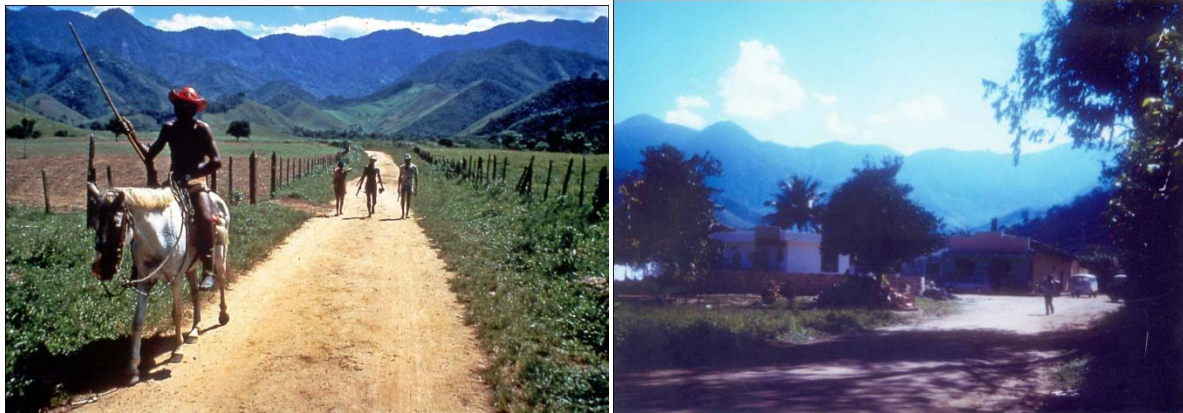


Bananeiras, Brazil is rural village located about 2 hours (140km) Northeast of Rio de Janeiro. In 1978 the Instituto de Assuntos Culturais, a Brazilian affiliate of the ICA US began a Human Development Project.

The old saying "A picture is worth a thousand words" is true. Here are some pictures of Bananeiras then and now.

The pictures below are of the road to Bananeiras and central town square as it was in 1978. While surrounded by mountains and visually beautiful the village had no electricity, running water or health facilities of any kind. All streets were dirt and the only means of transportation was by horse or a broken down bus that traveled once a day from nearby village of Silva Jardim, if the roads were not too muddy.



Lela Jahn leading a session in 1978 for the consult of the Bananeiras Human Development Project. A welcome sign, hung during the consult, is still at the entrance to the village greeting visitors in 2010.



Around 1983 the last ICA staff left Bananeiras and as far as we know no one had been back since. But the seeds of a community discovering a sense of its own self-worth and a vision of its future had been sown. Many years of hard work remained for the citizens of Bananeiras who have successfully fought to bring many of their dreams to fruition. Today, Bananeiras stands out like a brilliant "diamond" amongst its nearby villages, demonstrating what a community can do if it cares enough and has a vision.

Bananeiras as it is in 2010.

A Pousada (hotel) and restaurant in the center of Bananeiras today. One of the stores and cafés.



A general store that was in Bananeiras in 1978 that is now renovated and well stocked in 2010.



Today Bananeiras has wide paved streets with curbs and trash receptors that are emptied twice a week.



Note the sidewalks and yes, that is a public telephone. The mountains block all cell phone transmissions



It was the cleanliness and obvious community pride in Bananeiras that was so amazing. We saw nothing like it in any other city or village we visited during a month's travels throughout Brazil, even in the plush neighborhoods of Ipanema and Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro. Perhaps for this reason Bananeiras has become a weekend getaway for residents of Rio de Janeiro. Below are some of the houses in town.



We only spent a couple hours in Bananeiras that day but we were able to talk to a number of residents who remembered "the Americans," as they put it, even though the project staff was also made up of Australians, Brazilians and even a family from Mozambique. One middle age women came up to Lela and said "Do you remember me? I was the blue eyed girl in the preschool." Others told us of how Dorca, a very young woman from Bananeiras who was the HDP's pre-school teacher, went on to get her education and is now a teacher in a public school in Rio Bonito, the largest city near Bananeiras.

For those who visited Bananeiras, here is a picture of someone you likely met. His name is Alterio, but we all called him "Portuguese." He is retired and still lives with his wife Luce in Bananeiras. We enjoyed discussing ICA staff they remembered and members of the community we remembered. He seemed pleased to see us and reminisce. We were thrilled to see him and witness what he and his neighbors have created in the 30 years since we lived and worked with them; a sign of hope for all to see.



Brazil, at over 200 million people is now the world's 5th largest country. It will be in the spotlight in the next few years as it hosts the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016. We wonder what the TV cameras will decide to show the rest of the world about this Global emerging leader.

Finally, a brief word about some other Brazilians who supported the work in Bananeiras. One was a man born to great wealth who lives in Rio de Janeiro and was a former patron of ICA. Thirty years ago he personally had witnessed our work in Bananeiras and at a Global Women's Forum (led by Lela and Mary Ann Mann) held in another rural community to which he had a special attachment. We had lunch with him and his wife while we were in Rio de Janeiro. He spent the entire time extolling the methods he had witnessed. What struck us the most was, as we were saying goodbye, Sergio paused and said "Thank you. 30 years ago you taught me how not to be afraid of the poor." His company is the largest developer of high-end shopping centers in Brazil and, more importantly, they are also doing remarkable community development work around each of those 16 shopping centers today. When we returned home we sent him these pictures of Bananeiras as it is today. Sergio replied, "If we had a 1,000 people like you we could change all of Brazil in 5 years."

Our visit reminded us there are people all over the world who yearn to discover that there are those who really know how to change the world. Who have the vision, the passion and, most importantly, the methods to do it.

Pictures were taken by Lela Jahn and Don Bayer, two ICA-US staff members of the original Human Development Project, who returned to Bananeiras for the first time in 30 years in September 2010.