



Leicester-Masaya Link News

May 2005

SUPPORTING OUR SISTER CITY IN NICARAGUA AND HELPING TO RAISE GLOBAL AWARENESS

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4 months into the year and we have already been involved in a number of successful projects. We have two grant applications pending and we are beginning to fundraise for new projects in Masaya.....We are always eager to extend our membership so do please look at the back page for details.

Claire Plumb

What happened with Cultural Connections?

Michael Smith reports

It's over, that's for sure, and we can safely say that it was a resounding success for all involved! For those that weren't lucky enough to be there you missed a wild array of activities and messy fun – we had clay, paint, glitter and tissue paper in abundance! The response from the local community was amazing, with around 300 people attending - some were even being turned away at the end! We felt that there was a good mix of people, with families, groups of young teenagers, adults and children running around excitedly everywhere!

Everyone became really involved with all that we had staged, from the quizzes and sculpture workshops to Henna and Salsa - and it wasn't just the young ones up and dancing! The atmosphere was infectious. With brilliant music and singing, and the various rooms bedecked in colourful posters, pictures and displays, all topped off by the grand finale, a piñata hand decorated by the children.

We are confident that our audience learnt something about life in Nicaragua and Masaya's rich cultural heritage. People showed great interest, taking leaflets about the Link Group's projects and joining our mailing list, so Cultural Connections helped to raise awareness of the work carry out both in Masaya and the UK.

The focus on Fairtrade and the Make Poverty History Campaign were clear to all, with the activities, displays and posters promoting the idea of taking positive action in an accessible, holistic manner. People who were new to the issues surrounding sustainable development took time to read the fairtrade display, decorate a 'buddy' or buy a white band, and the fairtrade fruits and chocolate were a tremendous success with the children! We believe that they have gone away from Cultural Connections a little more aware of the choices they can make and the power they have to do something to change and enhance people's lives around the world.

The contributions from Leicester's twin towns in Rajkot and Europe helped to highlight the city's cultural links and communities around the world. The environmental element to the day conveyed the message of personal responsibility for the planet's future, and enhanced the Link Group's affiliation with environmental responsibility.

The Leicester Masaya Link Group would like to say a huge thank you to all those involved in the planning, organisation and implementation of the day – a lot of effort was put into food preparation, carting materials to and from the venue, publicity, craft workshops, music and dancing and a whole host of other tasks that would take too long to mention. We hope that all those who came to the day enjoyed themselves and found the experience as uplifting as we did.

NEW PROJECTS IN MASAYA

School Garden Project

We are holding preliminary discussions with partners in Masaya about the possibility of building a garden in the grounds of a rural school to use as an educational and recreational facility for children in rural communities. The primary aim is involve the teachers and pupils in growing organic produce (fruit and vegetables) and a solar cooker to provide the occasional meal for the school children and their families. In addition to play equipment, the garden will offer a space for community gatherings.

Dining for Masaya (Lunch & Film)

This event is a contribution to the UK wide-call to take action through the Make Poverty History Campaign, to tackle world poverty.

At the same time, the Link Group aims to outline the details of the School Garden Project (above) which draws on earlier schemes but is focused more on children.

The luncheon will be a "tongue in cheek" affair, as there will be a draw to see who is "rich" and gets a three course meal and a drink, whilst the "poor" get soup, bread and water!

Twenty-five years after the Sandinista revolution, when Nicaragua was America's "bogey man", the film - *The World Stopped Watching*, - documents what has become of Nicaragua, her society and her people.

It promises to be both entertaining and interesting, so why not give us a call or email to reserve your place (just now would be a good time!). See next page for more details.

Agro Selva - Building on Success

This project has been developed by ADIC, our partner organisation in Masaya, in response to requests from women involved in the Water Tank and Egg Projects who are keen to diversify and extend their income generating potential. They are looking to bring in other aspects of farming by growing other crops such as maize, aubergines and beans, cultivating fruit (mangoes, oranges, bananas) as well as growing flowers and medicinal plants.

The project has already received a £2000 grant from the British Embassy in Costa Rica (on the strength of the success of previous work with ADIC). We will be working in collaboration with colleagues in Holland (Nijmegen-Masaya link) and the LMLG has committed to raising another £2000, representing 10% of the total project cost.

Potential for Rubbish - Solid Waste Management Project

We are in the early stages of developing a funding application with the Water, Engineering and Development Centre at Loughborough University, to look at shared learning around some of the waste management issue that exist in Masaya.

We have had initial discussions with Leicester City Council Waste Management Team, Biffa and Environ about educational programmes in Leicester.

Following the election of a new Mayor in Masaya, we hope there may be greater potential to establish links with Leicester City Council.

NEWS FROM NICARAGUA - in brief

EU Conditions US\$120million in Aid on Political Stability and IMF Agreement.

Kees Rade, Ambassador of the Netherlands and Representative of the European Union (EU) in Nicaragua, met with the National Assembly Economic Committee on Apr 21 to discuss the possibility of the EU donating US\$120million a year to the Nicaraguan government. Kees confirmed that this money would "most likely be available for Nicaragua" if and when an agreement was reached between the Nicaraguan government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and political and economic stability was achieved as the result of "sound governing." Thanks for nothing European Union. The IMF and the Nicaraguan government have not reached an agreement this year due to the government's huge fiscal deficit and the fact that the 2005 Nicaraguan budget does not comply with IMF conditions. Rade said that the EU's main concern was based on the fact that the Legislature and the Executive seem unable to resolve the current problems with the National Dialogue "demonstrated by the uncertainty as to whether or not the dialogue will continue. We are also worried about the contradictory court rulings," said Rade. "The EU cannot take any position on the matter but we hope that there will be dialogue and debate about the matter."

Nicaragua Network Hotline April 25, 2005

PROJECTS IN MASAYA

Water tanks: thanks to you...

From Bob Ball

We in the West are surrounded by ways of reaching help when we need it, through government services. But in Masaya there is high unemployment and little welfare. Many people drift around looking for work, or some way to feed themselves and their families.

For that reason, the water tanks (Project Rain Drop) have been essential in helping farming families grow more food during the region's six month dry season.

Thanks to our supporters and friends' generosity and match funding from the British Embassy (Nicaragua) nearly £7000 was raised allowing 53 tanks to be built, which includes seven through the revolving fund.

A water tank may not be high-tech but to struggling families, it's an essential bit of kit. It's cheap and farmers can earn a dry season income not just for one year but for years to come. Consequently, the water tanks have been a real success, bringing real and many benefits in a sustainable way - and starting to MAKE POVERTY HISTORY.

Among the benefits are:

- Increased sowing and planting in the summer
- Faster growth of seedling as they have adequate water in the six month long dry summer season
- Planning of sowing in the summer
- Low cost construction of the tank
- Lower annual expenses because there is no need to buy barrels of water
- More time available for other things, particularly for women and children who are in charge of water storage
- Reduced incident of diseases, diarrhoea, gastritis, etc.
- Better hygiene
- Income from the produce in the summer period – which was not possible to achieve without relying on a water tank

Don't give eggs, give chickens!

Over Easter we said no to chocolate eggs. Instead, we saw this as a time to update and remind our supporters about 'An Egg Called Hope' which is beginning to change lives. In the last six months, with our partner ADIC, we supplied chickens to women living in poor communities, helping them to gain new skills, to have a healthier diet and earn extra income.



Buy me!

ADIC works with the women to construct chicken runs, give advice and guidance on vaccination and disease prevention. One hundred pounds buys ten chickens and

a cockerel.

As their incomes increase, the women contribute to a fund, so that over time the project can be extended to other women in rural Masaya. Currently there are 16 women on the scheme, but the Link Group's target is thirty people.

SOLAR ENERGY IN EL POCHOTE

In our last newsletter, we reported that a grant from the New Leaf Housing Association was helping to fund a pilot scheme to provide photo-voltaic panels in rural areas affected by unreliable electricity supplies.

A basic kit, which consists of two small panels, a battery and a small control system will support 2 - 3 light bulbs and a socket (for a radio) for a few hours each evening. The idea is that the prototype kit will be moved around between houses to show people how the system works and help overcome uncertainties.

Marc Ricart, a Spanish electrical engineer is working on a voluntary basis in collaboration with ADIC, the local NGO which is running the project. The first family to install the system are already involved in the 'Egg Project' (as above) and they were delighted to see that as soon as the panels were connected up (taking only 3 hours to install) the midday sun immediately lit up the light bulbs and powered the radio!

As families gain confidence in the scheme, it will be extended to other households. (more info on this project and photos on www.cih.org/nicaragua)

PUBLIC EVENTS

LEICESTER MASAYA & SALT OF THE EARTH Dinner and Talks

The theme of the evening was international development which is carried out by two of Leicester's NGOs. People at the dinner heard talks from Ed Brown, Chair of the Link Group and from Celia Barden and Alan Gledhill on behalf of Salt of the Earth who work in India. Even so, any enjoyment of the evening was tempered by the harrowing nature of a video on the Indian Ocean tsunami damage and the clean up operations.

For the Link Group, Ed outlined the work in Nicaragua on projects that promote sustainable development and help empower people in Masaya. He highlighted the development education work in Leicester which helps raise awareness across all sectors of the community.

The dinner, organised by the Green Party, was held on the 18 March at the Wood Gate Resource Centre.

THE DAY THE 'GIGANTONAS' CAME TO LEICESTER!

Giant processional puppets are an intrinsic part of Nicaragua's rich folkloric tradition, used in festivals, street theatre and as a vehicle for social change.

On 24 April, the LMLG in collaboration with Soft Touch Community Arts, had a rare opportunity to host a one-day workshop with visiting artists from the Viva Leon Jodido Youth Group in Nicaragua. Sharing their knowledge and skills, Gioconda and Wilfredo, who both come from a family with a long tradition of making 'Gigantonas', gave a dynamic presentation which looked at the history, function and construction techniques of the 'Gigantonas'

The aim now is to put these skills into practice, working with other community groups across the city to build 'Gigantonas' specifically for festivals in Leicester.

Dates for your Diary

Sat 21 May - Cultural Diversity Day Central Lending Library, Leicester

Raising awareness about trade justice issues with a focus on Nicaragua, featuring tasters and activities that encourage 'Learning about Fairtrade through your Senses'!

Look out for stands at the Central Lending Library and Reference Library displays at Belgrave Library on Cultural Diversity Day, Sat 21st May.

Sun 26 June - Leicester & Me Belgrave Hall

This is the culminating event, following a year-long festival celebrating Leicester's cultural diversity. Activities for all ages will be offered across a number of different themes, from music to food and crafts. The LMLG will provide the Nicaraguan contribution and bring a Latin American flavour to each of the activity areas!

Sat 28 Oct - Club La Pachanga Leamington Town Hall

By popular demand Club La Pachanga events are back. Watch this space for confirmation of Guest Band!

Sat 18 June - 1.00 pm Friends Meeting House, Queens Rd Leicester

'Rich World', 'Poor World' Lunch and Film 'The World Stopped Watching'

A fundraising event for projects in Masaya
Entry - donations £5 (£4 concs)

- **Vegetarian Meal**

Draw to see who is 'rich' and gets a 3 course meal and a drink, while the 'poor' who eat soup, bread and water can heckle the 'rich' as they consume more than their fair share.

- **The World Stopped Watching**

A film documenting what has become of the people and nation now that Nicaragua is no longer under the media spotlight.

Followed by a discussion led by Ed Brown, Chair of the LMLG and lecturer at Loughborough.

Supporter of the Make Poverty History campaign

Closing date for bookings, 14 June 2005

To book send cheque (made out to 'Leicester Masaya Link Group') to:
LMLG, Room 118, Town Hall, LEICESTER, LE1 9BG

[For more call Bob/Claire 223 2272/Leicester@masaya.fsworld.co.uk]

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

FOOD FOR THOUGHT **a successful collaboration between** **the LMLG and the University of** **Leicester Botanic Garden** **7 - 15 April 2005**

For one hectic week, 360 children from 6 Leicester schools found out what it is like to live and work in Nicaragua. Their day began in school where they were taken on an illustrated tour of Masaya with Miguel - meeting his friends and family, visiting his school and the bustling market, enjoying the views of the lakes and volcanoes and finding out about Masaya's rich cultural heritage and traditional foods such as 'Gallo Pinto' and 'Tortillas'.

They also learnt about life in rural Masaya, where people depend on the land but often struggle to feed their families in the dry season. They heard how Miguel's aunt has built a water tank so she can irrigate her crops in the summer and grow maize, beans and a variety of fruits and vegetables to supplement the family income and buy school uniforms.

From here, the children traveled to the Botanic Garden where they explored the different uses of some of the plants that grow in Nicaragua. Working 'in role', they experienced the range of jobs and processes that are involved in taking produce from the farmer's field to the local market in Masaya.

The maize farmers planted and harvested the corn, millers dried and ground the kernels and sold the maize flour to the cooks who turned it into 'tortillas'. Another enthusiastic group chopped and prepared pineapples, melons and oranges to make delicious 'Frescos' (refreshing fruit drinks) and discovered yet another use for maize flour as they made 'Pinolillo', a popular chocolate drink.

In the crafts area (reminiscent of Masaya's famous Monimbó neighbourhood), artisans made and decorated cotton bags used to keep the 'tortillas' warm. Others designed necklaces and bracelets using seeds and wooden beads. A small group formed a co-operative and explored the plants in the garden to produce herbal remedies familiar in Nicaragua.

The fruit drinks, 'tortillas' and the many plant products and artefacts were then sold to the market, where the stall holders haggled to get the best prices from their suppliers and their customers, bringing the realities of the local Nicaraguan economy to life.



Their activities were complemented by a visit to the tropical, temperate and desert green houses in the garden to see for themselves how the various plants that are found in Nicaragua grow - from bananas, pineapples, maize, coffee and rice to aloe vera and cotton.

The children returned to school with their wares, where they will share their achievements with the rest of the school. In a series of follow up activities, they will begin to engage with the concept of international trade. Working with the education officer from Just (Leicester's fair-trade shop), they will track a bunch of bananas on its journey from Nicaragua to Leicester, to witness the impact that changing prices have on the producers - and how their lives are improved by fair-trade schemes.

One lucky school was treated to a Fairtrade breakfast provided by the Midlands Co-op which is supporting the project and helping to raise awareness of how young people can act as ethical consumers.

It is of particular importance that this project took place during the Global Week of Action for Trade Justice, providing an opportunity for participating schools to make a positive contribution to the MAKE POVERTY HISTORY Campaign.

**THANK YOU TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS WHO
SUPPORTED THIS PROJECT**

MEMBERSHIP & FUNDING

Membership

We were delighted by the response to our call, when fifteen people took up annual membership to the Link Group. This will help to sustain our work in Masaya. For anybody else interested in joining, membership forms are available by ringing
(0116) 233 2272

or can be downloaded from our website:
www.leicestermasayalink.org.uk

Suggestions to help

It would be lovely if you could get involved to help raise some funds, either on your own or with your family, group, work, church, school and so on. Why not "adopt us" for your next event? One good idea is to ask your family or friends to donate to the Link Group on the occasion of your birthday.

Our thanks to

As reported in the last newsletter we are grateful to Club La Pachanga for organising two fund raising events in 2004, with plans for another one in October.

We appreciate the generous contributions we receive from our supporters - one anonymous donor has given £500 to the Agro Selva project fund. **If you would like to continue to support our work, or make a first-time donation, you can include this on your membership form.** (*details opposite*)

AND REMEMBER....

Using Gift Aid means that for every pound you give, we get an extra 28 pence from the Inland Revenue – and it doesn't cost you any extra!

FUNDING NEWS - It is with great disappointment that we have to report that our application to OXFAM for much needed funding was unsuccessful. The continued existence of the LMLG office depends on finding alternative funds so the search goes on.....

VOLUNTEER NEWS & NOTICES

A Fond Farewell....and many thanks to two of our volunteers

Gail Brown, who was involved in helping to take the school link forward has now embarked on her journey across Latin America. She is planning to visit Nicaragua and will hopefully meet some of the students and teachers at the Instituto Central. We look forward to hearing from her when she arrives - till then we wish her 'Buen Viaje!'

Michael Smith was a stalwart in the preparations and delivery of the Cultural Connections day, dedicating huge amounts of time and energy to helping with the publicity, producing the displays and developing the programme of activities. He was also involved in the Food for Thought project, preparing some of the educational material and supporting the activities at the Botanic Garden.

We greatly appreciate their commitment to the LMLG and they will be much missed!

Rachael Francis joined our membership team earlier in the year and has been actively involved in supporting the LMLG at all our events. As an ESOL teacher, Rachael has an interest and contacts in Adult and Lifelong Learning.

WANTED - Qualified English teacher is looking for a Spanish speaker for an informal language exchange. Please contact Paul Matlock on 07947 393 610