

# Diagnosis of Artisan Skills and Materials in Targeted Areas of Colombia

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**Report**  
**Diagnosis of Artisan Skills and Materials in Targeted Areas of**  
**Colombia**

**for**  
**Chemonics International Inc.**  
**Colombia Alternative Development (CAD) Project**

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## **Over view**

### **1. Bogota**

- 2.1. Artesanias de Colombia**
- 2.2. Escuela de Artes y Oficios**
- 2.3. Convenio Andres Bello**
- 2.4. Zio A'i**
- 2.5. Maconga**
- 2.6. Anaida**
- 2.7. Proexport**
- 2.8. The Pottery**
- 2.9. The Image Bridge**

### **2. Cauca**

- 3.1 FUNDEBAP**
- 3.2. Manos Amigos**
- 3.3. CORSEDA**
- 3.4. Recommended Next Steps in Cauca**

### **3. Narino**

- 4.1 FUCIE**
- 4.2. Limon Piel**
- 4.2. Eduardo Munoz**
- 4.3. Cooperativa Trabajadores Asociados Ecotema**
- 4.4. Laboratorio Colombiano de Diseno**
- 4.5. Casa de Barniz**
- 4.6. Recommended Next Steps in Narino**

### **4. Putumayo**

- 5.1. Fundaempresa**
- 5.2. ARMAZON**
- 5.3. Recommended Next Steps in Putumayo**

### **5. Huila**

- 6.1. Recommended Next Steps in Huila**

### **6. Tolima**

- 7.1. Recommended Next Steps in Tolima**

### **7. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **8. Appendices**

- 1) List of Materials, Techniques & Products by Department**
- 2) List of Useful Artisan Associations, Artisan Enterprises, and Organizations, by Department**
- 3) List of Resources for Technical Assistance**
- 4) Questionnaire Distributed to Artisan Businesses**

## **1. Overview**

I was contracted by Chemonics International's Colombia Alternate Development Project (CAD) to identify artisan skills and materials that are readily available in communities participating in the alternative development program, especially the veredas and cabildos committed to the Putumayo early eradication projects. Further, I was charged with identifying and recommending specific products from the region that might be placed effectively in mainstream markets. To accomplish these tasks, I spent 17 days in Colombia, meeting with project staff, individuals and organizations working in Bogota, and artisans and organizations throughout the project area. I was accompanied by Maria Jenny Hurtado, who is responsible for implementing programs in the project area.

In Bogota, I met with CAD and PNDA staff, and with several NGOs, organizations and individuals involved with different aspects of artisan enterprise development. I also visited several stores selling handcrafts and got a good idea of what sort of products make it into mainstream domestic markets and what prices they command. In visits to the cities of Popoyan, Pasto, Puerto Asis, Neiva and Ibague, I assessed handcraft samples and available raw materials and interviewed artisans. This report includes a summary the meetings I had, of the products I found that have appeal for export markets, and of the apparent capabilities of the producer groups I met with. I have also included notes on organizations and individuals that could provide assistance to artisan enterprises in the project area.

## **2. Bogota**

### **2.1. Artesanias de Colombia**

We met with Dr. Cecilia Duque Duque, executive director of Artesanias de Colombia, and with other staff there. The premier handcrafts development organization in the country, Artesanias de Colombia is a public private partnership, currently operating under the governance of the Ministry of Economic Development. They work to preserve

artistic traditions and invigorate artisan enterprises. Though they are sometimes criticized for monopolizing the sector, the organization unquestionably provides excellent design assistance and marketing opportunities to artisans throughout the country. They are managing several strategies for the promotion of the handcrafted sector. With Proexport, they produce an annual fair, Expoartesania, which attracts foreign buyers as well as the general public and which generates about \$2.5 million for Colombian artisan enterprises. They also work closely with Proexport to support artisan enterprise involvement in trade fairs abroad. They are developing a “Plaza de Artesanos,” a shopping and entertainment center expected to be a great attraction in Bogota. Another current project is the production, with Corporacion Andino de Fomento, of a wholesale craft fair which will feature the work of artisans from all five Andean countries. It will be held in Bogota in October. They operate two shops in Bogota in which they retail their own line of Colombian handcrafts. They also export, concentrating on what they call “Colombia Look”, a sophisticated style which makes good use of a variety of traditional handcraft techniques. They have an impressive resource library of literature on the subject of Colombian handcraft. The librarian provided me with a bibliography of the literature pertaining to the project area.

The organization’s offerings to artisans include a design course, and training and training materials on various aspects of artisan enterprise management. They have taught these classes through NGO’s, chambers of commerce, and governmental agencies around the country. They are working or have worked in all of the five departments I visited. One of the several design laboratories they have set up around the country is in Pasto. It is charged with providing design assistance to artisans in Narino, Cauca, and Putumayo. Artesanias de Colombia is also involved in an effort by the Colombian Ministry of Telecommunications to provide internet access to rural communities, called Conectividad. The laboratory could be well positioned to be a local center for the portal.

Dr. Luis Jairo Carillo, director for development, expressed his willingness to facilitate our getting contact information for all the artisan groups they have provided training to or received proposals from in the project area. In our visits with artisans in the project area,

we asked for opinions on Artesanias de Colombia. It is clear that the design assistance and marketing support they have provided has made a great difference to artisans in each department. Concerns center on occasional inappropriate use of indigenous designs, lack of follow-through with training, and insufficient impact in rural and remote communities. But it will certainly be useful for the project to consider various ways in which to collaborate with Artesanias de Colombia. A review of their literature on the project area would also be appropriate as a key part of the planning process for any initiative involving artisan enterprises.

## **2.2. Escuela de Artes y Oficios**

We met with Maria Isabel Restrepo, director of the Escuela de Artes y Oficios, which is a vocational training institute concentrating on woodworking, but also including silver and leatherwork and a new program in textiles. They teach 2-6 month long courses and provide space on their website for alumni to show a photo of their work and solicit business. They have a very active alumni association, including some who are available to teach handcrafting skills or design. They provide artisan students with technical training, design assistance, and help in developing their enterprises, including training in costing and pricing and a retail fair every six months. Members of their faculty are also available for teaching classes in outlying areas, and many also serve as trainers for Artesanias de Colombia.

## **2.3. Convenio Andres Bello**

Convenio Andres Bello, working throughout Latin America with multilateral governmental support, is dedicated to promoting culture, education, and the sciences. They have a division dedicated to the promotion of handcrafts that may be able to be useful to the project. I met with Anne Pechoux, who has background experience in her own export business and with the national agency, Proexport. She is currently an advisor in the organization's handcrafts program. Her colleague in the program, Diego Garcia-Reyes, worked for Artesanias de Colombia as they set up their design laboratories. They

are well positioned to make recommendations of consultants to provide technical assistance.

#### **2.4. Zio A'i**

Zio A'i is a foundation begun in Putumayo by the Cofanes people and dedicated to recuperating and saving indigenous languages and traditions, beginning with their own. They maintain offices in Bogota as well as in Putumayo. They have produced an extraordinary document, the "Plan de Vida Pueblo Cofan" which lays out a strategy for recuperating and revitalizing cultural knowledge and tradition. They are implementing the strategy in their own community and are eager to share it with other indigenous people. Their first priority is education; their second is artisan enterprise development, and their third is community organization. The Cofanes make up 50% of the population of indigenous people in 3 municipalities in Putumayo. Four other indigenous ethnic groups are present in these municipalities, and two of those have already lost their language. At this point they are relearning handcraft traditions and only producing in their spare time and in the rainy season, but they are interested in developing artisan enterprise with their abilities and local materials. They had their first experience selling their products at Expoartesanas 2001, which was a great success. Their products include beaded bracelets and animal figures, combs made of vegetable fibers, handbuilt ceramics, bags in chambira, a vegetable fiber, seed bead jewelry, and wooden sculpture. Though they are well organized as a community group they will need training in all aspects of business management to be successful in enterprise.

#### **2.5. Maconga**

Consuela Bermudez de Garcia, proprietor of Maconga boutique, is a fashion designer. She sells most of what she designs from her shop, but she also exports fabrics which she has designed and developed, some of them of silk from Cauca. She is interested in expanding that part of her business. She could serve specialty fashion and home fashion markets in the United States and Italy. The fabrics she has developed are of hand pulled

and handspun silk. Some are handwoven and some are industrially woven. The industrially woven ones are the most efficient to produce, but certain mechanical adaptations are necessary for weaving handspun silk. She works with silks of several grades, designing fabrics that make good use of very rough-spun third grade silk as well as the finest. In addition, she has experimented with making handmade paper from silk fiber scraps that cannot be spun. There are good possibilities for the development of a silk industry in Colombia and Maconga could be a very helpful player.

## **2.6. Anaida**

Aida Palacios is one of the few exporters working in the project area and expressing some interest in increasing her investment. She was a manager at Artesanias de Colombia for years and worked through that organization with indigenous peoples who were interested in recovering lost arts and making sustainable businesses from them. She continues to work with several of these groups in her export business, but says that most of them have not sustained their enterprises. They often lack a degree of professionalism that is required for successfully serving markets out of the region. Though exporters often find themselves coaching artisan groups to provide the service that is required, Aida finds the extent to which she can do this is limited. Another problem she deals with is the diminishing base of raw materials for many of her most popular vegetable fiber handbags and baskets. Much of the forest that these plants grow wild in has been cut so responsible exporters must encourage artisans to conserve by harvesting selectively or cultivating the vegetable fibers they use.

## **2.7. Proexport**

Proexport, an agency of the Ministry of Commerce, promotes export activity in four areas: agriculture, textiles, services, and handcrafts. I met with Ana Maria Lleras, who works in the promotion of handcrafts. She also serves on the board of directors of Artesanias de Colombia. I met with Ana Maria in an effort to become familiar with more export companies that might work in the target area. Though Proexport's activities such

as Expoartesanas and the training they have Artesanias de Colombia provide are geared toward the artisan, they have also found it is important to work with exporters and consolidators. They are, therefore, in a good position to help the project find exporters who can work in the project area. They have a space reserved at Sources, the new George Little Management Show which will debut in New York next year. They show regularly at Ambiente and Tendence in Frankfurt and they will also support exporters in including more new artisan lines in their offerings at these shows. In Proexport's estimation, the inputs that are needed to improve handcraft exports from most regions are, new product development, revised pricing structures, and improved packing for export shipments. As they participate in international trade shows and trade missions, Ana Maria and her colleagues are working on a market-led strategy to get appropriate training to the artisans in all regions of the country.

The agency is working closely with several universities to provide consulting services and training to artisans. Participants in the Expopyme fair have completed a nine-month course which resulted not only in a diploma but also in a business plan. Though no artisans from the five departments I visited have participated so far, this course, or other appropriate training, could be provided in any department. Trainings are arranged by region through chambers of commerce.

Ana Maria provided me with a CD-Rom which introduces the products and abilities of 188 artisans from around the country. It is arranged by region and includes artisans from Neiva and from Pasto. It will be useful in moving forward efforts to establish significant manual industry in the region.

## **2.8. The Pottery**

I met with John Stephenson, owner of The Pottery, the largest exporter of handcrafts in the country. In business for 35 years, The Pottery currently works with 50 different artisan groups and sells to importers in 14 different countries. Though the black pottery from La Chamba is their only current offering from the departments I visited, John is

interested in increasing his investment in the 5 departments we talked about. He is also specifically interested in several of the products I have identified, especially wood and bamboo accent pieces, and musical instruments.

Describing his current business, John comments that he spends about 30% of his time providing support and information to the artisans he works with so that they can serve him better. He notes that they lack resources for attending international fairs, but he responds to Proexport's efforts by sharing his booth space with artisans they assist in attending international trade fairs. The informal training he provides them as they work the fair is very valuable. He often continues to assist them as a broker after the fair. John finds that in his own line, production supply is sometimes a problem, but never so much one as the high costs of production are. Price is always a challenge to his business. I asked whether a free trade zone in a rural department would make a difference to him and he says not because as a trading company he does not pay export tax anyway, and the artisans who sell to him do not pay sales tax.

Current top-sellers for The Pottery include: furniture made from reclaimed and recycled wood, blown glass, iron, carved candles, their own ceramics, which they produce in Bogota, and the black ceramics of Tolima. They also sell numerous other home accent and gift products. The Pottery could easily act as exporter and consolidator to any importer who wanted to begin to explore doing business in Colombia. Their length of time in business suggests that they could be successful in inspiring confidence in new importers.

## **2.9. The Image Bridge**

I met with Marcella Echavarria, executive director of The Image Bridge, a major international public relations and advertising firm. She serves on the board of directors of the Escuela de Artes y Oficios and also works closely with Artesanias de Colombia. We talked about the potential of branding Colombia silk. She thinks there is good potential for the fiber and believes The Image Bridge could do for Colombian silk what

Cotton Incorporated has done for US cotton. If a market study suggests this could be true, it would probably be very valuable to work with The Image Bridge.

### **3. Cauca**

In Popayan local handcrafts have a significant market in the fair for Holy Week, which is a major event in the region and the country. The chamber of commerce, working with the board that produces the Holy Week fair, mounted an exhibition by nearly 100 artisans for my review. Many of the artisans who participated make most of their sales for the year at the Holy Week fair. Of the work they presented to me, I found the products of 20 to be market-ready and bought samples from them. Raw materials I identified as viable possibilities for industry development in Cauca include silk, totumo, fique, and recycled paper. I found interesting products in all these materials and can imagine lines developing around them. I also found strong artisan associations working in silk, CORSEDA being the largest. I found two excellent community development organizations working in viable materials, FUNDEBAP working in totumo, and the Parque Nacional Natural Purace containing tagua as well as interesting bamboos and woods, and laurel for candles. I found strong design abilities in these and other, less attractive, materials. The quantity of artisans who turned out for the event speaks well for the ability present in the area and for the local government's ability to mobilize an effort.

Artesanias de Colombia did a diagnostic here as they were developing the idea of the design laboratory that they located in Pasto. It would be valuable to review this document in preparation for any plans for artisan enterprise development in the area. The Chamber of Commerce in Popayan has a database of the artisans who participated in the exhibition, which they can make available to the project and this will also be a valuable resource. I had each participant answer a questionnaire (appendix 4) in order to learn more about their offerings and abilities. Participants who offer something of potential interest are listed in appendix 1.

### **3.1. Manos Amigas**

Interesting products in the vegetable fiber know as fique, a kind of sisal, include a variety of handbags, handmade paper, and a very good line of handwoven rugs. Manos Amigos, located in Santander de Qilichau, produces a variety of interesting products of fique.

They weave rugs on treadle looms, make paper and a variety of books, and sculpt decorative objects of papier mache. There are 30 active producers, located in northern Cauca, in the municipalities of Silvia, Caldono, and Pienamo. They produce rugs at a rate of 6/day/weaver, or about 1000 pieces per month. They would be appropriate for immediate placement in US decorative rug markets.

### **3.2. FUNDEBAP**

FUNDEBAP, a foundation and community development organization working in the Patiano community of El Borde, is following an agenda to make use of the totumo tree, conserving local stands of the tree, planting more, and making use of all that the tree offers. The tree is valuable for the way it conserves moisture in the soil; for the fact that trees are spaced 7 meters apart so there is plenty of room to grow other things between them; for their fruit, which has medicinal properties and is also used to make a shampoo; for the mates they produce, which can be fashioned into decorative objects and utilitarian vessels; and for its wood, which is useful in building. FUNDEBAP is working with young people in the community to nurture their entrepreneurial abilities, creating conservation-minded leaders for the future. They currently work on a 30-hectre hacienda in the community and are pursuing a goal of creating a totumo reserve of 50,000 hectres. Seventy-five young people are involved now and it is expected that the number will double over the next year. There are 5000 very poor women in the community who currently work as recyclers. FUNDEBAP hopes to include them as they are able to generate more business for various totumo products. This would be an excellent partner organization for the working in this area.

### **3.3. Departamento de Medio Ambiente**

We had an informative meeting with Maria Teresa Amaya and her assistant, staff from Parque Nacional Natural Purace. The park has a strong mission to preserve biodiversity, natural beauty, and natural resources. Staff are employed by the national Ministry of Environmental Protection, which was created to take care of national parks, in a system based on the US national parks system. This particular park has been identified as a “hot spot”, a key spot in global climate regulation. Within its 83,000 hectares, the park protects four major rivers, high mountain forest, volcanoes, lakes, and hot and cold springs. Since there is no tourism to sustain the parks at this time, staff are looking at the possibility of developing environmentally sustainable businesses in the areas around the parks. Artisan enterprise development is one possibility they are considering. There are about 70 artisans in the area immediately around the park, many of whom are ethnic Yanacuna. These artisans work in a variety of media, the most interesting of which include tagua, wood, wool, and musical instruments. This year they participated in the Holy Week fair in Popayan for the first time and were successful. It is especially interesting to note that there is tagua in the area, a popular material for a wide variety of natural products. Musical instruments of the area are also of interest for export markets. Honey and butterfly farming also show promise. It would be valuable to explore the possibility of exploiting local tagua resources, as well as to begin to seek export markets for those products of the area which appear to be market-ready.

### **3.4. CORSEDA**

The silk industry in Cauca was started some 20 years ago by a Korean firm which has since pulled out, leaving trained mulberry farmers and silk weavers to associate and do their best to continue in business. There are eleven local associations of silk producers, but CORSEDA, with 260 members and another 100 occasionally contracted workers, is the largest and best organized. They currently sell a line of shawls and scarves that they have developed. They work in natural undyed silk, as well as well as with vegetable dyes

and with acidic dyes. Customers are local, in Bogota, and in Spain. Prices and current product selection appear to be fairly reasonable for export to the US.

They have also sold their yarn to factories in Medellin, with varying success, as some of these customers are very slow to pay. Cokosilk, a company in Pereira, buys cocoons to process into silk yarn in a semi-industrial process. CORSEDA has used some of this silk for their handweaving operation, but the resulting fabric and products were not well accepted by their clients as it yields a fabric with a stiffer hand than the handspun yarn does. Using this yarn also displaces the handspinners, who need work. Selling yarn by the kilo, CORSEDA gets 170,000pesos/kilo, whether it is pulled or spun.

It is interesting to note that even though the machine spun silk is not appropriate for handspinning, it is a very fine quality silk, with an international appeal for industrially produced fine linens and lingerie. Cauca currently produces a significant enough amount of high quality silk that it would be worth exploring the possibility of branding Colombian silk as a specialty fiber. The first step should be a market study to determine whether there is, in fact, a place in the market for Colombian silk fiber and silk textiles.

### **3.5. Suggested Next Steps for Cauca**

With the skills, materials and labor force available in Cauca, I suggest that the project:

- 1) Get a copy of the database of artisans of the area from the chamber of commerce.
- 2) Review Artesanias de Colombia's diagnostic of artisan abilities in the area.
- 3) Find out about the free trade zone we heard is being established in Cauca.
- 4) Do a market study to determine whether there is space in the US market for the Colombian silk, for existing products and for fabric that could be produced for the fashion and home fashion industries.
- 5) Introduce fique rugs in US home furnishings markets.
- 6) Connect totumo producers of FUNDEBAP with US customers for decorative objects and to companies who could use them for packaging. Invite Aveda and The Body Shop to experiment with totumo pulp as an ingredient in shampoo. Work with

FUNDEBAP on conservation and reforestation efforts. Work with FUNDEBAP on cultivating the highest-yield crops possible in the spaces between the trees.

- 7) Work with the Parque Nacional Natural Purace on promoting sales of products produced by artisans in the area. Explore the possibility of exploiting the tagua resource in the park.

#### **4. Narino**

In Narino we visited Pasto and were hosted by FUCIE. Staff took us to several artisan workshops. The most interesting local art is barniz de Pasto, though woodworking may have the greatest potential for generating alternative income.

##### **4.1. FUCIE**

In Pasto we met first with the team at PLANTE and then went with them to meet with FUCIE, an NGO working with artisan groups and other microentrepreneurs throughout the area. Founded by a group of local university students 20 years ago, FUCIE manages a variety of productive and developmental programs, though their initial programs all centered on building handcraft businesses. Several artisan groups were identified initially. They work in iraca, a palm straw which is produced in great quantity in the town of Sandona; barniz de Pasto, a lacquer made from a leaf which is produced mostly within the city but which makes use of raw material that is brought in from Putumayo; wood, which is worked in many rural home-based workshops around the area; and leather, which is worked especially in the town of Belen. Recent projects have covered many areas, but one of particular interest is a diagnostic of more than 40 area artisan associations to determine what they need to be successful businesses. FUCIE is willing to make their diagnostic available to us.

A recent effort by FUCIE and other local organizations to strengthen artisan businesses in Belen resulted in many artisans participating in fairs regionally and nationally and in some exports to Ecuador. Most of the technical assistance provided was in the area of

design. An evaluation of the project determined that more assistance is called for to complete the successful commercialization of leathers from the area, especially in production systems and in packaging. Proexport is in the process of taking a critical look at the ability of local leather and straw work to compete internationally. Their findings can be made available for the project's review.

FUCIE has been part of a project funded by the InterAmerica Foundation which worked on establishing associations of artisans. One of these that might be of particular interest to the project is FEDAN, which includes artisans in Pasto and in Putumayo. It was stronger in the past than it is now, but it still exists. FUCIE works as an umbrella organization for several artisan groups and operates a revolving loan fund, which serves them. They work closely with the local chamber of commerce.

In their work with various artisan groups, FUCIE has worked with Artesanias de Colombia to provide design modifications. Apparently, artisans continually suggest other ways in which Artesanias de Colombia could help strengthen their enterprises, but since the organization is committed to maintaining their focus on design, FUCIE is thinking of taking on a commercialization component themselves. With tourism down, handcraft businesses are suffering and FUCIE has been looking for other ways to work with local communities, including providing personal growth and development training to community members. One goal here is to build trust within and between artisan groups.

A visit to the central market, Bombena, was instructive. We saw a variety of wood, barniz, wheat straw, and gesso products, produced locally and in Ecuador. Many handcraft shop owners buy wood products from artisans in the countryside and contract barniz artisans in town to decorate them. There are many small woodworking shops in the rural area around Pasto. They used to serve a customer base in Pasto that was made up of local furniture buyers and of tourists. Both these markets have diminished: there is no tourism in the area now and manufactured furniture is readily available at low prices. If the forests are abundant, it is apparent that there is skill that could be used to make a variety of handcarved products.

FUCIE's work is not limited to Narino, and has included projects in Putumayo. It would be worth exploring their efficacy and local reputation and considering working with them. There is a competitor organization, CONTACTAR, which should also be researched.

#### **4.2. Limon Piel**

FUCIE staff we went to a leather workshop called Limon Piel, where we met with Lyda Montana and arranged to get a delivery of samples for US importer Forests of the World. These products will be shown in Atlanta in July and in New York in August and so may generate immediate income for area artisans. Lyda buys interesting woven vegetable fibers and rawhide from artisans in rural areas and makes them into exquisite handbags in her workshop in Pasto. She makes very interesting use of the materials, and her designs sell well in Europe and North America. She has been involved with FUCIE, providing design assistance to leather artisans in their project in Belen. She has also shown at national and international fairs, having been chosen by Proexport as one of six artisans in the country to participate in Ambiente in Frankfurt last year.

Though leather appears to be a viable product of this area, market studies should be carried out before a push is made to promote exports. In addition, an evaluation should be made of the environmental impact that current tanning techniques have.

#### **4.3. Barniz de Pasto**

Barniz de Pasto is a fascinating local art form that is used to produce decorative objects. We learned about the technique and had a demonstration by master artist, Eduardo Muñoz. The resin of the mapo mapo tree, which grows in Putumayo, is processed into a sheet of material that is cut and applied to wood objects. The technique was used by pre-colombian indigenous peoples to make their ceramic vessels watertight. It was quickly adopted and turned into the current art form by the Spaniards. The process is slow and labor intensive and the resulting objects are expensive, but they are unique. A cultural

preservation effort that made use of existing institutions like the cooperative, Casa de Barniz and the school that Eduardo Munoz has worked towards founding, would be a very worthwhile effort. A bit of income could be generated by mounting and touring a museum exhibit that included artwork and decorative objects, information about the process, demonstrations by master artists, and sales of small decorative furnishings and gift items. Such an exhibit could be of interest to university art museums throughout the US and could be welcome good news from the region.

#### **4.4. Casa de Barniz**

There are 60-70 barniz artisans in Pasto. Casa de Barniz is a cooperative business where about a dozen of these artisans work and sell. Their work varies in quality, but is generally good. The coop could serve as a production source if there were a steady market demand and as part of a school to teach the art to a new generation. The art is very distinctive and worth saving. Though it cannot be expected to bring significant income to a large population, it could save the town's place as a tourist destination for the time when tourism returns, and could bring positive attention to the area in the meantime.

#### **4.5. Cooperativa de Trabajadores Artesanal Ecotema**

Ecotema is an association of 13 artisans who weave cotton, wool, and acrylic fabric on fly-shuttle handlooms. They work with 30 additional artisans who are contracted to do specific tasks in their homes. The artisans in the workshop have served customers in Europe, though they are currently under-employed. In an effort to combat this problem, they have diversified into wood furniture production. They have participated in regional and national fairs and have received support in building their institutional structure from FUCIE. They have received design assistance from Artesanias de Colombia's design laboratory, but they have not found any local organization or source of information to give them the assistance they need in broadening their markets. Their textile products include charming appliqued scenes, embroidered shawls, and blankets. All these artisans live within the city, but the workshop could be usefully contracted to weave fabric to

specification as a component of products produced in rural areas. A pillow I bought in Pasto, for instance, had an interesting vegetable fiber front but was finished with cheap and unattractive fabric; something handwoven locally would be a better choice.

#### **4.6. Laboratorio Colombiano de Diseno**

In a visit to the Laboratorio Colombiano de Diseno, a program of Artesanias de Colombia founded in 1996 to provide design assistance to artisans in Narino, Cauca and Putumayo, we saw an interesting range of products made using local handcraft techniques.

Laboratorio staff were able to give us production capacity information on several distinct products and assured us that they could provide assistance that might be needed in successfully exporting the products we saw or others that the same groups might produce. They have handcraft and semi-industrial designers available for teaching, as well as technicians who might help set up appropriate production systems, but their greatest strength, and their reason for being, is to provide design assistance. The artisan groups they work with regularly have an appointed community representative to receive training and then to teach it to the rest of the group. Some of the training they have to offer is on video and audio cassette. Their catalog will be useful in introducing potential buyers to the products and productions techniques available in the area.

Artesanias de Colombia is also involved in an effort by the Colombian Ministry of Telecommunications to provide internet access to rural communities, called Conectividad. The Laboratorio is well positioned to be a local center for the portal and could provide other support to local artisans as well. It will be important to make a careful analysis of their ability to work effectively in any specific project area before counting on them.

#### **4.7. Next steps for Narino**

With the skills, materials and labor force available in Narino, I suggest that the project:

- 1) Review FUCIE's diagnostic.

- 2) Review Proexport's findings and do market research on the viability of expanding the presence of Colombian leather products in export markets
- 3) Market vegetable fiber products currently produced in the area.
- 4) Determine corporate capabilities and local reputations of FUCIE and CONTACTAR
- 5) Determine the Laboratorio's ability to work in rural areas
- 6) Test market local rough wood products
- 7) Get an expert opinion on the market viability of barniz
- 8) Explore the possibility of an exhibit and/or school to teach about the barniz de Pasto tradition

## **5. Putumayo**

In Putumayo, Fundaempresa hosted an exhibit of the work of 30 local artisans and artisan associations, many of whom are of indigenous ethnicities. In general the indigenous groups have a strong commitment to uniting to transform Putumayo. They would like support in organizing to better effect change. The most interesting products I saw were ethnic musical instruments and household objects produced in natural forest materials. The wood products of the area are also of great interest.

Many forest plants have local uses and potential manufacturing and export uses. This is of interest as another way to generate income in the community, but also for artisan enterprise development because two large natural body care product companies are also interested in and sell handmade gift and accessories products. There may be an opportunity to serve several of their needs in Putumayo.

### **5.1. Fundaempresa**

Fundaempresa is working with three local NGO's in rural communities around Puerto Asis. They are working with artisan groups who make use of local materials in their handcraft production. Most of the communities are of indigenous peoples who have a close relationship to the land and who still practice traditional arts in many aspects of

their lives. Their products are sold in the Tienda Artesanal Indigena de Puerto Asis, which shares a building with Fundaempresa. In their program known as Raiz por Raiz, Fundaempresa is working with 16 different ethnic groups in 16 different communities, each of which includes about 15 artisans. The handcrafted household objects and musical instruments of their everyday life are of interest to export markets. The baskets produced by the Huitoto and the bags produced by the Pastos, for instance, are of particular interest. Intermediaries come to buy these things in Puerto Asis and in Makoia, but only when they feel safe, which is more and more rarely. Plastic has supplanted the regular use of many of these traditional objects, but Fundaempresa and their partner organizations are making an effort to recoup nearly lost arts and to revive them. They are documenting processes and facilitating classes where the elders teach the youth handcrafting skills. They are also enlisting the help of Artesanias de Colombia to provide assistance in design and finishing. It will be important that the designer be respectful of indigenous design, not only for cultural reasons, but also because authenticity is a key part of what is attractive to export markets. Since many of the craftspeople are elderly and arthritic, the finishing of certain things is problematical. Outside training will be useful in this. When large orders are secured production systems assistance may also be called for. Proexport is in a good position to provide this.

Fundaempresa gathered artisans from municipalities around the department to exhibit their wares for my review. I had the opportunity to discuss their businesses with them directly and to review with them the questionnaire I had them fill out. A significant percentage of the traditional work I saw was of interest to me and for US markets, but for a relatively small niche market. Of particular interest were indigenous baskets, indigenous jewelry (made of glass beads and of seed beads), indigenous musical instruments (made of cane and bamboo), folkloric wood carvings and vegetable fiber products. The fiber known as chambira or pita, a vine used for making bags, is particularly attractive. The sustainability of natural resource bases is a major issue in Putumayo, where much local forest has been destroyed to create coca fields. Many communities must travel significant distances to gather the fibers they have used forever.

Any effort to market natural fiber products must be preceded by a careful analysis of the resource base and should be accompanied by a conservation and/or reforestation plan.

All the indigenous artisans I met are gravely concerned about the state of their forests and the future of their cultural traditions given the threat that deforestation poses. The Pastos of Siberia Orito are working to develop an enterprise crafting decorative objects in balsa and bamboo. They make a range of attractive pens, which they sell through local schools and which may be effective as an export product. Other decorative objects could be produced to serve the same markets. Balsa is plentiful and fast growing and does not have other uses in the community, so preserves the forest materials they do use. They have production standards and quality control systems so are able to produce in quantity effectively.

The Kipara artisans I met do a good job of telling the story of the cultural significance of their products. They have very good hangtags with their glass bead jewelry. They are one of several ethnicities who use the sacred psychotropic plant yare to guide their design work and the hangtags with their bracelets describes the story of each design. The yare vine is also used to make baskets for households use which would be of interest to export markets. Other ethnic groups have equally interesting products in baskets, musical instruments, seed bead jewelry, folkloric carvings, and decorative objects.

## **5.2. ARMAZON**

This association of woodworkers is serving the local market with furniture they produce in their home-based workshops. The products they currently produce are not appropriate for export markets, but the skill it demonstrates certainly suggests that appropriate products could be produced. The association has come together to promote regional sales, and with the hope of being able to serve markets further afield. All members buy their wood from local woodcutters. Since they, too, are small businessmen who might benefit from association, they are currently being invited to join. The hoped-for result

will be better forest management. The most popular wood for furniture, cedar, is already depleted in local forests.

Association members seem savvy about their market and the possibilities for expanding it regionally. They are currently making a survey among themselves to see what sort of furniture sells best. In an effort to serve export markets, their skills would be well-used making decorative objects and accent pieces for the US home furnishings markets. Excellent use could be made of scrap wood in the production of boxes, lamps, placemats, buttons, handbag handles, etc. Design assistance will be useful as new markets are targeted. Improved machinery and more efficient workspace will make a big difference in the association's ability to increase their production capacity, if, in fact there is a market demand for more than they can make now. They would also benefit from access to appropriate wood-drying kilns.

## **5.2. Suggested next steps for Putumayo**

With the skills, materials and labor force available in Putumayo, I suggest that the project:

- 1) Sell market-ready products to appropriate importers
- 2) Continue to work with ARMAZON to strengthen their ability to serve local and regional markets and improve their production systems infrastructure
- 3) Do market research to determine what wood accent furniture and decorative objects might be placed in US markets.
- 4) Invite The Body Shop and Aveda to experiment with local plants as ingredients for soap and shampoo. Consider involving Conservation International in the process.
- 5) Consider the possibility of placing a free trade zone in Putumayo, to serve the wood industry and any others that are challenged by high taxes.

## **6. Huila**

In Neiva I examined local artisans' offerings at a fair organized by the local Cultural Secretariat. It is apparent that the department is supportive of cultural preservation efforts and that the secretariat offers very practical support to artisan enterprises. Of the 45 artisans participating, 28 had interesting market-ready product to offer. The products, materials and techniques shown at the exhibition included vegetable fiber fashion and home accessories, decorative and functional ceramics, decorative wood products, musical instruments, decorative bamboo and totumo accents, and seed bead jewelry. Very fine and expensive palmera straw hats are produced in Neiva. Though I do not see a US market for this particular product, other things in the same palm straw are a possibility. There is also talent and material for the very unusual art of weaving banana fiber. In addition, the various other baskets and handbags I saw suggest that there is an abundance of talent and skill for this sort of work. There was a larger proportion of market-ready products in Huila than in any of the other cities I visited. Talking with the artisans, and examining their responses to my questionnaire, I got the impression that production capacity may be a problem in serving export markets. Price was a problem for some things, like vegetable fiber bags, but not for others, like ceramics.

### **6.1. Suggested next steps for Huila**

With the skills, materials and labor force available in Huila, I suggest that the project:

- 1) Sell market-ready products to appropriate importers
- 2) Market the skills available in the area to importers and exporters who may do their own product development to serve specific clients
- 3) Test the ability of local red clay ware to compete in US markets

## **7. Tolima**

Our visit to Tolima was brief and the impressions I got of the department's offerings are sketchy, but it can serve as a starting point for further investigation.

### **7.1. Ibague**

In Ibague, hosted by the Comité de Cafeteros del Tolima, we met with members of an artisan association who exhibit their wares regularly at an artisan plaza in the city.

Though not all stalls are occupied every day, we were told that on feast days a great many artisans come here from all over the region to sell. Offerings were generally unimpressive on the day of our visit, but some of the ceramics we saw could be a viable product for export as well as local and other domestic markets. Other things I noticed at the artisans' fair included baskets made from various canes, vines, and bamboos, wooden spoons, and musical instruments, especially drums.

Of greater interest than most of the things I saw were things I only heard about. There is a women's group in the department, in Valle de San Juan, that is beginning to make paper from corn shucks. Coffee is also grown in abundance in the project area. Trees are pruned every year and interesting accent furniture and accessories can be made from the prunings. This sort of product is popular in US markets now. Another coffee-related possibility is the production of gift packaging and accessories for sales in coffee shops. There is also apparently a lot of bamboo in the area. It is currently used locally for construction, but could have other uses as well. Fique is abundant and is used for packaging for coffee.

It was interesting to hear that the mayor of Libano is working on starting a center to be shared by several micro businesses. Local contacts are finding out what sort of businesses are going in, to see whether this effort is one that could be expanded to provide employment to many people. We understand that one of the many strong women's groups in the area is centered in Libano and involved in handcraft production, so it will be interesting to hear what kind of products they are producing. Our local contacts commented that there is a lack of organization among artisans in the department. Though potters in La Chamba sell to major markets through intermediaries, artisans are not well organized to serve large customers' production needs.

Several towns in Tolima have been identified as possibilities for free trade zones, including Ibagu , Espinal, and Buena Ventura. It would be worth following up on the studies that have been done of these areas to see what sorts of enterprises would benefit from a free trade zone in the area. There is apparently an effort underway to make the center of the country an agroindustry center, where crops would be processed as well as cultivated. A look should be taken at what artisan industries could be established to compliment other activity in the area.

## **7.2. La Chamba**

We made a visit to La Chamba, where most of the ceramics in the department are produced. The black ware is most distinctive, but a red ware is also produced. These ceramics are already a successful export product. Most ceramic production in the department is in La Chamba, which is not a part of the target area. Artesanias de Colombia has started a cooperative in there, through which they have provided technical assistance, and from which they continue to buy. The coop is not, however, very popular. It is estimated that less than 10% of the potters in the area are members.

## **7.3. Next Steps for Tolima**

With the skills, materials and labor force available in Tolima, I suggest that the project:

- 1) Determine whether there is skill for working coffee wood
- 2) Evaluate the possibilities for corn shuck paper production
- 3) Examine sales channels for coffee and see what other products might be sold into the same markets, with a particular eye to the possibilities for gift packaging for coffee
- 4) Evaluate agricultural industries to determine what handcrafted products (such as rice paper?) might be made from the same crops.

## **Conclusions and General Recommendations**

Before traveling to Colombia, I contacted potential customers, importers and distributors who I had some reason to believe might be interested in Colombian product. Though they all expressed strong interest in product that they might be able to get from Colombia, they also expressed concern about the costs of doing business in the country. These costs include the prices of products compared to what is produced in neighboring countries, and the dangers that both producers and exporters must deal with, which compromise a secure source of production. If the project is successful in developing artisan enterprises in the region, it will have effectively addressed these concerns, providing artisans with the ability to serve the market effectively so that confidence is restored.

In each of the five departments I visited I found products that I think could be placed in export markets immediately. In some cases, such as with ethnic products, the market is a specialized one and the household income generated is likely to be secondary, not primary. But there is promise here for immediate results, which may provide critical encouragement to targeted communities.

I am encouraged in my optimism about the immediate possibilities by the apparent willingness of exporters such as The Pottery, Anaida and Maconga to invest in relatively dangerous departments. It is also encouraging that Proexport, the Escuela de Artes y Oficios, and Artesanias de Colombia are all apparently willing to provide any assistance that artisans may need in meeting export orders.

The three largest long-range possibilities I see in the five departments are the promotion of the silk industry in Cauca, the establishment and promotion of totumo products, and the promotion of wood manufacturing businesses in Putumayo. Leather products in Belen may be significant, too. All require some market research, but they seem possible at this point.

I have made specific recommendations for each department, but I will recap several of them here.

- 1) Review the literature available through Artesanias de Colombia to see whether there are other possibilities for artisan enterprise development that were not apparent in my visits. Note the types of proposals they have received from artisans in the target area.
- 2) Sell all market-ready products to appropriate importers.
- 3) Make sure key Colombian exporters are familiar with all the products identified as market-ready.
- 4) Initiate a market study of the possibilities for the silk industry. Key questions will revolve around the relative price and quality of Colombian silk, and why the Korean company pulled out.
- 5) Initiate a market study of the viability of wood products currently produced in the project area. Key questions will revolve around whether wood products of region can compete with Mexican wood in the US. If not, why not? Is price the only barrier? If the results of the study are positive, provide expert design assistance for entry into specific markets.
- 6) Continue working with ARMAZON to strengthen their ability to serve and grow their markets. Facility improvement will do a lot to increase their efficiency and lower their costs of production.
- 7) Consider establishing a free trade zone in Putumayo.
- 8) Initiate a market study of the viability of Colombian leather goods in export markets. Initiate a simultaneous environmental impact study of tanning and production process methods.
- 9) Invite The Body Shop and Aveda to experiment with plants that may be new ingredients in their products. Offer them appropriate gift, packaging, and accessory products.
- 10) Consider mounting a museum exhibit to promote Barniz de Pasto and to support the creation of a school or apprenticeship program to save the art. Examine the possibility of selling existing production into decorative accessories markets.
- 11) Have an expert look at all the paper making possibilities in the region, including mulberry, cornhusk, fique, rice and recycled papers.