

INTERVIEW · COOPERANT

Transformation, community and learning

«Supporting the MST cooperatives in Brazil has changed the way I understand cooperation, work and life.»



Andrea Antón and Marcio Carvalho, Mundukide workers, together with members of the Finapop credit cooperative.

After three years as a Mundukide cooperant in Brazil, Andrea Antón returns with a backpack full of lessons, friendships and experiences. We talk to her about the work carried out alongside the cooperatives of the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST), the challenges she encountered and everything she takes away from this stage of her life.

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These have been three intense years. If you had to sum up this experience in three words, what would they be and why?

I would sum it up as transformation, community and learning.

Transformation, both personal and collective. Personal, because of everything I have experienced over these three years in Brazil, as part of the Mundukide team and working alongside the MST's Production sector in Fortaleza and, later, with Finapop in São Paulo. And collective, because of the intercooperation built day by day between the MST and Mundukide, and the results that joint work generates for the development of the MST cooperatives fighting for agrarian reform in Brazil and, consequently, for improving the quality of life of the farming families who are part of them.

Community, because I have learned a great deal about the importance of a communal outlook, as opposed to the more individualistic view that often prevails in the society we live in.

Learning, because of everything I have learned, lived and reflected on during these three years in Brazil, and especially alongside the MST.

«Working with the MST has changed the way I understand cooperative work.»

How do you remember the moment you decided to leave for Brazil? What motivated you to take that step?

I remember it with great excitement. Working in the social field has always been a motivation for me. I had spent years working in development cooperation, mainly in project formulation and management, but over time many questions arose about how those projects took shape in day-to-day

life in the country where they were carried out, what the work alongside local organisations was like, and what the real challenges of implementation and achieving results were.

Another of my motivations for living in Brazil was working alongside the MST and being part of the Mundukide team. Seeing what all the daily effort is for is very rewarding, and I feel very happy with what I experienced.

When you arrived, what surprised you most about the country and the context you were going to work in?

I had never been to Brazil before, so everything was new to me. When I arrived there were two realities to understand: first, Brazilian culture, the country itself, and learning Brazilian Portuguese in order to communicate. And second, the MST's context within Brazil. Having had the chance to get to know both has been a real privilege.

It is hard to name a single thing that surprised me: my time there was a daily learning experience that gradually transformed the way I see things. If I had to choose one, I would say the MST's way of working: the importance of the collective, of caring for people and culture, and of intercooperation as a tool for moving forward and evolving.



The Mundukide team in a meeting with Finapop members.

What exactly was your job within the programme? What was a typical day like for you?

I worked as a funding officer in Mundukide's programme in Brazil. My work focused on seeking funding, both local and international, formulating new proposals and managing, monitoring and reporting on the projects underway. I also occasionally delivered some training related to these processes.

My day-to-day, both in Fortaleza and São Paulo, was fairly routine, though always within the Brazilian context and working closely with the people of the MST. Much of the work was done from the office, but I also travelled to different states in Brazil to follow up more closely on the projects.

Can you tell us a specific example where you felt your work had a real impact?

The real impact of cooperation is seen in the long term and is the result of many years of joint work between the MST and Mundukide. One of the things that struck me most is hearing how the farmers and the MST organisations who have worked together for years talk about Mundukide: they greatly value the support and the changes achieved.

A clear example is the implementation of the Management Model for Social Enterprises in the cooperatives. It is a change in the way of working, and that requires time, training and a great deal of support. That close accompaniment is key for the changes to be real and to reach the farming families in the settlements. In fact, many cooperatives we were not yet working with expressed their interest after learning about the results achieved by others.

«The real impact of cooperation is seen in the long term.»

What have you learned from Brazilian culture that you would like to bring back with you?

I had the chance to live in two completely different cities: Fortaleza and São Paulo, and each taught me different things.

From Fortaleza I take the rhythm at which they live and work, the positive energy they radiate, and the ability to put into perspective things that here we often give more importance than they really deserve. From São Paulo I would highlight, above all, its diversity: it is an enormous city, with a great cultural diversity that makes it a very enriching place to live and learn.

What has been the biggest personal or professional challenge you have faced?

In the long run, the biggest challenge has been being so far from my family and friends. Even so, like any experience of this kind, they have been very beautiful years, full of experiences and learning. Seeing the effort, commitment and daily struggle behind every process makes you understand the meaning of the work you are doing.

Have you discovered new ways of understanding cooperation or collective work during these years?

Absolutely. I have learned a great deal about cooperativism. It has been very interesting to see the application of the Management Model for Social Enterprises, based on the experience of Basque cooperativism and adapted to the reality of Brazil and the MST. It has been an opportunity to understand that collective work is a very important tool for strengthening cooperatives and continuing to move forward together.

If someone were thinking of becoming a Mundukide cooperant, what would you tell them?

I would tell them it is a great opportunity. As well as being very rewarding work, working in Brazil alongside the MST lets you get to know a reality very

different from ours and another way of understanding collective work and cooperation. You learn a great deal, both professionally and personally.

Looking back, how would you say this experience has changed you as a professional... and as a person?

I think, above all, it has changed the way I see things. I come back with a different perspective on how we live, how we act as individuals and as a

society. Living in a country like Brazil and working alongside the MST has made me reflect on many things and return with a different outlook.



Mundukide works towards a fairer, more caring world through intercooperation and the development of communities and organisations.