphabet, the greeting "namaskar" that we just learned is written as:

নমস্কার

Can you write "namaskar" using the Bangla alphabet? Start by tracing the following:

Then, write it on your own in the space below:

নমস্কার

Want more practice? Keep copying the word in a notebook or on a sheet of paper!





Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
21 South 12th Street, PO Box 500
Akron, PA 17501 U.S.A.

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If you're 70 ½ and up, QCDs from your IRA let you forge new trails for communities across the globe while reducing your taxable income.

Those with a DAF can make a grant directly to MCC or set a course for recurring or future gifts.

To take the next step in your giving journey, talk to your financial adviser, visit mcc.org/planned-giving or contact **Ron Hershey** at **717.859.1151**.

“ We feel like MCC is trying to exemplify a Christlike approach to loving and serving and helping people. We want to be a part of that. . . . With the tax savings [of a QCD], your money goes a lot further.”

– Marilyn and Bill Brown,
Berea, Kentucky