



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

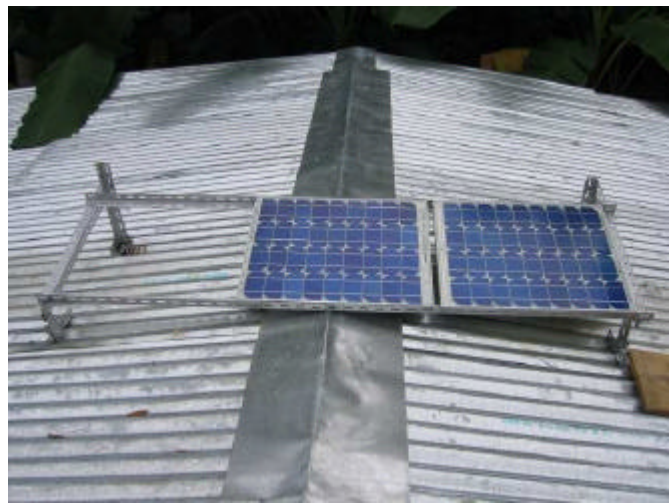
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BRINGING ELECTRICITY TO SANTA CLARA

The last bulletin, in March, reported on the start of a solar energy project, funded by the housing association New Leaf. Only limited progress was made in El Pochote, so the project is now offering solar panels to people in a more remote village, Santa Clara.

Work began in March to install a pilot solar energy kit in various houses in El Pochote. But demand proved much lower than expected, partly because the local electricity co-op has resolved some of its difficulties and has been operating normally over the last few months. One house has had solar panels installed – it is also one of the 'straw bale' houses that has been built through the housing project (see photo). These two panels will give enough electricity for several lights and a radio or (for 2-3 hours) a television.



Despite lack of demand locally, the project has generated a lot of interest more widely. Around twenty students from Leicester High School visited in July, and in August a group of students from a local college in Masaya studied the installation and had a teach-in on how the project was put together. They then prepared their own project proposal for a schools competition on environmental issues. Although they didn't win, they now know a lot more about energy issues (for example, that 70% of Nicaragua's electricity is generated by burning oil, so costs are escalating and electricity is being rationed because of the current oil shortage). Photos below show Marc Ricart (the volunteer from Bracelona working on installing the panels) talking to the students, and the model they built.



The project has now moved to a more remote village, Santa Clara, to the north of Masaya, where most families either have no electricity or a connection which is at the end of the supply network (so they get power during the day but not at night!). Following a well-attended public meeting (see photo), two sets of panels have so far been installed, with more planned.



One of the main problems though in this very poor community is the terrible condition of the houses – and therefore the roofs (see picture alongside). This makes it difficult to install the panels in the obvious, secure place – the roof. In some cases we expect to have to buy extra equipment to make small pylons on which to mount the panels.

The next bulletin will report on progress in Santa Clara and (we hope!) the successful completion of the New Leaf-funded project.

