



NEWS FROM HONDURAS

Honduras Community Support Corporation

HELPING RURAL HONDURANS TO LIVE BETTER ON THE LAND
AND TO PROTECT THE LAND THEY LIVE ON

WATER SYSTEMS AND WATERSHEDS

December 2011

MUCH-NEEDED FENCING

A major part of HCSC's program involves the gravity-feed systems that bring water to small rural communities from (relatively unpolluted) sources high in the mountains. Some of our projects help these communities to develop or repair or expand the systems themselves. Other projects fund the purchase of watershed lands to be held by HCSC partner FECOVESO, which owns land in watersheds serving 12 communities.

But FECOVESO ownership is not enough if communities lack the resources needed to protect these lands – in particular, those needed to reforest and keep cattle off the land. All communities are responsible for fencing their own watersheds, but the necessary barbed wire is expensive. This year HCSC purchased wire (for \$200) to fence watershed land for the community of **Monte Vista**, whose new water system and newly acquired watershed are described in our 2009 newsletter. We also purchased wire (for more than \$600) to fence the final piece of the watershed serving the communities of **Nueva Vida**, **Las Laurelas**, **La Mota**, and **Rio Indio**, as described in our 2010 newsletter.

COOPERATIVE SUPPORT FOR SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

The community of **Santo Domingo**, located high in the mountains, is developing a water system, with funding from a US church and Rotary International, and with coordination assistance from local organizers Alex del Cid and Rolando Lopez.

For the long term, we are exploring possible purchase of Santo Domingo's watershed, but in the meantime we helped with an immediate need for food. Community residents must commit substantial time to dig ditches and lay pipe over an extensive area, so it is difficult for them to do the work necessary to produce food for their families. Funding sources typically

provide staple foodstuffs in these situations, but in this case food was unavailable. However, HCSC purchased quantities of corn flour, beans and rice and, with the loan of a 4x4 pickup from the municipality of Omoa, delivered them to the community.

PIPING FOR A PRELIMINARY SYSTEM

Another high mountain community, **Nueva Palmas Real**, has no water system, and no prospect of developing a permanent system in the next several years. The community sought help from HCSC to acquire *mangera* – flexible tubing to be laid on the surface of the ground – as a preliminary system until a permanent system can be developed.



ROLLS OF MANGERA READY TO BE HAULED UP THE MOUNTAIN

HCSC purchased the *mangera*. Nueva Palmas Real residents then assembled a pack train of 20 horses and mules to haul the material from the trailhead on the highway to their mountain community, where it has now been put to use.



FECOVESO (Fundación Eco Verde Sostenible), the Honduran non-profit organized and funded by HCSC, is made up of elected representatives of communities affected by the purchase of the watersheds, along with 3 outside members and an HCSC representative. All watershed land acquired with HCSC funds is owned by FECOVESO as a locally controlled land trust. FECOVESO is also a community development organization, responding to project requests from communities and making funding recommendations to HCSC. Our long-term goal is to empower this organization as a permanent, independent institution in northwest Honduras.



SCHOOL PROJECTS

Cooperative efforts by HCSC and its local partner FECOVESO make it possible to fund a number of relatively small but important school projects. Most requests for such funding are processed by FECOVESO staff person Nestor Lainez, who visits the communities (by foot or bicycle), and are then reviewed by a committee of FECOVESO board members. Costs may then be met either with the funds granted by HCSC to FECOVESO to be allocated for such projects or with direct grants from HCSC.

LA VENADA. Last year HCSC paid for cement blocks for the construction of a third classroom for this fast-growing community on the highway. This year the community requested and received funding from FECOVESO for metal grillwork and screening for the windows.

MILLA CINCO, located on the coastal highway, has been working hard for several years to develop its own school for the kindergarten (currently housed in a church) and for children in primary grades who now have to walk more than a mile down the busy and dangerous highway to the school in a neighboring community (described in 2009 newsletter).

Two years ago HCSC funded the purchase of a building site. Since then community members have been working to assemble construction



COMPLETED CLASSROOM IN LA VENADA



RECONSTRUCTION OF LATRINES IN NUEVA PALMAS REAL

materials. Several potential funding sources have been approached, and, in the meantime, every family has contributed a number of cement blocks, as well as labor and use of their tools. The work is progressing, and HCSC has granted funds to cover the cost of metal roofing (more than \$600).

SCHOOL TOILET REPAIRS. HCSC has funded building materials that will allow **Nueva Palmas Real** to reconstruct their school latrines, and **Nueva Concepcion** to replace the roof of their toilets.

TEACHER BONUSES. This year again, HCSC awarded \$100 bonuses to teachers in **Las Flores** and **Nueva Vida** who had completed a full year of work to the satisfaction of those communities. Also we continued our practice of distributing school supplies (paper, pencils, etc.), as well as donated clothing, in a number of communities.



DESKS THAT NEED REPLACING



LOS MEJIAS STUDENTS IN FRONT OF SCHOOL

LOS MEJIAS. The name describes both the mountain village and its residents – 35 families, all with the surname Mejia. A four-hour walk from the highway, the community has a 2-room school (with 80 students) in need of more and better desks. FECOVESO funded materials to build desks (\$634), and also anti-corrosive paint for the school's old metal roof.

CAMINO NUEVO CELEBRATES

The growing community of Camino Nuevo is perched on a ridge scarcely a mile from the busy little market town and governmental center of Omoa. In some respects it is a traditional *campesino* community, but it is close enough to Omoa so that residents can easily walk to the highway, take a bus if necessary, earn cash wages, solicit government help, and purchase goods in local stores – all of which brings changes.

In March, more than 100 people gathered to celebrate some of these changes and to honor a variety of friends and benefactors, including Nola White (who as a Peace Corps volunteer 20 years ago organized the development of the community's water system), the Municipality of Omoa, a county-sized jurisdiction with its base in the town of Omoa

(which was responsible for road and utility improvements), and HCSC (which funded a fence around the schoolyard where the event was held).

Fencing began some years ago, and was designed to keep a soccer ball kicked too hard from bouncing down 80 yards of very steep, rocky slope. As classroom space increased to accommodate a growing population of students, and the road was improved, fencing became necessary on both sides of the small schoolyard.

The celebration involved many speeches by municipal and community leaders, but the climax came when a ten-year-girl stood before the crowd to push a switch that turned on a light bulb on the table beside her. Electricity had arrived. Camino Nuevo had crossed a boundary into the modern world – for better and for worse.



READY FOR FESTIVITIES IN NEWLY-FENCED YARD



ELECTRICITY!

MUSIC AND DOLLS

Funding for necessary community projects is not the only thing that HCSC brings to Honduras.

In February, HCSC board members Bliss and Robbie McIntosh visited Honduras, bringing with them their musical instruments, some simple hand tools, and the talents needed to put these things to good use.

One of Bliss's talents is the ability to make beautiful things from natural materials – birch bark, ash splint, milkweed pods, cornhusks... Cornhusks are of course an inevitable byproduct of the subsistence economy of rural Hondurans. Bliss gave



cornhusk-doll-making lessons in the community of Nueva Vida, having prepared herself not only with the necessary tools but with the Spanish words for the materials and steps in the process. Everyone loved the dolls as well as the winged cornhusk angels that can be suspended as graceful

mobiles. Planning is under way for two half-day cornhusk-doll-making workshops next year.

Of course, charming as they are, cornhusk dolls are not very huggable, and the huggability of a doll is important for people of a certain age. When we delivered food to the community of Santo Domingo, we also delivered a large collection of Raggedy Ann dolls donated by an HCSC supporter. Every one of them was immediately hugged!



CORNHUSK DOLLMAKING UNDER THE TREES



RAGGEDY ANNS ARE A BIG HIT



POTENTIAL WATERSHED ACQUISITIONS

The community of **Milla Tres** has a water system serving homes close to the coastal highway, but there are 45 homes higher in the mountains that cannot be served by this system. For now, these families get water through a temporary system, but the source of that water is drying up. They have identified another source and are seeking funding to purchase approximately 145 acres of land in that watershed. The acquisition would also help to protect the source of water for a neighboring community.

Elsewhere, the community of **Nueva Concepcion** wants to develop a water system for its 14 families. A system has been designed by Alex del Cid, and a source has been identified. Community representatives are talking with FECOVESO and HCSC about possible acquisition of 12 acres surrounding the source.



BOARD (CHRIS, FRONT RIGHT)

HCSC BOARD

We have a new HCSC Board member this year: Christine Casey. Chris has quite a history in Honduras, culminating in her marriage to Delmer Matute, a Honduran. Chris spent time studying water systems as a graduate student at the University of New Mexico, and in that capacity worked on systems in Honduras. Her master's thesis dealt with some Honduran systems which Nola had installed 20 years before Chris arrived, as well as those she herself worked on. While looking for work in Honduras, Chris spent some months volunteering (we provided housing and a small stipend) with HCSC and FECOVESO. She then worked for "Pure Water

for the World," until it disbanded. Eventually Chris returned to more lucrative work in her home area of Boston. When Delmer gained his visa, they married and now both are working in Boston.

Six of HCSC's eight board members have spent time in Honduras, coming to know the wonderful people and the country.

PROJECT HONDURAS CONFERENCE

This year's Project Honduras Conference in Copan Ruinas was attended by FECOVESO board members Santos Pascual, Jorge Chavez, Nassaria Gomez, and Nola White. One of the speakers at the conference was US Ambassador Lisa Kubiske, who invited questions from the floor. Both Santos and Jorge responded. Santos, after expressing appreciation for U.S. aid to Honduras, offered a brief description of life in his home community of San Miguelito. He then asked, gently, why it was that none of that aid ever reached San Miguelito. The question was greeted with applause from the audience. Kubiske gracefully acknowledged his point, noting that US government moneys are funneled through the Honduran government.



SANTOS SPEAKING WITH THE US AMBASSADOR

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO HELP...

We are an all-volunteer organization, and we operate with very low overhead. We put your tax-deductible donations to work directly for the people of Honduras – and we depend completely on those donations to support our work. You can find more information, including past editions of this newsletter, at our web site

www.hcsc-honduras.org

Your contributions can be sent to...

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