

This series looks at the work of EPES in Chile.

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DRAWING UPON ANCESTRAL WISDOM ON FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

In the middle of El Bosque's urban landscape, one comes across a stunning sight: four immense thatch-roofed and -walled *rukas*, traditional residences of the Mapuche people far in the rural south, with sheep grazing in an open expanse comprising two city blocks. It is the Petu Moguelein Mahuidache Original Peoples' National Ceremonial Park. Envisioned by its founder in a dream, it became reality fifteen years ago in a partnership with the municipal government of El Bosque, home to 8,000 Mapuches, who have relocated to the city in the past decades.

This transcultural place of indigenous learning, spirituality and development was the venue for another pioneering EPES event, "*Trawun Nutram: Dialogue and Interchange of Wisdoms on Food Sovereignty*," held October 9. Attended by 40 people, it was an invitation to rethink the food we eat, not only in terms of nutritional value, but also cultivation methods that engender greater autonomy.

In recognition of the traditional wisdom that underlies such concepts, participants began day by gathering around the *rewe*, a sacred outdoor space, marked by a flag and trees intrinsic to Mapuche cosmology. Then came a moment for a *misawun* (sharing of food) and *nutram* (sharing of knowledge) inside the spacious central ruka, structured around a hearth. Following a hearty breakfast, participants met outside in small groups to reflect on the right to nutrition and food sovereignty through EPES' educational board game, "From Seeds to Your Plate."

Near noon, guided by health promoter María Carrasco, of the *Círculo de Mujeres por la Salud*, the women exchanged vegetable seedlings and seeds. At the morning's conclusion, there was a participatory evaluation in which people expressed their appreciation for the unique workshop and especially the opportunity to meet with the Mapuche community.



In late October, EPES met with immigrant women to discuss their health needs and access to public health in Chile.



Karen Anderson, EPES Founder and ELCA Global Mission Personnel in Chile, shares EPES' materials in Creole about the right to health at an activity in downtown Santiago.

WELCOMING STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND

The EPES Foundation joined forces with many other civil society organizations to decry racist and xenophobic attacks that on September 27, 2021 reached their most deplorable expression in the northern city of Iquique. That day, a mob of ultra-nationalist demonstrators violently attacked a tent encampment of mostly Venezuelan immigrants, burning their meager belongings, while police looked the other way.

The immigrant families, with many children and elderly, were a small group among the thousands that have traveled thousands of miles to Chile since the beginning of the year, hoping to find a better future and reunite with family members already here. But Chilean government policy has ignored their humanitarian needs, refusing to issue visas or temporary residency permissions, resulting in precarious entry and living conditions.

Since the violent acts of intolerance in Iquique EPES and others have advocated immigrant rights. On October 3, EPES joined a march in downtown Santiago and offered immigrants guidance on access to public health clinics, Covid-19 vaccination, prevention of sexually transmitted disease and other health-related concerns.

EPES actions echo the position of international entities such as Amnesty International and the InterAmerican Human Rights Commission that have called on Chile to protect the dignity of immigrants. This rises from the conviction that all persons have the right to seek safe haven and stable living conditions when life becomes untenable in one's own country.

COMMUNITY GARDEN SOWED AT EPES CONCEPCIÓN



Vegetable gardening initiatives arising in pandemic times got a new boost on October 4 when the EPES center in Concepción took its initial steps to create a community garden.

On a bright southern hemisphere spring day, the course, Training Promoters In Nutrition and Community Action, got under way for women of Biobio region community organizations in southern Chile. Course facilitator, Valeria Rodríguez, member of the Chilean Educational Garden Network, instructed participants in the basics of starting a family garden.

Valeria shared her knowledge of how to plan a vegetable plot, where to locate it, how to prepare the soil, grow plants, and water them. She offered tips on how to plant various kinds of vegetable crops, while also opening reflection about the importance of growing our own vegetables. EPES training always has a hands-on learning focus, and this course was an example of that methodology in practice.



Left: The gazebo, built by Trinity Lutheran of Owatonna, MN at the center in Concepción is being utilized as an outside meeting space.

Above: The raised beds used to grow food and herbs is an approach that can be easily replicated at the home of the participants.



Conversation moved from agroecological theory to practice in building raised beds, employing structures that are easily replicated at each home. Agroecology encompasses autonomy to augment family and local economies. It is an approach that also creates networks to share food, plants and medicinal herbs. This practice is helpful not only for moments of hardship, such as the pandemic, but also throughout our lives, as it fosters the nutritional health of every person and their community.

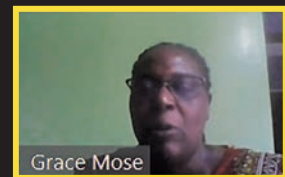
EMPOWERING WOMEN ON TWO CONTINENTS:

AFRICAN AND CHILEAN COMMUNITY HEALTH MONITORS MEET AGAIN

On October 27, a weekday morning in Chile and mid afternoon in east Africa, women from Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, whose advocacy work was empowered by the EPES International Training Program several years ago, came together virtually to assess lessons learned and share how these were adapted to their own contexts.

Grace Mose, Mary Nasibi and Joyce Amoyi from the Nairobi-based Hope Foundation for African Women (HFAW), Generous Turinawe of Agape Community Transformation (ACT HEAL) Uganda, and Chengetai Mano of The Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa that serves 15 member churches in 10 southern African countries, attest to how popular education, strategic planning, community participation, and creative evaluation methods have become intrinsic to their work and key elements for transformation.

Although the day-to-day problems that affect east African women and Chilean women are different, the root causes are the same: a societal structure that exploits and treats women as second-class citizens. In marginalized communities on both continents, women are the mainstay of their families. Thus, on both continents, promoting sexual and reproductive rights, confronting domestic violence, and striving for economic autonomy are key to empowering not only women but also their communities.



As Grace Mose noted, "Women sustain everything: they provide food, sell in the market, sustain the family. Women are everything. That's why when we empower women, we are empowering the community. Women are the foundation of our communities and for change." The team-building game (shown lower right) encourages productivity, motivation, and leadership, increasing confidence, self-esteem and self-expression.



EPES health promoters of El Bosque and their east African counterparts have created community vegetable gardens, which are now flourishing in both places. In rural Ugandan communities, ACT has taught women and men perma-gardening techniques to improve crop yield and quality, and to prevent malnutrition. In Kenya, HFAW provides women with a goat and chickens. All these initiatives improve nutrition while also enabling economic autonomy for women and their communities.



Caregivers learn how to give each other and themselves relief from stress.

EPES WORKSHOPS OFFER PSYCHOSOCIAL RELIEF

The protest movement that arose in October 2019 brought hardship to the daily lives of working class women. They had more trouble obtaining needed groceries and faced increased crime and intimidating police presence. The onset of the pandemic in 2020 augmented what already was a highly stressful situation for many, including EPES health promoters, who lost their jobs or had to make due with lower incomes, while also feeling isolated, over-burdened as caregivers, and afraid of the disease. The result has been stress, anxiety, and general malaise in women and their families.

In response, in 2021 EPES increased the emotional support initiative it had piloted the year before. EPES sponsored two psycho-social support workshops of four online sessions each, led by EPES educators and Eugenia Acuña, a Chilean U.S. resident of the United States, who is a coach and healing facilitator. Some 44 women, members of 20 organizations associated with EPES in Concepción and Santiago, have attended the workshops.

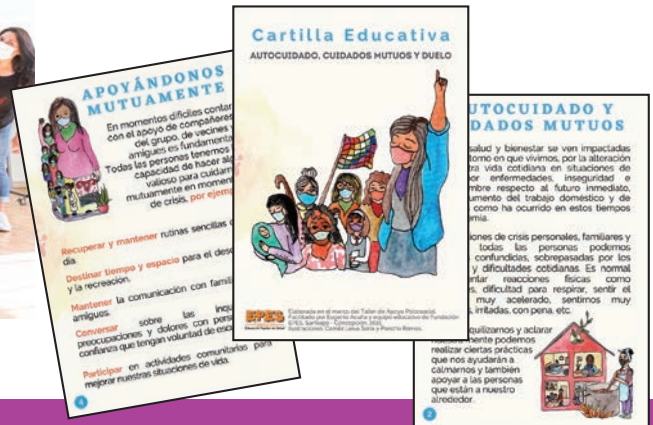
Employing guided meditation, relaxation, active listening, and group reflection techniques, Eugenia helped participants rethink and cope with mental health self-care, mourning, and caregiver burden.

By the time the workshops ended, every one of the women said she felt greater serenity and 85% of the women said they felt less stress.

The emotional relief did not stop there. The workshop equipped participants with tools, including printed material, to replicate their experience alone and with others. An estimated 89% continue to apply some of the techniques to keep their own stress at bay, while 63% say they apply the exercises to help others. "I learned to calm my fears and that many others feel the same anxieties," one woman remarked.

Eight women from the original workshops replicated what they had learned in three sessions attended by 21 people. Moreover, they shared self-help techniques with another 13 women in two sessions specifically geared to helping gender violence survivors recover their autonomy.

The psycho-social support workshops generated significant experiential learning, equipping women's organizations and the EPES staff with key content to protect emotional health, process grief, and better cope with the stress of constant caregiving.



FOUR SESSIONS

Intro and Mental Health Self-Help:

- Recognize moments when we feel good, in balance, flowing, happy.
- Identify what prevents us from feeling happy, calm, and clear.
- Group reflection, brief somatic exercises.
- Guided meditation to identify a favorite, peaceful place where we feel calm.

Mental Health and Mourning – How to Cope:

- Emotional impact of mourning affects an entire community.
- Stages of grief
- Small groups practiced active listening to identify stages of grief participant was in or the stages they saw among members of their communities.

Mental Health and Caregiver Crisis:

- Gender roles in a household and caregiving tasks.
- In small groups, participants discussed who in their families handles which tasks, reflecting on the importance of each, and the effects of carrying the burden of family mental health work.
- How to make known our own needs to be cared for by the community.
- Embodied exercises and guided meditation of gratitude.

Self-Help and Mutual Care in Organizations:

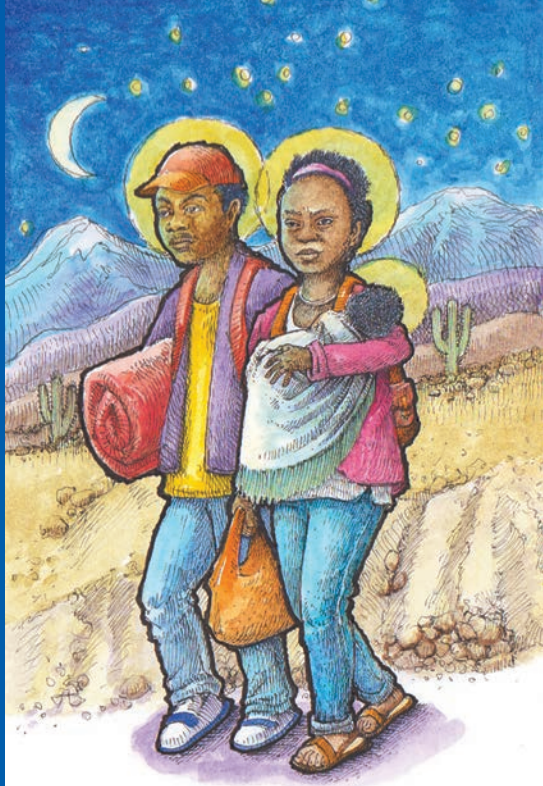
- Co-dependence and interdependence in communities.
- Images of group care and the personal qualities each person contributes to her group.
- Group norms that foster self-care and mutual care.
- Somatic exercise and guided meditation connecting with and giving thanks to nature that help us find inner peace.

The Work of Christmas

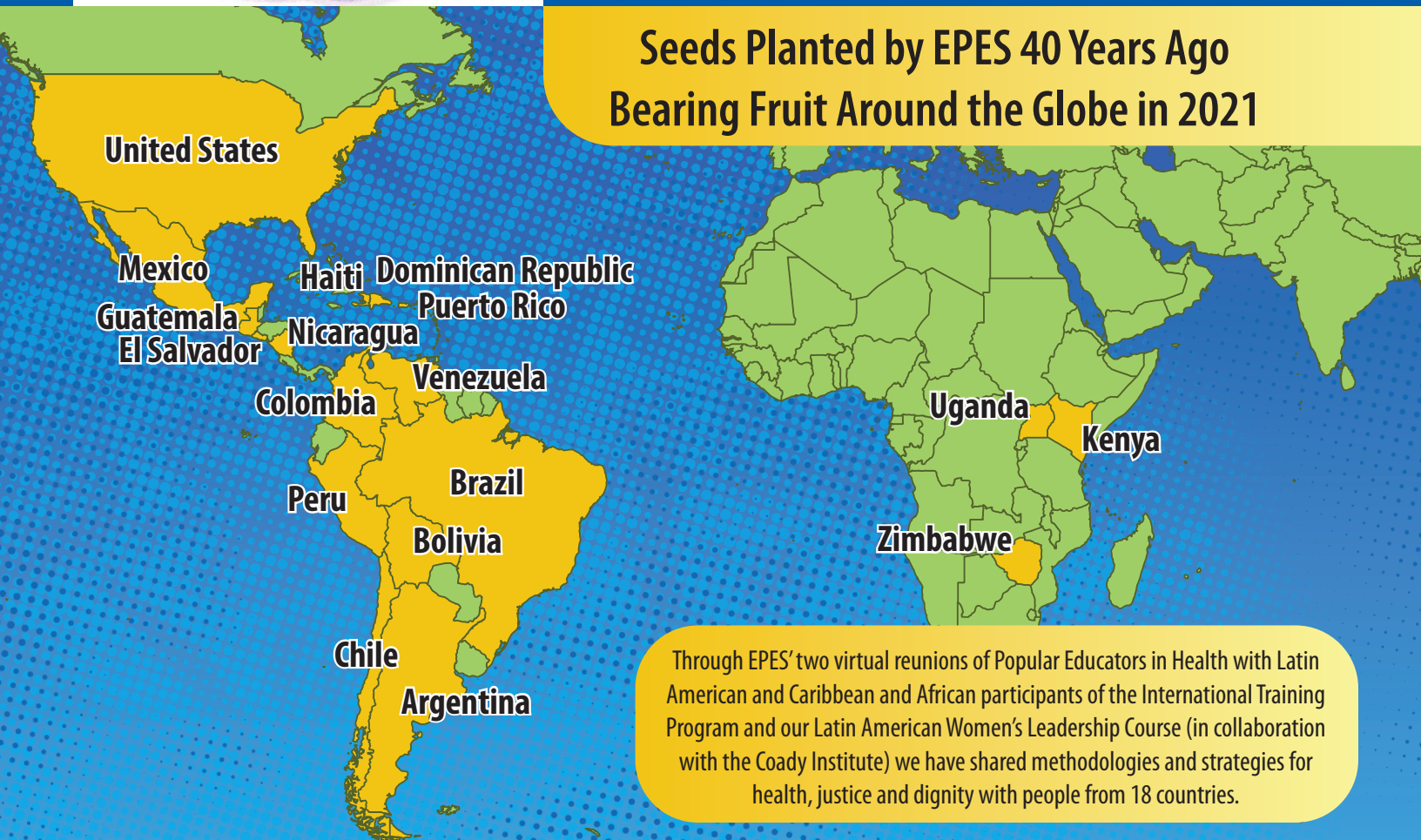
When the song of the angel is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers and sisters,
To make music in the heart.

– Howard Thurman



Seeds Planted by EPES 40 Years Ago Bearing Fruit Around the Globe in 2021



Through EPES' two virtual reunions of Popular Educators in Health with Latin American and Caribbean and African participants of the International Training Program and our Latin American Women's Leadership Course (in collaboration with the Coady Institute) we have shared methodologies and strategies for health, justice and dignity with people from 18 countries.



EPES was created in 1982 to promote health with dignity for the poor through empowerment, mobilization and collective action. It began as a program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) and maintains close ties nationally and internationally with the Lutheran church and is an ELCA Global Mission supported ministry. EPES became an independent, non-profit Chilean foundation in 2002.

LEARN ABOUT OTHER EPES ACTIVITIES AT:

www.epes.cl or Action for Health in the Americas (AHA): www.actionforhealth.org or Chile Libre de Tabaco: www.chilelibredetabaco.cl On Facebook: EPES Fundación; Action for Health in the Americas; Red Chile Libre de Tabaco.

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