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Reading - The Recicladores, Columbia's Scavenger Families Unite to find their identity

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Module 8 – Lesson 1: *The Recicladores, Columbia’s Scavenger Families Unite to find their identity*

As the urban populations of the world continue to grow, the challenge of finding work just keeps getting harder. Cities are extraordinary centers of culture and wealth. However, those resources are accessible only to people if they have the education and social connections to take advantage of them. For millions of poor urban residents, they must make a life for themselves on only the scraps of the great urban feast. Such is the case for the **urban scavengers**, like those below in Peru, who collect and recycle the materials found in the mountains of trash created by the people who live in the cities.



In the Central American country of Columbia, over 50,000 families in cities like Bogata live as scavengers called **Recicladores**. Although they are integral parts of the city’s economy, they live as outcasts with little chance of enjoying the resources of the city. Wealthier residents avoid contact with the recicladores and consider them less than human. Most of the scavenger children receive no formal education and very poor health care. The outlook for the recicladores is very bleak. This is an urban tragedy that begs for intervention and action.

One such positive action has taken place in Columbia. Beginning in 1986, a

group called *Asociacion Nacional de Recicladores-ANR* was formed to help scavenger families organize and begin to take part in the mainstream activities of Columbia’s urban centers. The ANR has become a program of hope and change for the recicladores

The ANR program has met the most fundamental needs of the recicladores families. They helped them get health care, social security and other benefits from the government. In addition, they have opened up Scavengers’ Houses that provide school for the children, social services and act as meeting centers for the families. However, the program has had an even bigger impact in a different way. The ANR has become a business manager for the recicladores.

The ANR representatives helped the recicladores organize their recycling programs. By providing storage facilities, helping to negotiate contracts with municipalities, or holding rallies to recruit new recicladores (as pictured below), the ANR has dramatically improved the lives of the urban scavenger families.



To date, nearly 125,000 people have been helped by the ANR. By organizing the families and making the storage and distribution of recycled materials more efficient, the income of most families has gone up by 30%. There is much more work to be done. The United Nations Environmental Program is now using the ANR Program as a model for other scavenger families in Asia and Africa.

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<http://www.flickr.com/photos/gusuval/187682799/>

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