



ALLIANCE FOR COMMUNITIES IN ACTION • A Peace and Development Network

SPRING 1991

## Celebrating Ten Years of Grassroots Development

### The first ten years...

The shock of seeing the depth of poverty and its health casualties, closeup and face to face in a personal encounter, has remained etched in the memory of our board of directors. During the summer of 1981, they visited Central America to see firsthand the desperate needs of the people and to record their daily struggles for a better life, which in many instances simply means survival.

Since that time, the Alliance has worked quietly but with vigorous determination to support a wide range of community development projects. The Alliance channeled resources in the form of project grants, technical assistance, equipment, and education to many self-help community organizations working to improve living conditions.

Our challenge is to obtain and deliver the resources into the hands of the dedicated and competent groups who will create something new and dynamic to benefit the most needy families and the community at large.

For ten years, we have responded to the most critical cries for help from both urban and rural community groups. We have helped people to build health posts, water systems, classrooms, cooperative stores, and improvement for hundreds of family homes. We have organized and financed a regional food production program for marginalized farm worker families, and an integrated urban development program for poor neighborhoods that are congested with migratory, unemployed, and displaced families.

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## The Women of Cusmapa Start Making Their Daily Bread



The women lingered outside the meeting shed, huddled together to break the chilly morning wind that swirled the dirt street into a cyclone-shaped funnel.

The men from the nearby farm communities had gathered to discuss their plans for the next planting season of our Food For Families program.

The women had come to present their appeal for help in forming their own local bread-making project.

Stooping low to avoid a collision with the old oak lintel and stepping high to clear the raised threshold, I was overcome by the bright blue rays of daylight that stretched from mountain top to eternity. The bony skeleton of a horse stumbled by, head to the ground, grubbing for a scrub of grass.

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## Felipe learning to see with Braille

Close your eyes tight, and contemplate the utter darkness. Imagine spending the rest of your life in darkness! What becomes of your dreams, goals, and plans?

As an infant, Felipe lost his sight because of constant malnutrition, disease, and lack of vitamin A. After years of being isolated, Felipe is learning to survive and care for himself. Now he is learning to read in Braille with the help of Sister Frances Kerjes, a Maryknoll nun in Cochabamba, Bolivia. As the coordinator of the Centro Bibliografico, she wants to create a library of educational audiocassettes and Braille books for blind children and adults.

No such library presently exists in Bolivia. In a nation of 6 million people, thousands of blind persons beg in front of churches or hide out of sight. Unlike Sister Frances, few try to help them. Sad, but true.

Recent studies in nutrition have taught us to include Vitamin A in the form of tablets or food concentrate in our basic health programs. This preventive health measure will save many children like Felipe from the terrifying experience of losing their eyesight. For those thousands of children for whom it is already too late, the Alliance is seeking funds to purchase materials, supplies, and equipment to make the library for the blind a reality. Lift them from darkness into the light. You can help. □

## GRASSROOTS from page 1

The Alliance is diligently fulfilling its long term commitment to support the self-help efforts of communities in action by forming specialized institutes to promote individual formation and organizational growth.

The Alliance approach to development is based on the dignity of the person and their active role in forging their own future by working together in an organized and democratic way to improve the quality of life for themselves and their community.

The Alliance seeks to network with other development and service organizations to provide more comprehensive planning and inter-organizational collaboration with others working for peace and development.

Our Agua Pura institute promotes the installation of family and small community wells for pure drinking water and irrigation. Hundreds of families in periurban and rural areas now have a safe water supply available. Our office in Bolivia is working closely with a water institute in Santa Cruz to train well drillers and to provide more adequate equipment for deeper penetration of the aquifers. In Nicaragua, we have completed projects that range from repairing well pumps to installing a deep community well system.

During the past three years, our Food For Families program aided more than 600 poor farm worker families to plant and harvest their own food staples. More than 5,000 persons have directly benefited through this agricultural program.

Our health institute has built five health posts and trained youths as health assistants to promote family health education and primary health care to poor, uneducated and illiterate groups of people. A major program in San Jose de Cusmapa will train health promoters, provide ambulance service, and educate families for preventive health care. Both adults and children will be encouraged to have periodic health examinations and maintain current personal health records at the local clinic. The Alliance has provided medicine, medical supplies and equipment to poverty stricken areas.

TECHO is the Alliance institute for basic housing, neighborhood improvement, and other cooperative housing projects. Thousands of families live in substandard and makeshift shanty towns.

The TECHO program has collaborated with five self-help projects consisting of 120 housing units. Our Roof Tops project has provided new roofs for many hurricane-destroyed houses and currently is implementing an urban neighborhood program to improve basic housing and provide microenterprise employment for related production of building materials such as blocks, roof tiles, windows, and doors. The Alliance provides technical and organizational assistance to these projects.

## The next ten years...

Grassroots work, like the grass and its roots in nature, appears as a low intensity activity. The work is not sensational but like true faith it is essential. Grassroots work is a thousand and one little acts that build up the humus, the sod, so that the nurturing conditions of human settlements can take place. The Alliance projects are self-help; its organization, its funding, its planned activities, its re-searching for the best methods, and appropriate oversight of projects, requires effective personnel in the field and the support of many others in its day by day operations.

Each contributor to the effort is vital to the success of projects. The success of the projects is not just practical physical infrastructure in place but also in the economic and social vehicles that encourage the spirit of cooperation and habits of self-governance and responsibility. The outcome of the Alliance programs centers on the growing stability of community life. Such stability helps build social confidence, practical know-how, and pride in improvement that helps along so many different elements of social living.

As a consequence of this stability, children are better cared for in health, education, and in fact, family life. Young men and women are given the necessary inspiration, hope, and tools to improve their life chances. Young families are encouraged to share with others their hopes of participating in community life, socially, politically, religiously. Older people find haven for personal and social security that is so often missing.

The programs and individual projects of the Alliance effect what they symbolize--development and the growth of solidarity. In a time of world-wide tragedy, the Alliance presents an alterna-

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## Memoriam to a Friend

**Padre Rafael Maria Fabretto  
1920-1990**

Everyone has met a most unforgettable character who wandered benignly into their life. My most unforgettable is Padre Rafael Maria Fabretto, an imposing hulk of a man, looming larger than life, his gnarled hair flowing free with the wind that carried him from place to place. His round fleshy face radiated a broad smile that warmed the hardest heart and won the deepest affection. He spoke with a lively enthusiasm that parted his lips and bridged the void

between his tartared front teeth. He was always on the move, from one boy's town to another, from the farm to the city to the mountains, from the vocational shops to the oratorio. One has to be on the move to take care of 400 boys singlehandedly.

For over 37 years, this man with a song in his heart made music ring in the dirty ears of orphans and abandoned street boys. His boys loved him as did all who met him and many were compelled

by some unknown, overpowering force to share in his work and his vision.

The work goes on but Padre Fabretto has found rest. His boys found his body in peaceful repose one early morn in March. The heart that was full of song will sing no more, but will never cease to be heard by his boys.

Many of us who had the privilege to hear his song and see his vision have come to know a sainted life. □

### *BREAD from page 1*

The women were clustered together, like the local majestic pines that reach with dignity and grace to the clouds, straight and tall, and firmly planted in the bedrock mountain top. As I emerged from the dark storage shed-type building into the street, the women surrounded me with quiet determination.

In desperation they said, "Mr. Richard, can you help us with our own bread-making cooperative? We need clothes for the children, school supplies,

and medicine. We have no money."

The sale of bread would supplement the meager family income and let them purchase a few extra necessities. The women have been working together to make a delicious sweet bread, "pan dulce," but they lacked supplies, an adequate wood burning oven, and other necessary utensils.

"I will try to find some help," I said. Their eyes sparkled with expectation. I assured them again, as I climbed the rocky slope to reach the waiting truck.

Through the generosity of Ann R. Roberts, the Alliance received a grant so the women of Cusmapa can start making bread. Their expectations turned to joy when they received the good news.

The municipality of Cusmapa has an altitude of about 5,000 feet, which is excellent for growing the coffee bean.

This might be the next likely project. Then we all would be assured of a regular supply of sweet bread and coffee for the early morning meetings on the top of the mountain. □



have started this new decade ready to face the challenges which underdevelopment carries.

The region is likely to see worsening economic conditions due to the global economic crisis and the regional political and military conflicts. However, the people have great hope because of a growing consciousness of their capabilities, as well as the commitment of groups and organizations which assist technically and financially to overcome years of poverty and neglect. Central Americans are very rich spiritually and culturally, and anyone who's visited Guatemala, El Salvador or Nicaragua can testify to the hardworking character of the people, as well as their great faith.

Economic development must be hand in hand with human development. Financing and planning for long term is essential in order to achieve both. New techniques in farming are important; so is seed, fertilizers and tools. But none of this means as much without acquiring the necessary skills to make any project sustainable. Education is of paramount importance for--learning basic methods

## Microenterprises catching on in housing

Winds of change have been felt in Central America, probably because democratic changes are occurring in other parts of the world. Now more than ever before, community development efforts claim urgency and validity. People who have suffered the pains of wars for years need and look for alternatives to deprivation and marginalization.

Education is of extreme importance for any development. Food production, health services, housing, and employment form part of this equation, too. Human dignity is preserved when, through different means, people can achieve and maintain economic independence. The people of Central America, with great faith and conviction,

## New roofs set up for 150 families in Managua barrios by Alliance

The population of Managua has risen steadily to more than a million people as families, relocated during the last ten years, have sought safety and employment in Nicaragua's capital city. The majority of these families live in shanty town neighborhoods called barrios, a framework scattered throughout the city. For the most part, their homes are only makeshift shacks of used and scavenged materials of wood, cardboard, plastic, and tin. Whatever can be found is patched together by the family to provide a little protection from the wind and rain. These barrios are often without access to water, sanitation, or electricity.

In order to survive the hardships and sufferings of many years of underemployment and poverty, the barrio people have effectively created a web of community improvement associations to help implement programs of health, education, and basic services. One of the most effective of these neighborhood associations mobilizing the efforts of the poor is a grassroots movement known as base ecclesial communities or *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs) whose religious roots were sown in the early 1960s throughout Latin America. In Managua, the CEBs, recognizing the importance of a united effort, succeeded in developing

a network which links the leadership of 24 of the city's poorest barrios.

Delegates from each of the barrios, directed by an executive council, meet regularly to address the common problems affecting the social, spiritual, and economic well-being of their neighborhoods. Previously the movement was

religiously-oriented to form local leaders. Now the major thrust is toward social action that emphasizes community and self-help development. By working together, they have been able to install tubing for domestic water supply, provide nutritious low-cost meals of soy products in community facilities, make



to prevent diseases, improved diets, growing the necessary staples, correct administration of resources, and the creation of microenterprises which enable people to develop and overcome underemployment.

Introducing new and appropriate technology alone is not the answer to the deep problems. It must be part of comprehensive development plans in which human dignity, participatory democracy, and better access to economic alternatives are crucial components.

The Alliance's approach to some of these problems is emphasized in the promotion of the concept of microenterprises for the informal market. Manufacturing roof tiles for basic housing units is an important part of a project. However, after supplying the project, the microenterprise can produce more tiles for other paying groups. This will provide full employment and low cost tiles to the market place. As a cycle of social and economic cooperation is started, it can only be limited by lack of vision, education, and financial support from individuals, groups, and institutions. □

available herbal medicines, and regularly publish a CEB newsletter.

The Alliance has been interested in the work of the CEBs for many years. After Hurricane Joan, a tragedy which devastated the Atlantic coast area, the CEBs in the barrios of Managua, assessed their own damage. Thousands of roofs, battered by the fury of the storm, were left in various stages of destruction, leaving homes unprotected from the elements. The Alliance, responding to an appeal by CEB representatives, raised \$15,000 to purchase materials, and also provided supervision to oversee construction. Thus far, the Alliance has given new roofs to 150 families.

The people of the base communities, despite years of runaway inflation, high unemployment, and a breakdown of services, have retained intact their spirit of courage and tenacity as they struggle for a better life. The Alliance, in recognition of their valiant efforts, continues to seek funds to support a comprehensive program to improve neighborhood housing, and upgrade community organizations. Localized self-help groups will organize to do the work, and other small microenterprises will be developed to generate employment and family income. □



## Grateful hearts share their joy

*Neighborhood families send their thanks to you for their new roofs received from Alliance Roof Tops project.*

**San Judas:** "Thanks for the eight sheets of material you gave us for our roof."

**La Esperanza:** "I want to thank our North American sisters and brothers for the roof you gave me for my little house."

**Villa Austria:** "We feel very joyful for this help, we did not think we'd get a roof."

**Nueva Libia:** "I feel so grateful for me and all of my family for the assistance this material represents because this is far beyond our economic capabilities."

"Thanks to your generosity my family and I are no longer exposed to the weather, now we have some comfort."

"We hope God gives you more so that you can continue to help the poor."

**Barrio La URSS:** "I feel grateful for your support, especially the roof I received."

"The material I received was a surprise because I could never have afforded a roof, only God can pay you for your generosity."

**Andres Castro:** "I thank you and all of those who remember the poor in Nicaragua. Thank you for the roof."

"Thank you for the roofs you sent to us, because we cannot get these things due to the economic situation here."

"I am so grateful, I never thought I would get a roof since I am so poor. I could never afford it."

**Georgino Andrade:** "We are so grateful for having received the roof we need so much. We wish you could come here to share in our joy."



## Ophthalmologist Goes to Bolivia

The prime time TV ad tells us how the local ophthalmological clinic will treat you with TLC. Their tender loving care will pickup and deliver you to their modern hygienic, fully equipped facilities where you can have a cataract removed in the morning and not miss the afternoon Soap on TV. The service is readily available and is not beyond the means of the average family.

For many poor families living in the slum neighborhoods around Santa Cruz, Bolivia, this would be impossible. The people would simply have to struggle along with their faulty eyesight without any hope that the condition could be remedied.

Thanks to a local ophthalmologist, many persons will be able to see again--to see their family and the beauty that is around them. Paul A. Dorn, M.D. and his daughter, Elizabeth, a nurse, traveled to Santa Cruz to help as many people as they could during their three-week visit.



*Waiting patiently outside a neighborhood clinic*

Their volunteer tour of duty was arranged by the Alliance to provide free eye surgery for needy persons living in a neighborhood targeted for programs in health, literacy, and vocational training. The Alliance has been working in this area for six years and is expanding many aspects of its improvement programs.

Dr. Dorn performed 30 eye surgeries, and he and Elizabeth attended more than 375 eye patients who desperately

needed medical care but could not afford to pay for local services. The local ophthalmological society in Bolivia welcomed their arrival and endorsed their humanitarian concern for the poor in need of this help. Santa Cruz is located in a semi-tropical region of eastern Bolivia which is adjacent to Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay, and where the climate and quality of air is conducive to a rapid growth of cataracts. □

## Alliance team helps bring water to the poor

Having experienced the tedious manual installation of water wells into the clay and gravel of Santa Cruz, Bolivia, Jim Dette discussed the project with a friend, Frank Gregory of Warren George Test Boring Inc. Frank responded by designing, building, and donating a drill rig, which Catholic Relief Services (CRS) then forwarded to the Well Drillers' Training Institute (PRODEA) in Santa Cruz.

In May of 1990, the Alliance team--Evelyn Dette, geologist; son Greg, driller's helper; Joe DiBernardo, engineer; and Claude Welcome, master

driller--traveled to Bolivia, where they met with Ed Dohler, the Alliance program coordinator. The team introduced the students to the new equipment and drilled a well. The young men were avid learners and hard workers. After driving the casing, they all broke for lunch--the American drill team of varying ages and tanned Bolivians in red hard hats. The work continued into the night until pure and abundant water was found at a depth of 60 feet. The casing was then retrieved.

The acquisition of the drill rig made the operation much more efficient. The

rig made it possible to penetrate the dense clay encountered in many local communities. Now, the poor without water could have their own family water supply.

Claude enthusiastically taught the apprentices how to operate the drill rig. He wants to return again to Santa Cruz to teach the young men more drilling techniques. He's hoping for a donation of equipment even better suited for more difficult drilling jobs to service entire rural communities and is looking forward to improving the school's drilling capabilities in the near future. □

## Food For Families program helps overcome obstacles to farming



Poor farm families are working together to grow their own food supply. The program will introduce alternative cash crops and set up a group of microenterprises to make a product and provide services for local communities. Groups in the U.S. can help by providing seed funds to start up the specific projects such as milling grain, baking bread and tortillas, fabricating silos and building materials, and providing services for transportation, irrigation, and welding. The Alliance invites your participation in these grassroots, people to people, community development projects. □

## Quality of health is affected by economic and political conditions

After nearly a decade of improving health conditions in Nicaragua, in which measles, malaria, and malnutrition were diminished or virtually decimated, the "three Ms" have returned with a vengeance. Minister of Health Dr. Ernesto Salmeron recently pointed to 400 known childhood deaths from measles in the last few months as a sign of a significant reversal in the country's health status. The decade of the 1990s promises to be a serious struggle in the Nicaraguan health arena.

A combination of factors has coalesced to radically reverse the gains made by the early years of the Sandinista health brigades. The long "contra" war interrupted preventive medicine and public health education programs, especially in the rural areas that are so important for malaria control. The war interrupted the distribution of measles vaccines, and eventually led to malnutrition resulting from general economic collapse and discontinued government nutrition enhancement programs.

Even peaceful political changes have played a role in decreasing Nicaraguan health status. Eastern Europe used to supply a high percentage of Nicaragua's pharmaceuticals; recent changes there have resulted in a cancellation or significant decrease in this source. The United States and other potential suppliers have been slow to take up the slack. The election of Violeta Chamorro, whose party is suspicious of the Sandinista-dominated Ministry of Health, has led to further confusion within Nicaragua as to how the country's health services will run and what level of priority they will receive. The *San Francisco Examiner* quoted Dr. Salmeron as saying that half of the country's 30 hospitals were either obsolete or badly in need of repair.

The Alliance has received a grant from the Public Welfare Foundation to help build a health project in the small community of San Jose de Cusmapa, located on the border with Honduras. The project will train local volunteer health workers and midwives, provide family health education seminars and materials, and purchase a vehicle for health services and emergency use. □



## Health seminar gives training and hope to indigenous families of San Jose de Cusmapa

The health project in San Jose de Cusmapa got off to a good start with a meeting of 60 volunteer health workers who attended a full-day general orientation meeting at the health post. Vicente, a certified nurse with more than 10 years of clinical and practical experience, is the Alliance coordinator. He travels on horseback over rugged mountain trails to visit the 18 farm communities participating in the project. The Alliance conducted a five-day training seminar on preventive health practices such as the preparation and use of soap, natural

remedial herbs, and the oral rehydration formula.

More than 80 community representatives, some arriving with their families, attended the session with great enthusiasm. They were very appreciative of our concern for their good health, and asked the team to return again soon. Several other training sessions will be prepared by the team in conjunction with a base line survey which Vicente will conduct to reveal the actual health conditions and diseases that affect this indigenous population. □





*Ramon proudly displays finished broom*

## Angostura Brooms

An Alliance volunteer, Ed Dohler, made contact with a mothers' club in Angostura, a small agricultural production town some 40 miles outside of the city of Santa Cruz, Bolivia, through efforts of the local Red Cross. The Alliance anthropologist, the mothers of Angostura, and the Red Cross developed a project proposal that will help alleviate the economic depression that the women of the community and their families face.

The project is planned to train the members of the club as broom-makers and to form a microenterprise in which the women will be manufacturing their own brooms to be sold in the city. The mothers are already learning how to assemble the brooms by hand from straw, twine, nails, and poles.

The mothers' club hopes to have their own field and workshop where they can control all of the steps of production, from growing the straw to the finishing touches of assembly. While they have already learned to put the brooms together, they have few economic resources to expand operations and realize their dreams.

The Alliance, through institutional and individual contributions, wants to help them raise the \$3,000 necessary to begin. We believe these women will be able to supplement the family income that has been greatly reduced by falling prices for agricultural crops produced in the area. The women will experience firsthand the cooperation that is necessary to produce their own brooms and manage their own business affairs. □

## GRASSROOTS from page 2

tive of vision and practice--the non-violent resolution of conflict through long term grassroots development, building toward a world where peace does have a chance. Our next ten year focus in grassroots is where humans find the bread and shelter they need, and the human community to sustain their spirits.

Our great expectations for the decade are based on the fortitude of the people and their determination to work for a better quality of life despite the overwhelming obstacles.

The Alliance is committed to helping them overcome the problems in a planned and organized way.

Pablo is a farmer, who hires out when labor is needed on the large farms, and grows his own food on the rented land. He is 40 years old, with a wife and six children who all work to support the extended family that is clustered together on a small homestead. They work very hard to produce enough corn, beans, and vegetables for family needs. The family lives in a remote rural region.

Pablo has never had an opportunity to learn to read or write. He started working when he was twelve. He has never visited the capital city and only goes to the market a few times a year.

Together with the other families of the small, rural community, Pablo participated in the Alliance's Food For Families program, which helped him to increase crop production, feed his family, and receive an income from the sale of surplus harvests.

The program is being extended for three years and will integrate more families in a comprehensive program for production and the development of local microenterprises. The new association of microenterprises will be a learning experience in participatory democracy, and an opportunity for self-management, income generation, and a working involvement in the agricultural economy. The program will light the way to dignity and stability now for the family and inspire hope for the future of the children to be rooted on their own land.

The Alliance commitment is to the people and the developmental process. We thank our donors and the foundations that have supported our programs. We count on your continued support as the specific projects are intensified and expanded to help more people. □

## ALLIANCE FOR COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

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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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