



## Bolivian Scholarship Students Solve Community Problem Challenge

The Yungas - a mountainous, tropical region northwest of the capital La Paz - is where for centuries indigenous peoples have grown coca leaf for chewing and for religious purposes. In recognition of this tradition, Bolivian law permits up to 12,000 hectares of coca only in this region. In recent times, however, additional coca has been planted that often ends up in the cocaine production circuit. Given the political and cultural sensitivities surrounding coca cultivation in the Yungas, the Bolivian Government does not rely on forced eradication to reduce the excess coca. Instead, Yungas farmers are offered community improvements, development projects and technical assistance in cultivating other crops in exchange for uprooting excess coca or for not planting it in the first place.



Photo: USAID/Bolivia

Carmen Pampa University provides quality tertiary education to the indigenous population.

### Initiative

USAID's Initiative has generated broadly accepted, high-impact activities to encourage the Yungas farmers' associations leadership to enter into negotiated coca-reduction and coca non-proliferation agreements with the Bolivian government. Since 2001, USAID has sponsored an annual scholarship program with Carmen Pampa University to support these efforts. Thirty-three students from local rural communities enroll in bachelor programs to study agricultural engineering, nursing, veterinary/animal husbandry, primary education and teaching.

Candidates are selected on the basis of combined criteria of academic promise and financial need, and must maintain those standards to remain eligible. Students focus on research linked to resolving problems common to their communities, such as childhood illness due to poor hygiene and sanitation. Students are required, as a condition of their scholarship awards, to conduct productive work on campus and in surrounding communities, and they are actively encouraged to work in their home communities during and after their studies.

### Results

Upon graduation, these future leaders contribute to the social and economic development of their communities in ways that enable them to choose coca-free futures. Sixteen have graduated in the four subject areas since the program's inception. Last year, students from the Public Health Department made over 3,000 home visits, while the Veterinary and Agronomy Departments assisted about 150 families with extension projects. In recognition of this successful effort to train effective professionals for development leadership in their communities, Carmen Pampa University's program was cited in the 2003 "Best of the Best" [Practices Worldwide] Report from the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs for its contribution to reducing rural poverty in Bolivia.

