

NEWS FROM HONDURAS

Honduras Community Support Corporation

November 2003

Helping rural Hondurans to live better on the land
and to protect the land they live on



Watershed Protection

Last year, to protect the water system serving the communities of Camino Nuevo and San Miguelito, HCSC purchased a critical piece of mountain watershed. Residents of the two communities have fenced the land to protect it from livestock, and we have had it surveyed so that title can be recorded. We are now organizing a land trust controlled by local community representatives to hold title to this and other land.

In the neighboring community of Nueva Vida we have funded the acquisition of land immediately surrounding the source for the newly completed water system described below, and we are working with the community to negotiate the purchase of more land in this watershed, which adjoins the Camino Nuevo/San Miguelito watershed. If acquired, this land would be held by the new land trust.

We are also funding the acquisition of about 13 acres immediately above the source for a new water system being developed by the community of Las Brisas de Rio Negro.



Unprotected hillside, deforested, overgrazed, eroding...

Water System Development

The water system shared by Camino Nuevo and San Miguelito has presented special management problems for the communities – because of its extensiveness and because the two communities must cooperate in maintaining and managing it. Last spring we paid air fare for a visit by water system engineer Peter Haas, who had provided technical support as a Peace Corp volunteer when Nola (then also a PC volunteer) was helping these communities to build their water system. During his visit he inspected the system and recommended modifications to address changes in population distribution and new homes. Peter and Nola also made recommendations regarding management issues.



Proud “fontanero” admires new water system dam

In Nueva Vida, community residents have worked with Alex del Cid and Dr. Campana and his students from the University of New Mexico (see back page) to plan and initiate development of their own water system. We then provided funds to pay a skilled cement worker and buy materials to construct the water tank. We are also providing funds for the community of Nueva Florida to hire a cement worker to complete work on their new system. The Honduran government paid for materials, which we helped transport into the mountains. In October, Nueva Florida and three other communities celebrated the completion of their water systems with an event that included the ceremonial breaking of a clay jar previously used by women to carry water to their homes.

Composting Toilet and Solar Cooker Projects



Nola and crew inspecting Las Flores school's new privy

Composting toilet and solar cooker projects were carried out in the communities of Camino Nuevo and Las Flores in March and April by interns Helen and Annika McIntosh (who had spent the previous six weeks in Guatemala becoming fluent in Spanish).



Annika and crew working through a shower

In Las Flores Helen and Annika worked with community members to build a two-door, two-hole latrine and composting bins for the school, and instructed students, teachers and other interested community members in their use and management.

In Camino Nuevo they worked with residents to build a latrine and bins for use by the family of a community leader, who will help other families to do the same. For ongoing use by these and other communities, they prepared illustrated Spanish-language instructions for the construction, use and maintenance of both composting toilets and solar cookers.



Helen and crew making composting bins of split bamboo

There was strong interest in composting toilets – in part because the pour-flush latrines in both communities are in need of replacement, in part because fertilizer for crops is a scarce commodity, and in part simply because community projects are fun.

There was also active interest in solar ovens, which were constructed in both communities (using corrugated cartons and aluminum foil). Their use was demonstrated by baking potatoes boiling eggs, etc.

Las Flores School Flourishes

The lack of adequate housing for teachers had made it impossible for the community of Las Flores to sustain elementary schooling for its children. A new school had been built, but teachers were forced to live in the already crowded homes of local residents – so they didn't stay with the job. In 2001, with funding from one of HCSC's founders, we helped the community purchase land next to their school and build a comfortable house for two teachers. We also launched a program, conceived and funded by one of our supporters, which pays \$100 bonuses to teachers who complete a full year of service.

Two teachers are now in their second year with the community. What is more, these resident teachers have obtained certification in adult education and, in addition to their daily work with elementary school children, are providing free adult classes 4 hours per week. The class is large and most of the reading glasses that we brought to Honduras this year went to these adult students.

Help for Other Schools

Early this year, the Milla Tres community received a promise of funding from the government to hire a second teacher in the middle of the year. In the meantime their school had one large room with one teacher and 62 students. HCSC provided materials to divide the room and pay the \$85/month salary of a second teacher for six months until government funding began. In addition we provided some money for supplies for the classroom, as well as the usual reading books and supplies donated by various individuals and by Scholastic Books.

In Omoa, HCSC provided a small grant to help fund physical expansion of a cooperative (tuition-free) secondary school (colegio) serving families in the surrounding area. The expansion is being accomplished through the direct labor and fundraising efforts of the member families. HCSC also provided a small grant to support development of an adult education program in Camino Nuevo.

A Road to Betania

Residents of Betania sought our help in developing a passable road up to their mountain community from the coastal highway – a distance of about two miles. Although building roads is not our main purpose, we were impressed by the community's solidarity in support of this project. With the leverage provided by a modest HCSC grant, Betania negotiated further assistance from the municipality – and managed to complete the major portion of the road in the spring of 2003.



Ri  de la Paz descending from mountains

Sustainable Forest Management

In the remote Sico Valley – two days travel east of our projects in the Omoa region – residents of Altos de la Paz have organized a co-op to practice sustainable forestry. We have loaned the co-op \$7500 (funded in turn by a loan to HCSC from the Equity Trust Fund) to pay for the completion of the detailed planning needed for government approval of the sustainable harvest of mahogany and other tropical hardwoods. Selected trees will be felled and milled at the site with chainsaws into rough lumber, which will then be transported on men's shoulders, then on mules, then on rafts down the river. The project will not only provide income for this remote community but will involve the residents in an organized alternative to the unregulated deforestation of mountain forest that is so common in other areas of Honduras. The loan will be repaid as the lumber is sold.



Nola meeting with Altos de la Paz residents

Partners

We launched HCSC two years ago with a focus on the two communities – Las Flores and Camino Nuevo – with which Nola had worked closely in the Peace Corp. But as we've tried to respond to requests for assistance from a growing number of communities we've welcomed the opportunity to collaborate with others who are doing constructive work in the region.

These people include Alex del Cid, a very dedicated local resident who is supported by the national government and acts as a representative of the nation's Vice President (whose special responsibilities include this region). HCSC is working with him on several projects involving schools and water systems.

Another important player is Rolando Lopez, a tireless community development activist. Rolando arranged for Nola to meet with the Vice President and is playing a key role in the Altos de la Paz project described below. Also important is Dr. Michael Campana and his program at the University of New Mexico, which brings volunteers to the Omoa region to assist with water system projects, including that of Nueva Vida and potentially others involving HCSC.

And we are grateful to Maribel Reyes for her legal work, and to Arturo Sabillon, who has offered to provide further legal assistance.

New Requests

As we approach the beginning of 2004, we are already looking at the following new requests for assistance.

- Milla Tres. The roof of the school leaks so badly that equipment is damaged and the building cannot be used during heavy rains. About \$2000 needed.
- Nueva Vida has asked for help with materials and a construction manager to build a teachers' house, with the community providing land, local materials, and labor. \$1850 needed. Also seeking to buy additional watershed acreage as noted above.
- Las Flores. The barely passable road washes out completely with heavy rains. \$300 is needed to purchase culverts.
- Monte de Los Olivos. This remote community (4 hours walk from the highway) has a suspension bridge that children must cross to reach school. They need \$112 to buy chain link fencing for the sides of the bridge so kids won't fall off. They also need materials and equipment for a new school building and equipment – likely to cost about \$4000.



Family in Nueva Florida

Community Ownership of Community Lands

For *all* of the communities we are working with, we are supporting the legal process required for them to achieve corporate status, so that they can own land used for community purposes. This process – aimed at anchoring the communities and their members against displacement from lands to which they have no recorded title – continues to be handled by attorney Maribel Reyes, who lives in nearby Puerto Cortes but has had to travel to the capital, Tegucigalpa, to file the necessary papers. We now hope to streamline the process with additional help from attorney Arturo Sabillon, who has offered to handle filings in Tegucigalpa, where he lives.

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