

Highlights of Fact-Finding Trips early 2019

Three **SHEAF** board members spent 2 weeks in Nicaragua communicating, encouraging and listening to those who execute their programs in Nicaragua. Here is what they found.

An associate of SHEAF spent a few days in the village of Siksayari on the Rio Coco, accessible only by boat. It is a day's journey including navigation several sets of rapids. Both trips are summarized briefly.

Situation in Nicaragua.

The effects of the spring crisis were very visible.

- Government stability is tenuous. In spite of Ortega's, the current president, heavy hand, protests could erupt any time
- Thousands of people have left the country for Costa Rica and hundreds have been jailed
- More than 100 political prisoners were released from jail in February and March.
- Tourism is down to a trickle and volunteers have been encouraged not to come. Subsequently, unemployment has increased substantially and programs which counted on volunteers have been jeopardized. Language schools have had a 90% reduction in students. Nevertheless we found our partners ever hopeful and even though some projects were delayed during the crisis they have since continued and are progressing.
- It is suggested that the crisis has been politicized. The opposition and outside influences may have overblown the severity of the crisis making the situation more unstable. Ultimately, their goal is to seize power. Unfortunately, it is the poor that suffer, not those with financial largess or political power.

Our partners

- **SHEAF** relies on its partners to oversee the day-to-day management of the projects. They ensure the funds are spent where they are intended.

Casa de Niño (a day refuge for children and teenagers who have experienced traumatic events at home or elsewhere)

- Are busier than ever, in addition to coping with abused (physically and sexually) children and teenagers, they are coping with children and families who were traumatized during the crisis. Some were witnesses to scenes of violence, including shootings. They all were confined to their homes for at least 2 weeks, while schools were closed.
- Hope for the **Casa de Niño** came in the form of a donation from the Women's Missionary



Society of the Presbyterian Church. The donation's purpose was to provide aid with the purchase and production of knitted comfort dolls. These dolls will be knitted by women and girls in Masaya, a city overwhelmed by protests during the crisis. These women knitted hammocks to sell at the tourist market but currently there are no tourists. Moreover, the large tourist market was burned and destroyed. The idea is that knitting of dolls will be therapeutic since participants knit in groups making the knitting time a social time for sharing as well as a productive time. The dolls will be used by teenagers or children who come for treatment at Casa de Niño to encourage them to talk

about their feelings. They will also be used by patients at a psychiatric hospital. The surplus can be sold at local markets.

Batahola Centre (A cultural and arts centre in Managua)

- Became a refuge during the crisis. But even they were forced to close for 2 weeks.
- SHEAF was able to fund their arts programmes, music, dance and fine art for poor children in their neighbourhood.



Scholarship students in Chaguitillo



- Universities were closed for a while during the crisis. Students had to make up classes toward the end of the semester.
- The students came en masse to meet with us, the visitors, to introduce themselves, to talk about their hopes and to provide entertainment (folk dancing and a dramatic reading).

Medical clinics

Managua

- Was busy when we visited them. Lots of people in the small outdoor waiting room.
- Their clients come from all over the city.
- **SHEAF** helps with day-to-day operations and medicines with generous help from a private donor.



Siksayari



- Medicines purchased by SHEAF were taken to this clinic by boat. A perilous day's journey undertaken by one of SHEAF's associates in the boat pictured.



Union de Cooperativas Agropecurias UCA)

- **SHEAF** supports Macadamia and Cocoa Production
- Guatemalans have indicated an interest in growing macadamia in Nicaragua which provided an impetus for the current growers to realize the potential of their crop
- One farmer sold a bag full of nuts one of these new would be growers who will use the nut to grow seedlings
- Several farmers plus the head of the UCA will travel to a Macadamia farm in Guatemala to learn more about processing macadamias, especially learning how to crack the very hard interior shell.
- Cocoa production project in the UCA is in its infancy



Projects coordinated by the Asociación de Cristianos Jóvenes (ACJ-YMCA)

Latrine Project in Pitahaya

- In this very poor indigenous community, a total of 32 new latrines were built with the help of a donation from The Community Church in Deep River.
- The community is still without electricity; potable water is in short supply and the families have to go to the local creek for bathing and washing their clothes.
- They are studying the output of a nearby spring to determine if it has sufficient flow to provide more potable water.



Cocoa Project in Bocoa

- Twenty four farmers received enough cocoa seedlings from the ACJ-YMCA to plant on 1 acre of their land. These plants will bear fruit in about 2-3 years. The hope is that the sale of cocoa will lift these farmers from abject poverty.
- We were impressed with the technician in charge of cultivating the cocoa plants from seeds on an ACJ-YMCA farm. He was knowledgeable, enthusiastic and dynamic.
- A dryer has been built with funds from a Spanish NGO. SHEAF with the help of Gay Lea provided funds for the fermentation boxes (cocoa beans are fermented to decrease the inherent bitterness of the beans) and the drying racks and processing equipment required for the handling of cocoa and the cultivation of the seedlings.



Other News



SHEAF sent money to the remote community of Siksayari for school furniture. The school has 352 students and virtually no furniture. The furniture was made in the village.



Impressions by SHEAF Board

- Hope abounds in Nicaragua, people spoke of hard times but vowed to continue improve their lives.
- The crisis affected life in rural areas less than in urban centres. Rural people are poorer and do not have a lot of amenities as people have in the city such as running water, indoor bathrooms (a luxury unheard of in rural areas). They also produce some of their own food making them more self reliant. They do not express despair and continue to hope that the future will be better.
- **SHEAF** is very thankful to their donors who have given generously and faithfully making it possible for SHEAF to fund those projects.