

REPORT FROM THE FIELD

PEACEWORKS JULY 2024
DELEGATION TO NICARAGUA



These are only a few of the 220 families from the communities of Los Corozales that are installing a new potable water system with the support of the PeaceWorks Community.

peaceworks.org

Dear friends,

Our 2024 delegation to Nicaragua was once again awe-inspiring trip, with plenty of time spent with our long-time nonprofit partners. It was particularly exciting to visit new partners and their projects in a remote area of Jinotega.

Despite the warm conversations and delicious food we shared, it was immediately clear that Nicaraguans are still living in difficult times. Struggle and change were common themes of discussion, and just about everyone had a story. Even organizations that are in good standing with the government have trouble keeping up with the many, often-changing bureaucratic requirements.

For others it's much worse. 1,500 additional NGOs were shut down the week of August 19th. In this process all the organization's assets are seized, all services provided to the community are terminated, and obviously all employees are dismissed.

The NGO community may be struggling in Nicaragua, but what hasn't changed is our

partners' vision and their achievements on behalf of the most vulnerable Nicaraguans.

For example, check out *Inhijambia*. Their team is now serving more kids than ever before and its university scholarship program is supporting 22 young people through college (up from 18 last year) and another dozen in technical school.

So, no matter the challenges, we are back and more inspired than ever to work in solidarity with our Nicaraguan friends and partners – people to people, pueblo a pueblo.

As always, we are so very grateful that you continue to travel with us on this journey.

Diane Sterner
2024 Delegation Leader



Delegation member Rick Walter on location at the Peñitas Beach.



2023 PeaceWorks Delegation on location above Jinotega, Nicaragua with a few of our partners from Green Empowerment and AVOCEC: From left: Maria Espinosa (Green Empowerment), Guy Talbot, Micha Loughlin, Diane Sterner, Victorino Centeno (AVODEC), Jose Luna (our driver) and seated in the foreground is Jorge Isaac Pineda (AVODEC). Photo by Javier Gutierrez Llanes.



INHJAMBIA PROGRAM FOR STREET KIDS “Having never been to Nicaragua before, I was not prepared.”

By Rick Walter

It was my first full day in Nicaragua and our delegation headed off to Managua's Eastern Market to meet with *Inhijambia* educators who would introduce us to the children who live and work in the area behind the stalls of colorful vegetables - the market dump. Having never been to Nicaragua before, I was not prepared.

I did not understand what “around the dump” really meant. In my mind I pictured a typical inner-city environment in the States - run down houses and apartments arranged in city blocks in the same neighborhood as the dump. This dump is an

open-air field about the size of a city block.

There are no freestanding houses. The outside walls of the dwellings either share the cinderblock walls of the dump or use plywood or tarps, or corrugated zinc panels. There were indoor wood burning fires for cooking and bare light bulbs for lighting. There were no windows therefore the interiors were very dim. In between the rows of these dwellings there was a family of pigs seeking shade and chickens scrounging for food. The open-air market had both wholesale and retail stalls. Some of the families lived in the stalls.

But our visit to the dump was only a small part of the *Inhijambia* story.

We visited both *Inhijambia's* boys' and girls' facilities which serves 73 girls, 40 boys, and 80 young children in the seed program in Managua's Eastern Market. There are classrooms, common areas with tables for dining, and a full kitchen. The children come during the day and are provided both breakfast and lunch. Early on, the staff noticed that many of the children were not eating their full lunch but wrapping up their food to take home to the family. So now, the children receive two lunches, one to eat and



AXAYACATL WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE Building Self-Sufficiency

By Micha Loughlin

We were only a 45-minute drive outside of the city of Masaya, but in the rural areas of Nicaragua, it can seem so much further. We sat in a circle enjoying cold drinks and snacks as our hosts, the women of the small village of La Montaña, explained how their well-being, and that of their families, has changed.

The women in this village have been receiving support from the *Axayacatl* Women's Collective which provides counseling, legal assistance, self-help groups, encouragement and education for women who have suffered domestic abuse. In La Montaña, as in a number of other communities *Axayacatl* supports, these women have also received special economic support from *Axayacatl*.

Over the past two years, twenty women

have received material support in the form of pigs and chickens to raise and sell, materials for building pens, coops, and cisterns, and seeds to plant corn, beans and yuca. They have also received individual and group counseling regarding their rights and advice on nutrition and farming practices. The plan is to expand the program to include additional beneficiaries, but even now, the women expand the program themselves, by gifting some of the offspring of their animals to other women.

One woman told us that the program has improved her family's nutrition and economic situation. Her diet now includes more meat and eggs and she no longer has to purchase these items at the store. We also heard how the women have been able to improve their houses using the profits from what they sell.



"*Axayacatl* has taught us that we have rights in the home," said one of the women. "It is not only the men who have rights. While domestic violence is a problem, we have learned to defend ourselves and each other. We are not poor; we are humble. We are part of a process and we want to keep it going and expand it so that everyone will benefit."

another to take home to their families.

After breakfast, the children are immersed in programs to help them grow developmentally, socially, and academically. Classes, such as sports, dance, crafts, sewing, are designed to build core competency, social skills, trust, and self-esteem.

We also met with a group of parents with children in the program who also went through counseling provided by *Inhijambia*. In a group discussion they talked about the different ways that the counseling helped them personally as well as the family overall. It amazed me that these parents took the time to come in and share their deeply personal feelings with us in the middle of the afternoon. Some traveled over an hour on public transport. Several spoke about the counseling breaking a multigenerational parenting habit of hitting their children as a means of discipline.

Next, we visited *Inhijambia's* housing program in the small town of Mateare, just outside of Managua. We saw for ourselves at least five homes that were built in recent

years. They are now ready to break ground on four more.

Before we headed out for our next stops on the delegation, we met with most of the 22 young adults who are participating in the *Inhijambia* scholarship program for university students. Their majors included Accounting, Law, Nursing, Premed and Architecture, among others. They all expressed gratitude and told us it would not be possible without the work of *Inhijambia*...and

the kind people of New Jersey whose donations have made the scholarships possible.

It is hard to believe that what started 25 years ago with a \$600 donation and the belief of the original director, Mirna Sanchez, has grown into the *Inhijambia* of today. The result has changed the trajectory for countless families, giving them the love, support, and tools to build a more hopeful future.



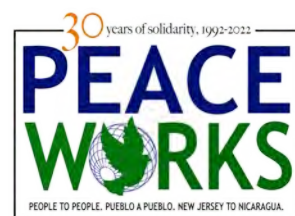


El Porvenir Coffee Co-op

Juan Venado Sea Turtle Sanctuary



New homes for families with Inhiambia (near Managua)



July 28-August 9th, 2024
Delegation to Nicaragua



LOS COROZALES

JUAN VENADO
ISLAND

EL PORVENIR
COFFEE CO-OP

MANAGUA

MASAYA

SAN JUAN DE LA
CONCEPCION

Los Corozales Potable Water Project



Axayacatl Women's Collective (Masaya)



The Mariposa Spanish School's "Chispa de Vida"
Program for kids with disabilities (San Juan de la Concepción)



EL PORVENIR COFFEE CO-OP

Moving Toward Sustainability

By Micha Loughlin

Our trek up to this remote mountain community started in an Agriculture Supply store near the Nicaraguan city of León, where we met up with Rene, the president of the coffee co-op.

With PeaceWorks support that our delegation hand-carried down, he was able to purchase two humongous tires for one of the co-op's tractors. That was the good news. The bad news? Without a tractor to take us up the mountain we piled into an old 4x4 and hung on tight.

The road for the last mile of the journey to *El Porvenir* seemed rougher than ever before. But once we made it up, we were received with a warm welcome, an awesome view, lunch and some of the freshest coffee in the Americas.

Under the co-op veranda, Rene told us about the improvements made with PeaceWorks support last year. Their huge water holding tanks were revitalized and were full to the brim with rainwater. The wood gutters that feed the tanks were replaced. A leaky reservoir used to irrigate crops had a

new concrete lining and the veranda that we now sat under had a new wood railing.

The old coffee processing machinery is still cranking away. The co-op continues working with new, drought resistant varieties of coffee plants, with the several thousand new plants they bought before last year's growing season. The plants are just about ready to produce those golden beans for the first time.

But in spite of their success, there is still a lot to do.

The co-op gave up on a recent cacao experiment because, as it turns out, squirrels love chocolate! They're still unable to bring electricity up the mountain. They've also been unable to acquire a small roaster they were hoping for to try testing more local markets for their coffee.

We learned that a doctor from the national health service has visited the Jim Burchell Health Clinic only twice this year. Visits from health professionals from foreign NGOs no longer take place, as there are

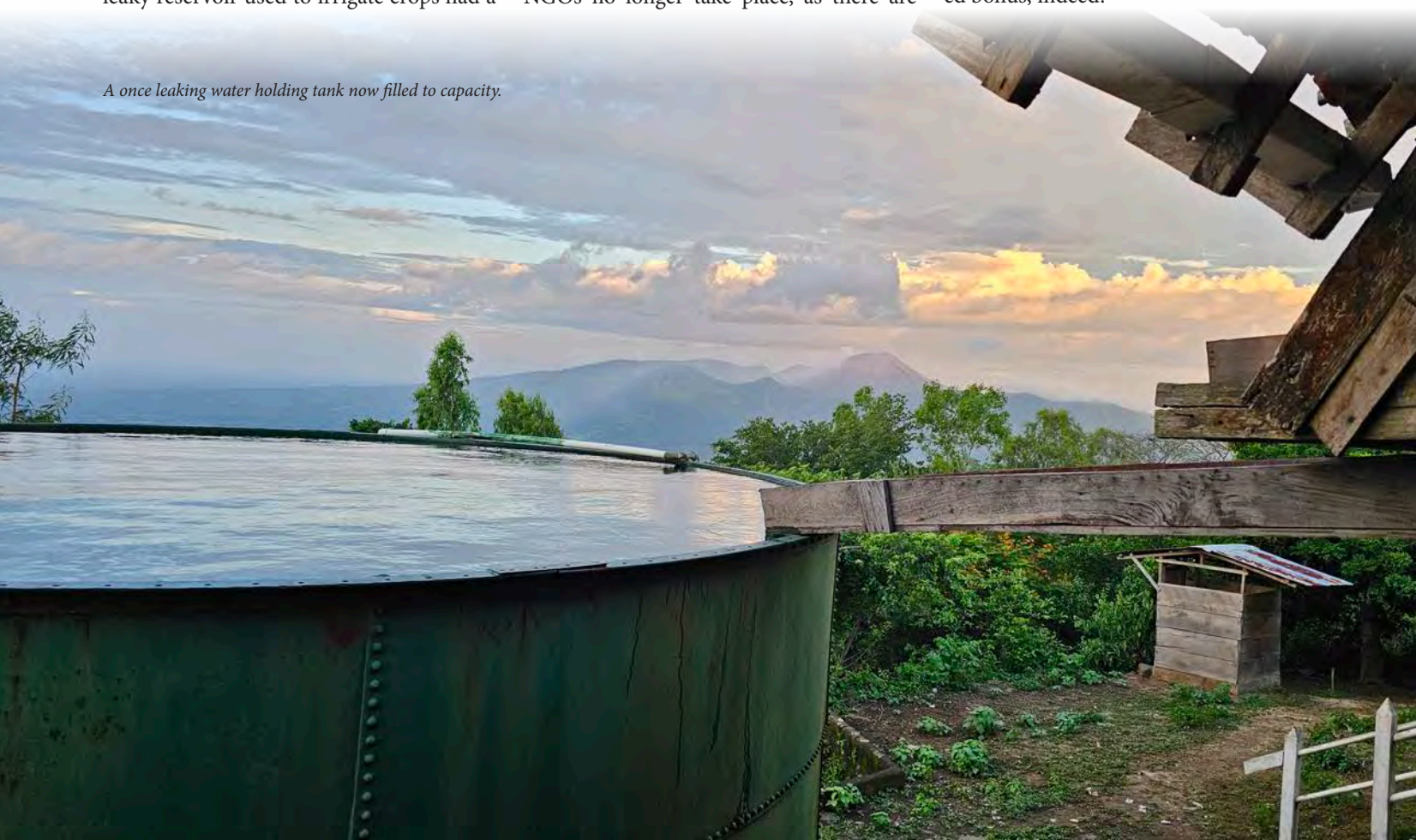


Around 50 families occupy the co-op.

few visitors of any type in Nicaragua these days. Unfortunately, a lightning strike once more knocked out the Clinic's inverter, which needs to be replaced for x-rays and ultrasounds. We provided a small contribution to assist with that and obtain some much-needed medical supplies.

In spite of these difficulties, it was the rainy season and the vegetation was lush with abundant flowers and butterflies – an added bonus, indeed!

A once leaking water holding tank now filled to capacity.



JUAN VENADO SEA
TURTLE SANCTUARY

New Lessons in Preservation

By Micha Loughlin

The busy season for sea turtle nesting is just beginning, and as a result there were no little turtles for us to liberate on this visit to *Isla Juan Venado*. In fact, there was not even a proper visit to the island. As we made our way through the lovely mangrove forest, enjoying spotting sea birds, a thunderstorm blew up and made it unsafe to continue.

However, earlier in the day, we had met with Marvin and learned a lot about the turtles and the project. Community members, often accompanied by university students, patrol eight miles of beach each night. In the high season, community collectors are paid \$1.20 US per dozen eggs; and, in the off season, \$7.00. As always, Marvin's meticulous data recording enabled him to account for PeaceWorks' support, showing that the project was able to transfer 176 turtle nests from the beach to the turtle nursery over the last year, and that 14,200 baby turtles were liberated.

During this reporting period, the vast majority of eggs transferred to the nursery were laid by Olive Ridley; 321 were laid by Toritas; and 142 by Leatherbacks .

During the past several years, students have been measuring eggs and tagging the females. Many of the students have undertaken studies and research and written theses based on the data they collected. As a result, the project is increasing its scientific knowledge, leading to improved practices. Because of tagging, they have learned that the same females sometimes return within two weeks, a month or two years to lay eggs. One Leatherback, the largest of the turtles, returned seven times within a period of six weeks.

Marvin explained that gender is determined by the amount of sunlight the nests are exposed to and the resulting temperature of the sand. The more sun and heat, the more females; and conversely, the more shade and coolness, the more males. Right now the ratio of males to females in the sea is out of balance, being approximately 25 to 75 percent respectively. The Project is using a heavier grade of screening to shade more of

the nests to encourage the development of males. They are also using a device called a hobo to measure and track the temperature of the sand over time.

Volunteers are welcome to join the community and be trained in egg collection. Those interested will get to patrol the beach from 5 p.m. to 6 a.m. and sleep the day away. Of course, it is recommended to avoid nights of the full moon when the mosquitos are most abundant!

Sanctuary director Marvin Hernández explaining how sand temperature influences the gender of sea turtles.



GREEN EMPOWERMENT & AVODEC LOS COROZALES POTABLE WATER PROJECT

By Guy Talbot

Getting potable drinking water for 220 families in the villages of Los Corozales is an uphill battle. This is the road families must walk to retrieve contaminated water from the Coco River - currently their main source of water for domestic use.

For one of the last stops on our delegation, we headed up to Jinotega, the largest department in Nicaragua, approximately 3 hours north of Managua.

Up in the northern Segovia mountains, the natural beauty we expect for Nicaragua is still ever present, but takes on a different character in the cooler, more rugged environment. The region produces 80% of the nation's coffee, which was visibly evident everywhere we drove. It is the home of Nicaragua's first and largest artificial lake - Lake Apanas - a major source of hydro-electric power and was the epicenter of the Contra war in the 1980's.

NGO founded in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch in 1998 to alleviate problems of poverty, housing, water supply, energy, and environmental degradation. Its founding director, Victorino Centeno, and his team lead us on our journey into some of the most rural, hard-to-reach communities of Nicaragua.

Along the banks of the Rio Coco, near the town of Wiwili, we saw first-hand the beginnings of two adjacent potable water projects PeaceWorks recently started working with. These projects are located in the small communities of Corozal Arriba and Boca del Corozal, together representing more than 200 families.



The Corozales water project is in full swing. The community is providing the muscle to get the job done.

Maria Espinoza of Green Empowerment, the Portland-based group we often partner with on drinking water projects, brought us here to visit several communities which are in the process of installing or planning new potable water systems. The technical partner in the project, AVODEC - Association of Volunteers for Development-, is an

Currently, the communities of Los Corozales have very limited access to clean water. Families often get water from holes they dig in the banks of the river, in the hope that the pebbles they line the holes with will filter the worst contaminants. The women and children have the primary responsibility to carry the polluted water back over rugged terrain for domestic use.

Our delegation got to see the very beginning of a better way to deliver water - clean, potable water flowing directly to homes. New pipe is already being laid from a water source seven kilometers away. This is no

The PeaceWorks delegation with Green Empowerment and AVODEC at the Coco River.



Two potential beneficiaries of a new potable water system for the villages of Los Corozales.

small chore, but with over 100 people from the communities contributing to the construction, the work is moving along swiftly.

We were there for the official ground-breaking which was attended by community leaders, family members, students and representatives from the mayor's office, and was emceed by a local radio celebrity who broadcasted live on the Radio Kilambe Wiwili. We may not have had shovels, but as you can see, the cameras on our phones are useful tools in helping tell this amazing story.

You too can help write the ending of this story. If you can, write PeaceWorks a check designated for the Corozales water project and you will help us make the water flow.

Mariposa Spanish School



Our visit to La Mariposa Spanish School began with a delicious cup of coffee and a trip down to the *Reserva*, where most of the school's social and environmental programs are housed. Chispa de Vida, the school's program for people with disabilities, now serves 53 children and 15 adults, a significant increase from previous years. PeaceWorks has supported this program, which in addition to education, various types of therapy and other supports, has recently been helping families in the program to upgrade their houses. La Mariposa's after-school program, organic gardening and reforestation projects seem to be thriving, with 11,000 young trees given away so far this year and more to go.

Back at the school, we found most study areas filled with Spanish students and their teachers, but there is still space available! Visit mariposaspanshishschool.com to book an online class or to head down to Nicaragua for a fully immersive experience.

FEDICAMP

The delegation met with FEDICAMP in Esteli for an update and learned that their new drinking water project in La Laguneta, Pueblo Nuevo was about ready to launch. Since our return to the US we received the design documents and signed a funding agreement for the project, which PeaceWorks is helping to fund with support from FOCUS Central America, in partnership with Green Empowerment.



Cusmapa Pine Needle Artisan Co-op

Our delegation met with co-op members Maria Teresa and Altagracia, who made the long trip from San Jose de Cusmapa to Esteli so we could purchase their beautiful handicrafts to bring back to sell at PeaceWorks dinners and events. We have been supporting the co-op for more than 10 years, helping open up more sales opportunities for their members and benefitting from their beautiful work. We took advantage of their visit to introduce them to our lovely hosts at the Hotel Casa Vinculos, who support regional artisans by selling their art work in the hotel lobby.