



Milestone is a Good Foundation

By Richard Schopfer

Bench marks of our own progress are sometimes difficult to identify, much less realize. They come about slowly after great effort and hard work fraught at times with frustration, failure, and fatigue. The first six months of '93 slipped by in anxious anonymity. The workloads piled up weighing heavily on weary shoulders. The process of growth, transformation, and adaptation passed through periods of analysis, self-evaluation and program planning. Although it was a costly experience in terms of time and expenses, it gave us the opportunity to evaluate our past performance, define our present capability, and to consider more clearly where our future efforts will be directed. In spite of the economic and political turmoil and the desperate plight of the poor, our enthusiasm and vision for the future is strong and clear. The way is now open for us to proceed with our new Nicaraguan programs in health, small business, agriculture, housing, water, and education. The groundwork compiled to date is firmly in place as the foundation for our development programs during the decade.



Those eagerly learning today will be the leaders of tomorrow

Milestone in May, the Nicaraguan Assembly approved Institute for Socio-Economic Development, *INDESE*, as a national non-profit organization. The Institute will promote base community development in collaboration with other development organizations, and local

community, neighborhood, church, women, and business groups. Its first project was approved recently by the Canadian Embassy in Managua. They provided seed capital to form an association of women in microenterprises and

See MILESTONE page 4

The Social Foundation of Productivity: Education

By John Lawrence Daly

After 12 years of intensively building a field capacity in Nicaragua to meet the complex requirements of grassroots development, the need for a permanent site for comprehensive training of Nicaraguans in all phases of self-help work has become a major priority of the Alliance. Some background explanation of this new project is offered as an appeal for help of all sorts: technical, social, and financial.

Taking responsibility for one's life is a community project: grandparents, parents, children, and interested others

are all part of it. Trying to make it solely on one's own doesn't work. Both young men and women need the support of the wider community to develop the awareness and technical skills required to move forward their individual and family lives.

In a country devastated by civil war, natural disasters, and the lowest per capita income in the hemisphere, much work must be focused on the socio-economic life of children: hope of the future. If present efforts with adults are to have any effective continuity and sus-

tainability, the carrying forward of programs must rest with young Nicaraguans ready and capable to take up their responsibilities as agents of their own history.

At the present time, long-term planning for the whole Central American region, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and national development programs must give a priority to training, increase in competencies, and social stability of the future human resources of the region. This

See EDUCATION page 5

Roof Tops in Rivas

By Sal Piazza

For those of us who have been working in Nicaragua these last several years, the experience is best described as furiously frustrating. The dollar had a value of 50 cordobas; its value climbed to nearly one million cordobas. Fortunately, current policy has succeeded in stabilizing the currency after a change in government. Despite this, some non-governmental organization (NGO) reports state that the situation in Nicaragua is desperate, polarized and explosive, and the plight of the poor is as perilous now as before. In fact, recent World Bank statistics establish Nicaragua as the poorest country in Latin America.

One difficulty prevails. As a condition for receiving international agency loans, reduced public spending, allocation of credit to the export sector, and privatization of state enterprises is being implemented. Health and education are no longer free and unemployment is near 70%. Within this context of political and economic instability, development becomes extremely difficult.

The Alliance has worked and completed projects in many parts of the country. An effective community development program has been underway for the past six years in the province



Family installs new roof from Alliance self-help TECHO project

of Rivas, a region in the most southwestern part of Nicaragua.

The program began during the war when containers were shipped quarterly containing medical supplies, household articles, and clothing, the latter having been sold at nominal prices. Subsequent shipments included needed educational supplies, tools, recreation and office equipment. The proceeds from saleable items are used to fund grassroots projects such as pre-school children's feeding programs, classroom and community center repairs and maintenance, a people's pharmacy, and latrine construction. Through the distribution of

these materials we have had the opportunity to relate personally with all the indigenous groups and thereby reach a better understanding of the people's problems and basic needs.

One of their first priorities was for a project to extend the city water mains to neighborhoods at the town's outskirts. The Alliance provided sufficient tubing to bring a potable water supply to 225 families in five barrios. The people themselves dug the trenches and installed the pipes.

A second priority was for a program to address the tremendous demand for

See ROOFTOPS page 8

Water, Water, Everywhere



Family education for safe use of water is essential for good health

by Jim Dette

Samuel Coleridge's oft quoted line from *The Ancient Mariner*, "Water, water, everywhere, not a drop to drink," described the situation of a ship at sea. Unfortunately, the same is holding more and more true for the water supplies available for many developing countries. Indiscriminate use of surface water for dumping, refuse, industrial wastes, and human wastes make it unfit for consumption farther downstream. Ground water, long believed to be free from contamination, is not the pristine source it once was. Even deep wells can be contaminated by chemicals which do not biodegrade in their movement through the soil.

The Alliance has always maintained sanitation as an integral part of its endeavors in water projects. Construction

See WATER page 7

Alliance Participation in the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

By Richard Bissell

After two decades of increasingly severe human costs due to disasters, the United Nations in 1989 declared the decade of the 1990s as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). The Decade has the function of educating decision-makers in governments and multinational assistance organizations regarding methods of decreasing the human impact of disasters. The programs of the Alliance have at their core the goal of helping people decrease their vulnerability to cataclysmic events in their physical, social, political, and economic lives.

Disaster researchers in the last few years have scientifically demonstrated what journalists have reported for years: disasters affect the poor much more severely than the middle class or wealthy. The poor have less disaster-resistant housing, are typically located in vulnerable marginal areas, such as ravines

or unstable hillsides, and have fewer physical and economic resources to fall back on when their lives are suddenly disrupted.

The Alliance works in one of the most disaster-prone countries of the world, Nicaragua, and its programs have directly experienced the effects of tropical storms, hurricanes, floods, droughts, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis (tidal waves), as well as the effects of war and economic crisis. Nicaragua is also one of the more seismically active countries in the earthquake zone called the Pacific Ring of Fire.

How is the Alliance participating in the IDNDR? First and foremost, we are working in all of our projects to enhance communities' self-reliant abilities to respond effectively to natural and political/economic events. Some of the work of the Alliance, such as the TECHO program directly works to decrease the population's vulnerability to housing col-

Recently Nicaragua has been victimized by:

hurricanes



a tidal wave



and volcanic eruptions



*Alliance is proud to announce that on May 5, 1993, the official publication of the government of Nicaragua, the **Gaceta**, reported in decree number 546 the approval of the legal status of the Institute for Socio-Economic Development (INDESE) by the National Assembly on March 9, 1993. INDESE will work with local and international organizations to plan and implement grassroots development projects to promote production and employment, education and leadership, democracy and participation. As a national Nicaraguan non-profit organization, its bylaws allow it to work in other countries of Central America.*

MILESTONE from page 1

to equip two association member groups that produce clothing and bread. Doña Amparo, Argentina, Isabel and the other 37 women members of the association, are heads of households and mothers of 151 children. They will make clothing in their own homes on newly purchased treadle sewing machines. The grant also provided for the purchase of materials and supplies for the women to start working immediately. INDESE is providing supervision and administration to assist the women in making their new business a great success. The women of the association are being trained to manage business activities, accounting, and the selling of the finished goods to local families, stores, and market places in the region. The training will give the women the opportunity to learn the skills and acquire experience to run their own business affairs. Working together they are now able to produce higher quality and greater quantity of goods for their own families and for sale in the local markets. The women will repay the initial loans into a revolving fund from their earned profits.

The Alliance is implementing through INDESE a foundation grant to conduct a pilot training of trainers program for the formation of a development team to work in microdevelopment projects in rural communities and poor urban neighborhoods. The team provides planning and consulting services, technical assistance and training of local leaders for more effective implementation and efficient operation of essential improvement projects. The development team is composed of local grassroots leaders, professionals, and technicians who assist groups in the technical aspects of project design, funding,



What's missing in this photo? Happy children in the CENFAMA pool for summer camp '94!

and administration. The current funding grant started the project in a selected location as a test model for its future expansion to other regions. This type of project is very much in demand and critically needed by local project and development groups to acquire the skills and aptitude for self-directed management of business, improvement and betterment projects among farmers, underemployed urban families, low income groups and marginalized communities.

Another milestone for INDESE is its conceptualization of the essential need for the Center for Children and the Family (CENFAMA). This is the most significant advancement in its early growth and planning. The Board of Directors meeting in November will discuss and plan the first year program for the Center, which realistically can begin in Summer 1994 with camp sessions for groups of children from urban neighborhoods.

The rural site of the Center is a new

environment and its location adjacent to a small village will provide an ideal setting for the children to learn, work, and play together in planned group activities. The children selected in compatible age groups will be responsible for planning and organizing their own daily schedules and activities in education and vocation, arts and crafts, recreation and remedial skills. The self-reliance groups will assign specific tasks for preparing and cleaning facilities, caring for equipment and supplies, and maintaining order and decorum in common areas for dining, sleeping, recreating, and studying.

The fundamental concept is to give the children, youth and adults the opportunity for new experiences in planned and participative ways for living, working, playing, and learning together what it means to be family and community. Self-discovery is a new potential to perform and accomplish those abilities, skills, and values that remain hidden beneath a hopeful countenance threatened by poverty and despair.

The Center envisions a broad scope of activities in education, vocation, and formation, and shared-living gatherings for both children and parents in search of a consensus for solidarity that is pro-development and pro-family. This program needs your support now. Please help us to fix up, furnish, and supply the Center. Give the children a chance! □

Richard Schopfer is Executive Director of the Alliance

With your help CENFAMA is a reality for the children of Nicaragua. Wouldn't you like to share their dream?



Children express joy with the news of the CENFAMA Center

Health is our High Goal

By Richard Schopfer

The town is nestled among the craggiest of mountain tops. Sheltered from the incivilities of the city and problems of the national, economic, and political crisis, it stands isolated and alone with its own unique problems. The wind whips its chilling slap across the face of the mountain and through the indigenous community of San José de Cusmapa, the place Vicente calls home. A bit overweight and under-exercised, he still struggles to navigate the steep slopes that descend to the neighboring villages. As Alliance coordinator for the region, he walks the rocky footpaths to visit the communities serviced by the regional clinic in Cusmapa. The long trip to El Carrizo is always a bit of a challenge for a nurse more accustomed to the clinic than the mountain. The countryside around El Carrizo is populated by poor farm families clustered in a score of small communities. If medical care is needed, they have to wait for Vicente or make the long climb up the mountain to

Cusmapa. It is a frightening trip for an injured worker, a sick child, or a pregnant woman.

Vicente requested a health post for the area. All attempts to convince the regional health director were rejected as a burden on the system and a drain on available resources needed for the existing facilities. The people of El Carrizo desperately needed medical services. The Alliance took up the challenge.

Vicente is an experienced medical professional with years of practical nursing experience. He is on the community advisory board and works closely with the doctor in charge of the clinic. Together they made a study of the local health conditions and petitioned the Ministry of Social Action. Their recommendation for a new health post in El Carrizo was given priority status in the municipality and approved by the regional advisory board. Vicente has won the first phase of the battle. The Alliance will take up the challenge again

by preparing a grant request for the construction of the health post and seek donated supplies, furniture, equipment, and medications as part of our health program for the region.

Vicente will service the health post from our office in Cusmapa with regular trips down the mountain. The people of El Carrizo are thankful for his perseverance on their behalf and hope that they will soon have their own health post. The women will have a safe place to give birth and medical attention for the children. The Ministry of Health has agreed to assign a doctor to the post after the first year of operation.

We are proud of Vicente for his dedication to the people and his ability to solve the difficult problems affecting development and the health care system. Our man in Cusmapa will not have to be concerned with being overweight and under-exercised for the next year as he makes good things happen on his frequent trips down from the mountain top. □

EDUCATION from page 1

aspect of development hinges on the ability of the men and women of tomorrow to grow up today as leaders of their families and as the workers and managers of the future economy.

Successful grassroots work depends on personal continuity, follow-up, and allocation of resources to aid the growth of self-sustaining young men and women in every sphere of life. This requires sites of training, update, renewal, and a chance for people from different regions, class, and ethnic groups to learn the skills of living together, cooperating together, and building a common vision of their future. The very roots of civil and family strife can be addressed at the Center for Children and the Family.

The work cannot wait for a better time. As with most important family matters there is an urgency and intimacy to this work that requires immediate attention. Children by definition are in transition. But added to that is the difficult conditions brought on by civil unrest, continuing violence, natural disasters, poverty, and the relocation of refugees in both rural and urban areas. The crying need for a training center to form and sustain leaders is a crucial institu-



Miguelito and Juanita await patiently for the opportunity to get the education they truly need and deserve

tional innovation in grassroots activity.

Self-improvement, practice in democratic living, and coming to grips with the need to form indigenous change agents takes help to make it happen.

Your ideas, technical skills, and financial assistance are needed now. We hope to hear from you soon. □

Larry Daly is a member of the Alliance Board of Directors

Sidetracked by Mother Nature!

By Don Schopfer

The moment had arrived! It was 9 a.m. on September 1, 1993 in San José de Cusmapa where the official inauguration for the women's project began between the Madriz Women's Association and INDESE, the Alliance counterpart organization in Nicaragua. These women were assisted by INDESE to form an association to participate in various income producing activities. INDESE responded to the immediate needs of the women by inaugurating the components for sewing and bread baking.

First I read a letter I had prepared for the women, which explained the components of the approved project and the

responsibility of each member. Then the women individually signed agreements whereby they acknowledged the receipt of sewing machines, equipment, and credit needed to begin producing clothing and bread in their communities.

Afterwards, the machines were to be distributed from the back of our pick-up truck to each member located in two different municipalities, San José de Cusmapa and Las Sabanas, 10 kilometers down the mountain. It was near lunch time and the women in Cusmapa offered to prepare lunch for our group. However, in spite of our hunger, something moved me to run down the mountain first to deliver the three machines in Las

Sabanas. Then we could return for a more leisurely lunch. We proceeded to Las Sabanas, intending to return after distributing and assembling the machines there.

Upon arriving in Las Sabanas we immediately began to assemble the first machine. Suddenly a young woman appeared whom I had known for a few years. She was a nurse from the local health clinic, who had been subsidized by the Alliance in 1992, while training in Cusmapa. She explained that, through the support of the Alliance, she received the opportunity to acquire the training needed to become a full time employee of the Ministry of Health, and was now working as a regular nurse in Las Sabanas. Then she explained that the real reason for her visit was to ask if I could transport a special case to the hospital in Somoto, all the way down the mountain. She explained that she had a patient that was three days past due in delivering her baby, was in serious condition, and needed a cesarian section in order to save the baby and the mother. I immediately answered her plea, since the local transportation vehicle had already passed through the town for that day.

Soon we were all in the truck and on our way to Somoto, which was 20 kilometers down the mountain on the worst imaginable dirt road. It generally takes about an hour to travel that 12 mile stretch, but we all knew that it would be much longer since we had to move extra carefully considering the woman's condition. We were about 5 kilometers into our journey when suddenly the woman screamed because her contractions were very close together. Now the moment had indeed arrived! Gloria López, the nurse from the clinic, accompanied by Vicente Baquedano, our regional project coordinator and male nurse, attended the birth in the back seat of our pick-up. The woman gave birth to a healthy boy at 2:12 p.m. somewhere on the side of the mountain.

After all the excitement was over, we then proceeded down the mountain towards the hospital, now with a new passenger. We finally arrived at the hospital where the woman and her baby were able to receive the attention they needed. We returned to Las Sabanas where we continued assembling the

See *MOTHER NATURE* page 8

Doña Amparo shows how easy sewing is when you have the right equipment to work with, as she prepares to assemble the first job of the day with her new machine, at right.

Below, members of the Madriz Women's Association express their joy for having the opportunity to participate in INDESE's enterprise development program.



Delegation Visits Managua

An excited group of travelers from the Church of the Little Flower in Bethesda, Maryland, arrived in Nicaragua for a week long visit. The delegation met with many prominent persons in church, private and government organizations, which was highlighted by an exhilarating meeting with Doña Violeta Chamorro in the Presidential Office. The group was warmly received and articulately informed on the present conditions and expectations for the future. After becoming familiar with the capital and its environment, the travelers made side trips to Granada and Leon, with delightful interludes resting on the beach at Poneloya and boating on Lake Nicaragua.

The group spent the majority of its time with its sister parish by getting to know the many new friends, the pastor, parish council, school children, and many dedicated persons working in the parish activities. The health post, library, and thrift store were of particular interest because of the financial and material help that the group sent to support these critical sister parish needs. Padre Alfonso, the pastor, Sister Zoraida, and the other teachers at the school were very appreciative of our efforts to learn and cooperate with them in the spirit of solidarity. □



Everyone lends a hand while medical supplies are delivered to health clinic in Managua



WATER from page 2

of latrines goes hand in hand with well drilling. This practice protects the local domestic wells from contamination, but large scale industrial and governmental practices are beyond the reach of our grassroots programs. Large governmental and international lending agencies must take the lead in these activities. The passage of, and the strict enforcement of environmental laws are the only answer to this problem. One need only read of the degradation of the Amazon rain forest by commercial exploitation to understand the breadth of the problem. The argument that this development is necessary to give employment, and thereby relieve the misery of the people, is self-serving. Greed is the motivation. One need only to look at the effects of the discovery of oil in the Ecuadorian oriente. The boon to their society has been the marked increase in foreign

exchange and cheap fuel for local consumption. On the other side of the coin, a recent earthquake ruptured an oil pipeline, dumping millions of gallons of oil into the rivers making them unfit for human use for the foreseeable future. And, the lead levels in the blood of children in Quito, the capital of the country, is many times the level considered safe. Air pollution affects all classes of the population. The rich can take individual measures to guard against water pollution but no one can avoid breathing the air.

AguaPura, the Alliance water institute, is continuing its search for a driller experienced in cable tool drilling. The April 1993 issue of the *Water Well Journal*, the national magazine of the National Ground Water Association, featured an article about the water project Alliance has with PRODEAS, the

Bolivian well drilling school. The article describes the need for a driller to volunteer for a year to work with PRODEAS. Six responses were received, but a selection has not yet been made.

In Nicaragua, INDESE has received several requests from institutions and localities for assistance with solving their serious water problems. The Alliance is discussing these projects with Water for People and other international organizations to seek and work out details to collaborate for funding and technical assistance. Many health and nutrition projects are directly dependent upon a pure water supply, and the safe storage and handling of water for the ultimate success of improving the health of the people. □

Jim Dette is co-director of the Alliance water institute, AguaPura

ROOFTOPS from page 2

housing improvement. The Rivas NGO in recognition of this problem, initiated a TECHO Roof Tops project. This NGO is one of many formed to channel foreign aid to grassroots organizations. The Alliance, in collaboration with the Rivas NGO and solidarity groups from Germany, provided funds for the construction of roofs; to date, 150 roofs have been completed. In order to qualify, families are required to assist in the construction and pay one-half of the cost. The project also supports a workshop that produces cement, roof tiles, and building blocks, providing work for five people.

The Alliance continues the shipment of containers attempting to meet the unlimited demand for bicycles, a very valuable transportation resource, which are sold to teachers, health care and other workers at nominal cost, in some cases on an installment-paying basis. The sales of bicycles guarantee sufficient funds to support a repair and maintenance workshop that employs six people.

To date, 165 bicycles have been sent, and 220 are now ready for shipment. Total net estimated sales amount to

\$10,000 which will be available for projects of housing, health care, community wells, and a six acre nursery enterprise.

In its development work in Rivas, the Alliance has served as a catalyst for a sister-city linkage between the people of Bergen County, New Jersey, and Rivas. We were also able to interest solidarity groups from California and Montana to work jointly in planning and initiating self-help neighborhood projects. We have worked closely with the director of the Rivas NGO. In fact, we were a major sponsor of his recent visit to the U.S. for the purpose of fundraising. In addition, three young women volunteers from the U.S. are presently working on Alliance projects and living with local families.

We are confident that the spirit and resourcefulness of the Nicaraguan people will see them through the present crises. It is our hope that future conditions improve. For our part, we will continue with shipments of aid and funds to develop more projects to provide employment and economic benefits. □

Sal Piazza is Director of the Alliance TECHO Program

MOTHER NATURE from page 6

machines. I later heard that the mother and baby were both in good health.

The women making clothes now have two more sheets and many more diapers to make, while the bread bakers are preparing to add another pound of flour to their recipes. The lunch we had craved was finally served at dinner time, late in the evening. Better late than never.

The Alliance and INDESE continue to promote self-help community development projects in communities like San José de Cusmapa and Las Sabanas. Now when I travel up and down that mountain road the people say, "Here comes the INDESE ambulance." □

Don Schopfer is the Alliance Program Director in Nicaragua

Vicente Baquedano, Gloria López, and Judy Huete express their joy for new baby and mother... just another typical day on the mountain



Alliance for Communities in Action

P.O. Box 30154, Bethesda, MD 20824

Telephone: 301-229-7707

Fax: 301-229-0457

The Alliance is a non-profit organization that links groups and individuals for self-help projects in economically disadvantaged communities primarily in Latin America. The Alliance assists these communities by securing funds and appropriate technology for projects in shelter housing, agriculture, potable water, health, cooperatives, and microenterprise.

Officers:

Richard Schopfer
President

Joseph DiBernardo
Vice President

Sal Piazza
Vice President

John Lawrence Daly
Secretary

Drs. Richard & Robin Bissell
Directors of Health Program

James & Evelyn Dette
Directors of Water Program

Barbara Schopfer
Treasurer

Advisory Committee:

Bishop Morgan Casey
Apostolic Vicar
Pando, Bolivia

Robert Caswell
President, Laubach Literacy International
Syracuse, New York

Juan Claudio DeVincenti
Architect
Bethesda, Maryland

Reina DuVal
Financial Advisor
Washington, DC

Mary Evelyn Jegen, SND
Pax Christi International

Mary Keim Maples, MSS
Early Childhood Specialist
Syracuse, New York

Michael Moran
Marketing Economist
Vienna, Virginia

José Olivares
Agricultural Economist
World Bank

Edmund Pellegrino, M.D.
Georgetown University
Washington, DC

Michael Shimkin
Vice Chairman, Oxfam America
New York City

Bishop Walter Sullivan
Catholic Diocese of Richmond
Richmond, Virginia

(Organizations for identification only)

Contributions to Alliance for Communities in Action are tax deductible