



Agrovienda – A Housing Project for Small Farmers in Masaya, Nicaragua

Bulletin No. 10

November 2005

SANTA CLARA FAMILIES SWITCH ON THE LIGHTS

In September we discussed with families in the remote community of Santa Clara whether to offer to install solar panels to bring electricity to the area for the first time. Now demand exceeds supply, especially as the first families have recently been able to switch on their lights.

Part of Santa Clara is called El Arenal, which means sandy ground. In the rainy season this flat, sparsely-populated area, almost at the level of nearby Lake Nicaragua, becomes a sea of mud. To reach some of the houses, the solar panels and other equipment - and the installation team - had to be carried by ox-cart.



Although only a dozen kilometres from two main towns, El Arenal's roads are so bad that it takes an hour to reach there by truck in favourable conditions, and much longer if part of the journey can only be made by ox-cart. Electricity has never been brought to this community and indeed the people told us that ours was the first development project of any kind to be offered to them. (The work is funded by the housing association New Leaf, part of the Places for People group.)

Few houses are in good condition, as can be seen from the first photograph. This meant in most cases installing the solar panels on steel posts alongside the houses (second photo), because of the poor state of the roofs.



In each case the basic kit is a single 38 watt panel feeding two lights and one socket for a radio or small television. In summer, this will typically allow one hour's TV and 4-5 hours use of the lights; in 'winter' slightly less. The cost is about £330, which the family will pay back over two years.

Two families spoke about the difference that having electricity makes.

Anna Estrada and Jose Cordoba have a poor house – although surrounded by flowers – and learnt of the project at the recent community meeting (see bulletin no9). They have several children who can now do their homework in the evenings.

Anna mentions that the family also watches the inevitable Latin American 'soap'. They start work early in the mornings and having light means they can get produce ready for market and leave earlier.

Idalia Cordoba (a relative, living nearby – see bottom picture) has four children and a similar story. Her day begins at 3.00 in the morning (currently it is dark until 6.00). Her husband has to walk to work at another farm several kilometres away, to be there at 5.00. So Idalia's day starts with making the food and getting the children ready for school. Asked how she managed this with no electricity, she said 'we were poking around in the dark with the only torch we have – when it had batteries'.



Agrovivienda is a project supported by the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Leicester Masaya Link Group, to improve housing and living conditions amongst subsistence farmers in the region of Masaya, Nicaragua. For more information, visit www.cih.org/nicaragua or contact John Perry, project co-ordinator (jperry@ibw.com.ni). For information on how to make a financial contribution, contact Claire Plumb at 0116 223 2272 or email (leicester@masaya.fsworld.co.uk).