



ALLIANCE FOR COMMUNITIES IN ACTION • A Peace and Development Network FALL 1994

## Living a Childhood Dream - CENFAMA

For the 20 boys and girls full of energy and inquisitiveness, it was an unforgettable day; sharing experiences with friends, exploring the beauty of nature in the rural environment and learning about the sounds of music, a far cry from the noisy city streets.

The laughter and sounds of the countryside made music to the youthful hearts singing the joys of innocence and the fun of life lived well.

The children came from a poor city neighborhood to attend the first music workshop at the Center for Children and

the Family, CENFAMA, located in Veracruz, Nicaragua. José Palacios, a talented guitarist and songwriter, gave a music seminar to the ten-year old boys and girls from the Sacred Heart parish school in Managua. The group enjoyed an exciting day as José took them on a classroom journey through the world of music with ideas, words, and notes placed together to express the feelings, sounds and scenes around them. The children composed their own song that reflected their experience of the day. José put it to music and taught the children to sing their song. The music

workshop was creative fun for the children, who also had a splashing great time in the pool that stimulated a voracious appetite at lunchtime. When asked how they enjoyed the day and when do they want to come back, they all shouted "TOMORROW!"

Our first workshop was a great success not only because the children had a fun-filled learning experience that will last a lifetime but also the Center had an important learning session for planning and conducting other workshops and activities throughout the year. □

*Playtime at CENFAMA pool*



*José teaching at CENFAMA music workshop*



## Seeds of Change in Cooperation

Soon the 21st century will greet our perception of ourselves and others with a window of opportunity to exist and co-exist in a new quality of life. We as humankind are still learning in action how to do this. The ominous cloud of global disintegration threatens the earth and all its forms of life. This global threat is a challenge that we must all take up. The cross-cultural details of

this education is new learning. The global dynamics of our new interdependence with each other and nature is moving the raft of life on this planet earth to change socioeconomic policies and practices more rapidly than they can be monitored. New generations of young people are engaged and attuned to new pathways of vision and action for

interdependent cooperation.

This new learning in living together affects profoundly our work in grassroots community development. Our project activities of learning-by-doing are essentially social tasks with economic and technical support that require creating viable organizations and mutual cooperation between them. Such

*See CHANGE page 7*



## Rivas: A Community in Action

In a country where the people have persevered through dictatorship and war, survived earthquakes, hurricanes and tidal waves, and experienced flooding and drought at the same time in different parts of the country, it should not be surprising that Nicaraguans are finding creative ways to struggle through the current economic crisis. The city of Rivas, located on the Pan American Highway towards the Costa Rican border, provides impressive examples of this Nicaraguan ingenuity.

With gasoline prices 2-1/2 to 3 times above levels in the United States, the people of Rivas have turned to bicycles as an economical and reliable mode of transportation. Given that the flat terrain lends itself to the use of bicycles, more and more residents of Rivas are riding bicycles. Bicycles are a major part of the early morning bustle of activity, whether to work or school. At night, the plaza is filled with bicycles as young Nicaraguans gather to socialize.

The Alliance for Communities in Action, in conjunction with Pedals for Progress and the Open Road Bike Shop, have contributed to the use of bicycle transportation. To date, 710 used bicycles along with an assortment of bicycle parts and accessories have been sent by container to Rivas.



*Bicycle made for three?*

The local NGO that receives the bicycles, ADC-Rivas, works closely with a bicycle assembly and repair shop to prepare the bikes for their new owners. ADC-Rivas, through a democratic and participatory process, oversees the placement of the bikes, giving priority to school teachers and health workers. The price of the bicycle varies, depending on

the buyer's ability to pay.

Similarly, ADC-Rivas has used a \$7,500 grant from the Alliance for Communities in Action to address the pressing need for another basic necessity: sanitary housing. The makeshift housing of many Nicaraguans proves particularly inadequate in the

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## New Projects in Chile

The jet dips its wings as if in salute to the majestic Andes and crosses the equator into the southern hemisphere. Following the line of the mountains, we head toward the icy South Pole. Far below us the Atacama desert is scorching everything in sight as it stretches its thirsty tentacles from the mountains to the sea. The plane glides into a gentle descent above the central valley of Chile as the sun setting into the Pacific glistens the snow covered peaks of the Cordillera into a bursting aurora of color. Home again, the sojourners for twenty years arrive in Santiago.

Patricia and José Olivares are highly trained professional consultants to international development organizations. Technocrats, in the best sense of the word, they also have a heart and a mission to do something special to help the poor in their country. They will represent the Alliance by establishing a program plan and coordinating the first projects. A large periurban sector within an hour's drive north of the capital has been selected as a target area for a preliminary feasibility study for family needs in microenterprise, health, and agricultural activities.

The Olivares are the catalysts to organize a support team among their circle of family and friends. They will be the core group to plan and implement various basic projects that will initiate a country program for future Alliance activities. An innovative aspect of their approach to grassroots development will be to ask the whole family to make a commitment of time and talent to the work. In this way, each member of the family will share in the vision and the mission work in a spirit of togetherness and cooperation with the other families.

We miss them and wish them peace and success in their new endeavors. □



## Alliance Helps Pure Water Technology in Bolivia

PRODEAS, the well drilling school with which the Alliance works, is sponsored by the Santa Cruz Archdiocesan Secretariat for Social Ministry (SEAPAS). In a recent newsletter, SEAPAS observed that, although national and municipal elections had been held with the anticipated results, there have not been substantial changes. The general poverty of the Bolivian people can be seen in the faces of migrants, Indians, street children, women living in abusive situations, handicapped individuals, etc. The government speaks a great deal about development. Their actions appear to be made for economic considerations: e.g., privatization of public utilities and encouragement of exports from mining and the highly mechanized agro-industries. Obviously this will result in major increases in unemployment and dislocation of rural workers.

SEAPAS is realistic, as well, in their self-evaluation, recognizing not only their successes, but the need for improvement. They conclude that they are proud of their program, but must continue to critique it to become more efficient and give greater support and assistance to the poor among them. In this regard, the Bolivian bishops have called for a new pastoral focus. In the next five years, efforts for development will proceed under the slogan, "Church, the Communicator of Life and Hope." SEAPAS desires "to be the signs of Life for our people and signs of Hope for a just, fraternal and supportive society."

We have been impressed by SEAPAS during visits to their downtown office. The director, Sra. Blanca Perez, is very capable and the staff is well-trained and diligent. Our task is to assist PRODEAS in the techniques of supplying pure drinking water—the most important element of life, providing the basic needs for bathing, washing and cooking. PRODEAS also trains its drilling students in health and hygiene, and the maintenance of a pure water system. However, without a well-run umbrella organization such as SEAPAS as a partner, it would be very difficult to make the necessary contacts and receive the support we need to implement our project. With SEAPAS we have an excellent opportunity to directly affect and improve the quality of people's lives.

In the spring of 1994, an Alliance engineer, Joe DiBernardo, and his wife, Addy, health worker, visited the PRODEAS project. They discussed with Engineer Juan Carlos Lopez, director of PRODEAS, the cable tool rig and rotary rig that have been donated to the Alliance, and the search for a U.S. driller, proficient in the use of the cable tool rig, to spend a year with PRODEAS to train the students. Director Lopez told the DiBernardo's that the school had found a local well driller capable of

teaching the students the techniques of cable tool drilling. It was good news to hear that one of our needs had been met. What remains is finding the necessary funds to send the cable tool rig and rotary rig to PRODEAS school. We are in the process of trying to raise approximately \$37,000 needed for shipping costs. An experienced U.S. cable tool driller is still being sought for a short period to assure a smooth transfer and integration of the rig into the school operation. □

*Jim & Evelyn Dette demonstrate rope pump for water at training school*



### *RIVAS from page 2*

rainy season when even the most sound roof is severely challenged. Accordingly, ADC-Rivas set roof replacement as a high priority, with an emphasis on indigenous production.

The roof tiles are fabricated and painted by ADC-Rivas. The tiles are made from local materials and have distinct advantages over the more traditional roof tiles, being lighter than the Spanish tile and lacking the carcinogenic qualities of Nicalit.

Again, ADC-Rivas, using a democratic, participatory process, selects those families most in need of a

new roof and sets their payment terms according to their ability to pay. To date, the grant has financed 42 roof replacements with over a 50% repayment rate in a country where about two out of every three persons are unemployed. The proceeds from the sales of bicycles have been creatively applied to a water well system for a 10-acre experimental farm and a feeding program for malnourished children from families living in poverty.

The bicycle and roof tile programs in Rivas illustrate how Nicaraguans have confronted adversity by creatively working together to address the basic needs of the community. □



## Free and Independent

The recent Alliance Board of Directors meeting was enlightened by the presentation of the economist and international development consultant, Gabriel Siri. He spoke about the importance of grassroots, democratic organizations and their vital role in civil society. Gabriel expressed his deep convictions about the great potential and fundamental need for people living in poverty to organize and work together. By sharing their talents and resources things can get done in more effective ways to directly benefit the workers and their families.

Mr. Siri highlighted the fact that a dynamic, grassroots movement among people at the poverty level can help to strengthen a foundational base for the economic triangle. This vital role has always been an integral part of the fabric of the socioeconomic weave.

This is true today in a very difficult

politico-economic place like Nicaragua. The key is an active and independent progress by self-reliant groups working locally and democratically to come up with constructive projects for community and enterprise development. The question which Mr. Siri seems to answer strongly in the affirmative is, "Can base groups in civil society generate their own power for long term survival without the interest, interference, influence and investment of government?" There are many ways this can be done and should be done to strengthen the progress of grassroots development.

The task is for them to remain free from excessive governmental control and independent from oppressive political pressure, in order to achieve self-reliance and build new initiatives. Granted, this is an incredibly difficult task. But the use of local human resources, and talent creatively applied, can

solve local problems that provide the groundwork for strong community action to improve conditions and provide a better opportunity for small enterprises and increased employment to alleviate poverty for many families.

Civil society rests on the natural and human resources of the many workers who form the base of the economic triangle. Our projects help to organize the base to participate in their own growth and development. It is a long-term self-help process that educates, coordinates and implements projects that take the poor out of poverty in a step-by-step, upward mobility. Society is strengthened as the foundational family is liberated from the dehumanization of deprivation. Our projects for community water, health, training for adults, and education for children help to build up personal identity and dignity of the person and the family. □

**Being free and independent often requires thoughtful planning, training, and hard work. This community of 35 families is now enjoying pure drinking water through the benefit of their own planning and hard work in this Alliance self-help project.**

*The planning session is an important part of any self-help project*







*Working together to accomplish the task requires hard work and cooperation*

*This small community is delighted at the success of their planning and hard work*



## Reforestation Helps the Ecological Future

The rain-gullied slopes of the barren countryside wait patiently to receive the warm embrace of Mother Nature to restore the bucolic beauty of the green forest. Mother Nature needs a helping hand to plant the seeds for the reforestation of the ecological wasteland created by the hands of need and greed and neglect.

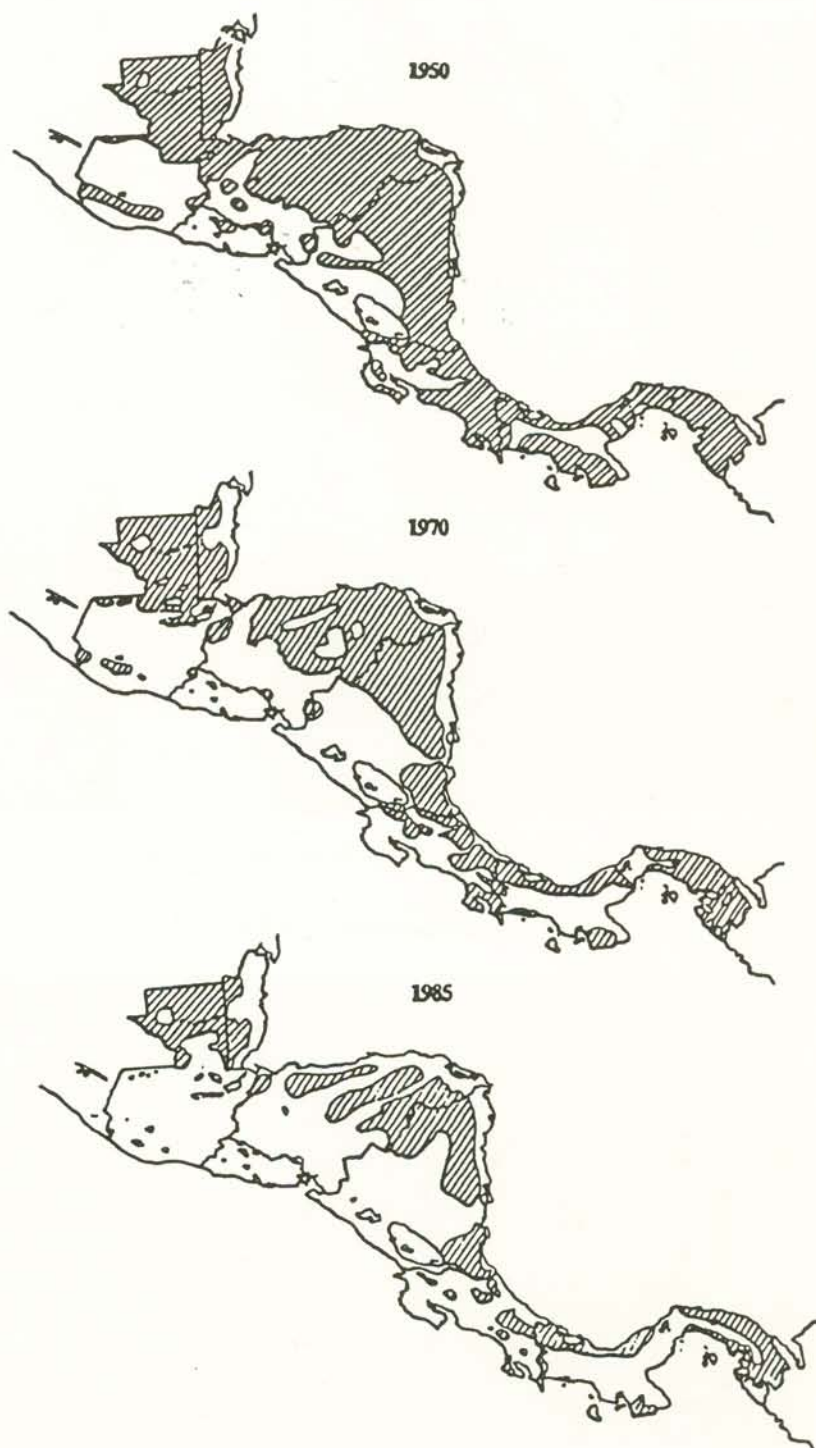
*It is better to plant a seed  
than to curse the emptiness.*

Thousands of leucaena seeds donated by Alliance for Communities in Action have been carefully nurtured into saplings under the watchful eye of Jorge Miller. The pilot project provided seed beds along the Tapacali River and the leucaena saplings were transplanted to the farms and towns scattered across the mountains and valleys around San José de Cusmapa. About 125 local farm workers received a small daily wage from the Ministry of Social Action to plant the trees. The project demonstrates the agricultural need and the environmental usefulness of the trees which will provide shade and wind barriers, stabilize the soil, demarcate boundaries, restore nutrients to the soil, and become an alternate source of firewood and leaves for composting organic fertilizer. The reforestation of the region, although requiring years to fully mature, is essential to the future sustainable agriculture in the area.


Our Nicaraguan program planning will study the potential for some environmental impact projects which will help the small farmers to improve the ecology of the local biosphere in very manageable and practical ways.

The sketches show the critical deforestation in Central America between 1950 and 1985. This is an ecological disaster of major proportions for the region and the hemisphere that must be dealt with through planning and developmental cooperation. □

### DEFORESTATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA: 1950-1985\*



\*Does not include coastal mangrove forests and open pine savanna.

 Dense Forest Cover



# Community Development Needs Plan for Disaster Response

"When the earth shakes, or the wind is taking away everything around us, and the volcanic lava is flowing down upon us, what do we do?", asked the bewildered people living in the valleys and on the slopes of the mountains. As subsistence farmers they scratch the earth with wooden plows and penetrate the soil with metal bars to plant the tiny plots that pack the parched face of the mountains. Clear and precise answers to their concerns are difficult to explain for any local leader or typical development specialist.

Our solution to these kinds of problems is to say, "Let's ask Rick." The Alliance is fortunate to have on our Board the experience of Richard Bissell, PhD, Professor of Emergency Health Services, and Director of Disaster Health Studies at the University of Maryland's National Study Center for Trauma and Emergency Medical Services. The Center studies the application of emergency responses and preparedness of governments and local public service agencies to rapidly bring efficient medical care and relief to victims of natural disasters and technological crises.

Plans and preparations for medical care and basic necessities of life to relieve the emergency situation are a huge task that requires people to work together cooperatively before the event occurs.

All development programs should have a preparedness component that integrates a basic survival strategy for interdependent cooperation among neighboring communities in a common geographical region. The role of the non-governmental organization can bring people and groups together at the grassroots community level to plan for their own defense and common good. This can be an important counterpart

contribution to their own progress and development plans. Their own self-help efforts can discover new capabilities and organize local material, natural, and human resources. People can work together to improve their conditions and strengthen the community response to disaster situations without waiting for government. In this way lives are saved and families can better deal with the suffering and losses they do incur. □

*Natural disasters occur frequently in Nicaragua*



## *CHANGE from page 1*

forms of mutual self-help in volunteer organizations and civic associations of small enterprises are fundamental to the future of democratic governance and the degree of stability of civil governments. Governments can represent the will of the people but they are no substitute for the self-empowering activity of the citizenry, especially in organizing themselves. The tension suggested here is rooted in the democratic living where the political, economic, and social interdependence of spheres mutually support each other's advancement. No nation state has an absolute corner of empowerment of its own citizens. All are challenged.

This challenge of self-empowerment makes the sharing of experiences in action very appealing as the cutting edge of growth and development. All the more vivid is this challenge amid the starving, the victims of violence, and the indifferent who need invitations to effectively help.

What is new in the leadership of grassroots development is the increased empirical awareness of the necessity of self-empowerment, not handouts; self-rule, not paternalism; self-directed participation in civil personhood, not servility to institutional usurpation of human rights. Creating the physical,

economic, social, political, religious, and ecological conditions for a better quality of life is our gift to one another.

This sea change in the aim of grassroots development is especially manifest in a post-cold war culture. Seeking, finding, and collaborating with communities of change agents living the life of cooperation becomes the seeds of change we promote. Our solidarity of purpose, our life of kinship, and our practical action of shared work and delight leads to better judgments, more opportune programs, and most important, an increased participation of the giftedness of life with one another across the borders of this one world. □



## Alliance Health Program Needs Funding

The past three years in San José de Cusmapa provided an opportunity for better health and a profound learning experience for the families living in the 20 rural communities. Many have been touched by the healing hands of the medical professionals and volunteer corps. These dedicated individuals service the health needs of the indigenous farm families, who eke out a meager living from the slopes of the surrounding mountains. The education has brought a new awareness of health and environment among the people. The training has strengthened the skills of the health workers to give better care. Vast amounts of materials and equipment, medications and clothing donated by the Alliance have supplied the health post with available resources for prevention and treatment. This experience of working with the health service, the volunteer corps, and the people has been the proving ground for our next three-year program.

The new program will have five major components that will radically change the health services and practices of these uneducated, hard working people.

The Oral Hygiene project will provide the office space and equipment for a dental unit and a pharmacy, which will function as small enterprises to service members of the community health

maintenance organization as well as the public.

The health post at the Center for Children and the Family will be equipped for testing and examination of children and furnished with a classroom for health education for adults and youth. Local church, women or community groups will enroll children, and teenagers in education and training, vocational and formation seminars to upgrade life skills and abilities for work and home. The immunization of infants and youth against childhood diseases and adult vaccinations are planned for specific localities and target populations. An intensive training project is planned for volunteer health workers, midwives and community leaders in women, youth and family health issues, alcohol and drug abuse, pre and post-partum care, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and mental health, as well as general health education and prevention for adults and the family.

The component for material resources will solicit and collect the necessary supplies, equipment, furniture, medicine, and tools to implement all aspects of the health program. An overseas freight container will be loaded with the donated goods and shipped to Nicaragua. □

*Adrian directs health post volunteers and midwives*



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*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 microenterprises.*

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