DEVELOPMENTS @
World Neighbours Canada Society
FALL 2007

Kamloops supporter visits Nepal project

BY PETER GRAY

In September 2007 I visited a World Neighbours Canada (WNCS) project in the Ramechhap District of Nepal. A friend, Larry Dixon, and I were on a one month trip through Tibet and Nepal. Our three days visiting there was the highlight of our trip.

To reach Manthali, the capital town of the Ramechhap District it is an eight hour trip occasionally needing the use of 4 wheel drive. The trip is actually only about 200 km. but our trip took nine hours because a truck was broken down on a bridge and no one could get by. It had been raining and so the trip had some very exciting moments. Nepal is a mountainous country but this part of Nepal is not even considered the "real" mountains like the Himalayas but, unlike Canada, there is a town or village every kilometre or so. Nepal has three quarters of the population of Canada squeezed into a mountain range that would fit into a rectangle from Kamloops to the border and from the coast to the Alberta border. There are people everywhere.

Next day we went to visit a number of completed projects. The travel was all by 4 WD over some very rough roads. I will list them in order of the oldest kind of project to the newest kind of project that WNCS supports in Nepal

The oldest projects that WNCS supports here in Nepal are the gravity fed water systems. In the afternoon we parked the truck and hiked about half an hour downhill to visit some villages that had had these systems installed some years ago. All of them were still working well. As you can see from the picture the tap is led to a convenient place in the village and then a concrete "water station" is constructed. The villages still have to carry the water to their individual homes but what an improvement from walking a kilometre or more to get good water. We were shown one of these water systems that had been in place for 15 years.

More recently TSS has looked at villages that cannot have gravity water systems. This is a much more difficult problem and hence more expensive to solve. With the help of WNCS they have developed a rain water system. This is a gutter on the house roof to catch the rainwater, a pipe to a cistern, and then a concrete "water station". The cistern is made from chicken wire and concrete kind of like a ferro-cement boat hull. This is a more expensive way to deliver water. Firstly to collect the water the village houses must be roofed with slate or corrugated metal. In many of these villages, especially the poorest, most houses are roofed with thatch. Secondly each house in the village must have one of these cisterns built. The 2,000 litre cistern will not last through the entire dry season, however this does provide a lot of the water to each house in a village and so is a vast improvement from what was there before.

Most recently TSS has been helping to design and build basic septic systems village by village. Each house of a participating village will be supplied with a toilet fixture and the basic plumbing parts. Then help is provided in the design and placement of these systems. In simplified terms an outhouse is built with the effluent going into a covered rock pit. The great improvement here is that none of the effluent sits on the surface or is allowed to drain to a place that would be unsafe. It is estimated that these septic systems will last up to 15 years.

World Neighbours Canada has been quietly funding water systems in Nepal since the early 1990s and has participated in the construction of 121 water systems affecting 23,000 people.

Govinda, the Field Coordinator for TSS who lives in Manthali, explained to us that TSS has a plan to convert all 42,000 houses in Ramechhap District taking ten more years. About 10,000 households have had the system installed over the last 4 or 5 years.

Most of the villages we visited had both good water and safe effluent disposal. Larry and I realized that results meant much more that just those two items. In a real sense the sum was greater than the two systems individually. The women have more time to work in the fields since they are not spending time getting water, the kids are healthier because more water is used for cleaning, cooking, and drinking which prevents some illnesses and so can also help in the field or go to school, and finally some water is used to dispose of the human waste safely thereby preventing a host of illnesses again making each family more productive.

Suresh, program officer of Tamakoshi Sewa Samati (Tamakoshi Service Society or TSS) described a village, that we did not have time to visit, where 15 years ago all the houses had thatch roofs. It has one of the first TSS gravity water systems which of course is still working and was one of the first villages to get the septic systems. As an indication of prosperity almost all roofs are slate or metal. As well many villagers walk to town to sell excess produce actually creating some income not just feeding themselves. So much so that a few families have sent children to boarding schools. It is a good example of a village changing from a drain on the Nepalese nation to one of being a contributor.

In those villages without access to gravity fed water sources, the alternative is to construct rain water harvesting systems. Rain captured from the roof is fed into a simple ferro-concrete tank. The current three-year project with CIDA assistance is implementing both water systems and latrines.

Honduran study tour report

BY MARY DOYLE

As a long time supporter and new board member of World Neighbours Canada I jumped at the chance to join a small group of volunteers on a site visit to Honduras. Our role was not to donate gifts or give advice but to observe local leaders sharing their expertise with their neighbours thereby strengthening their communities.

Our first morning in Honduras was spent at the Vecinos Mundiales headquarters in the capital city of Tegucigalpa where local staff presented background information on the projects we were going to visit. We learned that local facilitators assess rural villages for their need, their ability to analyze their situation, and their motivation to participate in solutions to improve the quality of their communities. Villagers choose the focus of projects and take responsibility for solving problems which they have identified themselves. Programs include sustainable agricultural techniques, environmental conservation, community and reproductive health, water and sanitation, income generation activities and savings and credit programs.

The journey to the six tiny villages involved in La Esperanza Project seemed to take forever as we wound our way up a steep, rutted road, arriving well after dark. It wasn't until the next morning that we were able to appreciate the stunning scenery from the top of the mountain.

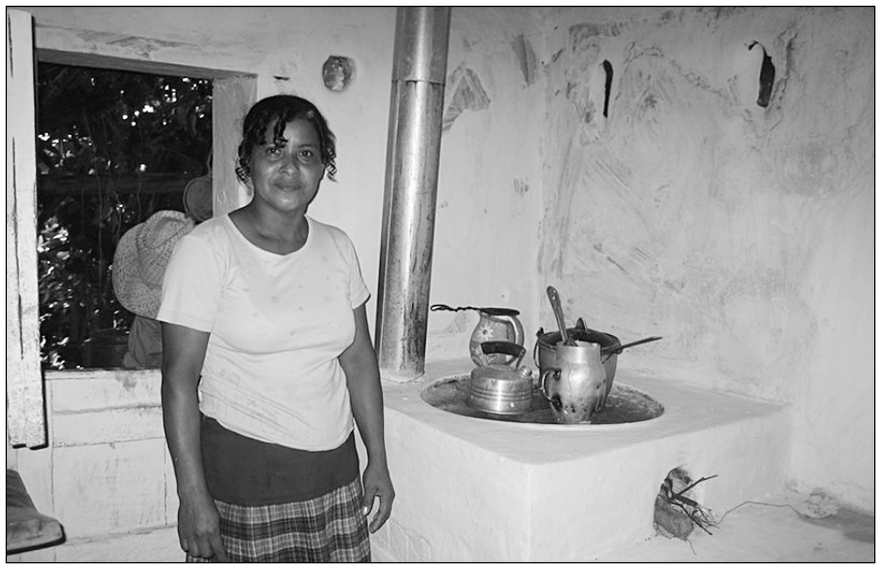
For three nights we stayed in the tiny village of El Guano. Six of us slept on cots in a windowless wooden structure with no running water or electricity. Although the accommodations were primitive by our standards, the family living in the dugout basement of our temporary home was considered one of the most prosperous of the community.

We attended meetings in two of the villages where we listened to villagers' heartfelt testimonials of how World Neighbours has helped them work together to improve their lives. A few formally prepared speeches were followed by a stream of men and women standing up and spontaneously thanking us for our help. We were invited into many homes where women proudly showed off their improved stoves, and into the fields where campesinos demonstrated techniques they had learned from local agricultural promoters supported by World Neighbours. We visited the local health centre and met the nurse who travels around the six villages by mule.

Our next stop was the village of El Socorro, home of World Neighbours' first project from 1990 to 1998, where we visited CEASO, a family run training centre for sustainable organic farming and technology. We were shown simple but effective water retrieval and purification systems, odourless composting toilets, a biodigester which converts animal waste into cooking fuel, and rammed earth structures which actually become stronger rather than deteriorating with age. The facility included classrooms, dormitories, and a well used community library supported by World Neighbours. We met a couple of American graduate students who had come to share their expertise and would take home environmentally friendly technology they had learned in Honduras.

We were reminded before we left that simply "giving people stuff" encourages them to look pathetic. Although the people we met were very poor, they were proud and happy. Instead of feeling sorry for them we rejoiced in their resilience and self respect.

World Neighbours Canada's focus on capacity building and sustainability exemplifies the proverb: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." We certainly witnessed this in Honduras.



In addition to installing an improved stove in her home, this resident of El Guano has developed a kitchen garden on her small plot of land and is part of the developing leadership in her community.

CEASO continues to grow

La Esperanza in eastern Honduras is World Neighbour Canada's third project int the region. Our first from 1990 to 1998 was centred on the village of El Socorro 160 kilometres west in central Honduras.

That village is now the home to a remarkable institution. Centro de Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de Agricultura Sostenible (CEASO) is the creation of the Santos family who worked and participated in the El Socorro program.

In 1996 they decided to model their farm on the famous Loma Linda training farm that was tragically lost during Hurricane Mitch. Eleven years later their farm has classrooms, dormitories, dining room and a small library open to the public.

The farm itself has operating examples of a huge range of rural technologies ranging from compost making to rain water harvesting. The centre has examples of rammed earth construction, ferro-concrete water storage, bio-gas generation in addition to livestock and all the basic vegetable crops. Farmer groups come from as far away as Guatemala and Nicauragua to take workshops in these technologies.

World Neighbours Canada's role has be to find funding from groups such as TODEC at the University of Toronto and the BC Library Association to fund and equip the library. In addition WNCS gave a small grant that covered the centre's legal costs associated with registering it as a legal entity under Honduran law. CEASO has completed the process and elected a board of directors.

The library has become the afternoon study hall for the local school children.

Mayra Santos Mata poses with a recent technology CEASO has been demonstrating. Easily constructed biological filters for improving drinking water quality can be scaled from family size to village size depending on the demand. Behind Mayra and Paul Doyle is the rammed earth wall of the library