



Agrovivienda – Housing and Other Projects with Small Farmers in Masaya, Nicaragua

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WORKING WITH A LOCAL SCHOOL

Most of the project work in Masaya is complementary to wider work on sustainable agriculture and rural community development. With fundraising by the Leicester Masaya Link Group, we are taking the work into one of the local schools serving the farming area.

Schooling is a critical issue in Nicaragua. Out of a population of about 5m, some 800,000 are children who *don't* go to school. Many can't afford the uniforms or the books. Others find it too far to travel. Yet more give up school before they reach leaving age, so as to work. In rural areas, many families still question whether school has any value when there are so few jobs.



We have decided to work with one school that serves the rural community where many of the farming families – which the wider projects assist – are based. The school is called 'Nueva Zelanda' (New Zealand). When asked why that is, the school director, Janet Cordoba (centre in the photo, in baseball cap and t-shirt) gave a disarming answer. 'We were originally named after a local revolutionary hero, but when the government changed in 1990 we were told to get a new name. We looked in the atlas and chose 'Nueva Zelanda', hoping that some day someone might arrive from there and sponsor the school. They never did!'



The project is to design and lay out a garden in the school grounds, incorporating a variety of flowering plants as well as fruit and vegetables. There will be a communal kitchen (to replace the present one, left), where some of the garden produce will (we hope!) be cooked. There will also be play equipment for the younger children.

Not only will there be the physical work, but the whole idea is to integrate it with the curriculum and use it to promote 'education for sustainability'. Our research has revealed that while environmental education exists in theory, in practice it is poorly developed. Given the experience of working with local families – and especially the women – in the agricultural projects, we have an ideal base for developing more relevant curriculum materials.



All depends, of course, on the enthusiastic participation of teachers, parents and children. We got off to a good start earlier this month with a meeting attended by about 50 parents (almost all mothers), teachers, and the schools director for the local zone, Petrona Hurtado. There was a lot of enthusiasm tempered with caution about the need to protect what is done against vandalism or theft. The meeting concluded with the presentation of a box of 'Chartered Institute of Housing' pens to Janet Cordoba (below, right).



Work starts next month, and so far we have transferred £2000 to the local organisation, ADIC, to begin the project. The budget for the first stage is over £5,000, leaving quite a lot of fundraising still to be done.

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 (johnperry@satelinet.net). For information on how to make a financial contribution, contact Claire Plumb at 0116 223 2272 or email (leicester@masaya.fsworld.co.uk).