

DEVELOPMENTS @

World Neighbours Canada Society

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Victorino leads La Esperanza

BY MICHAEL NEWMAN
WNCS Director

World Neighbours Canada's new La Esperanza project in Honduras is up and running. A fifty kilometre pickup ride north-east of the city of Danli is an isolated group of six mountain villages containing about 2,000 people. Greeting me on my arrival in August was our old friend Victorino Rivera. Victorino led our first project in El Socorro, Honduras between 1990 and 1998 and agreed earlier in the year to undertake this one on our behalf. The beaming smile and seemingly endless energy have not changed.

Although he had been in the communities for less than six weeks, Victorino had organized an afternoon 'fiesta' for our group that included World Neighbors International programs leader, Peter Guebbels, and Vecinos Mundiales coordinator Elmer Lopez. We were all astonished at what he had achieved in that short time. I had assumed that most of his time would have been taken up with finding temporary lodgings and conducting the baseline interviews against which we will later measure progress. When the fiesta started, it was obvious that he had been far more ambitious. Each of the six villages made a presentation that involved two large maps. One map was of

the village showing homes, fields, forests, roads and water sources. The other was of a typical farm in that village. Mapping in this way is an important tool in helping villagers envision and plan change. The map of existing conditions becomes a take-off point for discussions about problems and their possible solution. Later in the process another map will be produced that encapsulates the villagers' plan for the future.

One after the other, three or four representatives from each village took the battery-powered microphone and unrolled their maps and briefly described their community. Between village presentations were songs, poetry reading and a skit by the local school children. It was an astonishing couple of hours and my companions were as impressed as I was.

These villagers came to this area about 20 years ago as part of a land distribution by the government of the day. They were promised aid, education and assistance that have never materialized. There are no other aid or development organizations working in the area (which will perhaps explain the level of interest that was evident at the fiesta).

These villages are situated, by climate and elevation, in a zone with good potential for high-grade, shade-grown coffee. It



Victorino Rivera started his involvement with World Neighbors International in the 1980s as a teenage participant who went on to become a part-time volunteer, then a full-time promoter and finally a program leader. His role in the next year will be to identify similar 'bright lights' among the men and women of the villages who will provide the leadership to implement change.



These villagers from the community of Pedras Coloradas proudly show a detailed map of their homes and farms.

is the major cash crop in the villages but the producers have difficulty delivering adequate quantity or quality to the coffee buyers. Victorino, a coffee grower himself, has identified a number of improvements to their current practises that will greatly improve their returns.

WNCS is currently preparing a CIDA matching grant application for a program that will address coffee growing, women's credit organizations, hygiene, family health and community organization.

I came away from this visit with great optimism that we can have a very successful project that makes a significant impact on the 2,000 people in a beautiful, if impoverished, corner of Honduras.

Nepal reopens to the world

It has been many years since a World Neighbours Canada representative has set foot in Ramechhap District of Nepal. The Maoist insurrection, the monarch's seizure of power and the political turmoil would have made it dangerous for both guest and host. During our last visit in the spring of 2001, the decision was made to bus several village representatives outside their district to a conference centre rather than bring to the attention of local Maoists the fact that our partner, Tamakoshi Service Society (TSS), was in part funded by westerners. We have held to our decision to not 'show the flag' since, but it has not meant that we have been out of touch.

The internet has brought many changes not the least being that WNCS has been able to continue a lively correspondence with the staff of TSS throughout the turmoil. Not only has the flow of reports and financial transfers been smooth and regular, but we have been the recipient of direct news about events on the streets of Kathmandu and in Ramechhap. During the height of the popular uprising this year we were getting daily reports. TSS staff was ecstatic when the king stepped down and returned power to the legislature.

To compensate for our not visiting Nepal we have made visits by TSS staff to British Columbia a regular event. Last month's visit by Suresh Shrestha was his third since the troubles began. Joining Suresh was Neeraj Sharma who was making his first visit outside Nepal. Suresh runs



Suresh Shrestha (left) and Neeraj Sharma agreed to taste the non-alcoholic fruit beverage during their tour of the Burrowing Owl wineshop in Oliver. They were keenly interested in all aspects of our community and were as eager to explain the realities of their nation to Canadians.

a two person office in the capital where he has contact with government and foreign funders such as WNCS. Neeraj organizes our current program of assisting villages install water systems and, recently, simple hygienic latrines.

While in Canada the two men were hosted by a circle of WNCS supporters in Langley, Gibsons, Kamloops and Oliver. They spoke to Rotary Clubs, donor gatherings, schools and media. In addition they were toured about our communities by local supporters. They enjoyed a boat ride on the Sunshine Coast and were fascinated by the sophisticated apple-handling equipment at the local Oliver fruitgrower's co-op.

Suresh is optimistic about the current political situation in Nepal. The Maoists have agreed to participate in a parliamentary government but some conditions remain under negotiations and some regional Maoist leaders have violated the ceasefire. WNCS board members are anxious to resume regular program visits but will rely on our partners in Nepal to give us the high sign.

NEW PROPOSALS IN THE WORKS

WNCS board has agreed to support another water systems project in addition to the two-year CIDA-matched latrine project currently underway.

CIDA announced a new funding program in June which offers three to one matching. CIDA will put up \$3 for every \$1 put in by World Neighbours Canada. An application on behalf of Honduras will be submitted within the month Applications for Nepal and possibly Peru will be prepared over the winter.



While the citizens of Oliver, BC debate a multi-million dollar rebuild of the local high school these Nepalese school children are grateful that their school has a concrete floor thanks to TSS.