



NEW SEASON & CHANGES FEATURE: PROMOTING TRANSFORMATION IN AGRICULTURAL AND GENDER THROUGH COMMUNITY BUILDING



photo above: community members of Santa Julia celebrating the inauguration of a water well

Thursday September 17th, 2021, Santa Julia, a rural community in the El Crucero municipality of Managua, celebrated the inauguration of their water well. The whole community came out for the big event, one that the Gloria Quintanilla women's agricultural cooperative had worked hard to achieve for many years.

At the event, Lola Esquivel, the cooperative's treasurer, reminded the public that another cooperative leader, Doña Irma, always said she did not want to die until Santa Julia had water, a school, and a road. In fact, those were the **three** goals of the Cooperative when it was formed in 2008. Doña Irma's words echoed the purpose of the cooperative, which was to support both the members and the community. So it was with a heavy heart that the cooperative and the community celebrated the achievement of the final goal, despite Doña Irma's recent passing.

During Lola's speech she pointed out that Casa - Pueblito has been a partner of the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative from the the creation of the cooperative. Casa-Pueblito helped construct a building to house the well's motor and a school. Through the 5-year funding, 2021-2026 agreement with **Global Affairs Canada (GAC)** promoting Gender-Responsive Smart Agriculture project, Casa-Pueblito will be working together with the cooperative to support and strengthen their goals as a cooperative.

The cooperative members and women in the community have built their empowerment and brought greater gender equality to the community. Eloisa García, the cooperative's president, recalled how in the early days, a few cooperative members would show up to meetings with a black eye. However, through different types of training, leading by example and sharing knowledge with community and family members, they have been able to reduce violence in the community. The intersectionality of gender-equality has manifested itself through the community involvement.

The Cooperative's more recent goals, with the support of Casa-Pueblito, have also contributed to benefits for the community as well as the strengthening of the cooperative and its leadership. The beneficiaries, who include cooperative members, other women in the community and members of a diverse gender cooperative in the community

have been learning how to improve the processing of their coffee, diversify their other crops, strengthen the cooperative's administration and accounting, and improve the commercialization of their produce. Their organic coffee and produce are in high demand both local stores and at fairs around the country. Indeed, Casa-Pueblito also supported the Cooperative to switch to organic production to improve the health of cooperative and community members. And within their own community, people can now buy a local organic coffee that is cheaper and healthier than the national brand.

The cooperative members shared with us that the community has been hit hard since the political events of 2018. There is now 68% unemployment in the community, though fortunately there have been no cases or deaths due to COVID-19. In the face of these challenging times, the cooperative is working even harder to support and strengthen the community. The wooden crates they had built to sell their coffee were made by an unemployed carpenter from Santa Julia. They are also finding ways to support youth to prevent them from migrating to the city, and they are improving the health of its members through medicinal plants and being volunteer health promoters. This is a heavy burden along with their agricultural production, one that demonstrates the intersection of inequality based on gender, poverty and rurality, as well as their commitment to transformation.

Nonetheless, the women of the cooperative and the community remain committed to improving their own wellbeing and of the community. They are finding that their current Casa-supported projects and the GAC project are helping them to overcome multi-dimensional poverty in different ways. Their diet has improved by eating more fruits and vegetables. They have increased production and are keeping better records of their earnings, so they can further improve their future economic planning.

The Gloria Quintanilla cooperative is already envisioning its next goal: have a coffee collection centre so they can store their own coffee and the coffee of other local producers. This will enable them to reduce costs and have a more stable income throughout the year. It will also amplify the other improvements to gender equality and sustainable agriculture through the current projects.

2021 COMMUNITY PROJECT UPDATES:

For this newsletter we thought it would be important for our readers to know how Casa - Pueblito's community partners are responding to COVID-19. There has recently been a spike in infections in several parts of the country.

GLORIA QUINTANILLA WOMEN'S COOPERATIVE SANTA JULIA, EL CRUCERO

Projects: We have been supporting the cooperative since 2008. The cooperative is currently implementing two projects. One aims to improve the production of 19 types of coffee production and processing, while improving commercialization and fair-trade practices. This will strengthen the cooperative's organization and accounting in line with new laws. The other project focuses on adding value to the commercialization of the cooperative's coffee by improving packaging and labeling that better communicates the cooperative's image.

COVID-19 response: There have been few cases of COVID-19 and no deaths in Santa Julia. The cooperative and the health department have very active health promoters that visit people at home on a regular basis.

HOGAR LUCEROS DEL AMANECER, CAMOAPA

Project: We have been working with Hogar Luceros del Amanecer since 2018. It operates three schools in urban and rural parts of Camoapa that serve very poor children. Their average family income of the children they serve is about US\$ 2/day. The project this year continues to improve the children's education by providing books and other materials, as well as improving the infrastructure. One of the improvements was the building of a small kitchen and cafeteria for snacks and lunches.

COVID-19 response: The organization had planned to take the children to visit historical sites during the country's bicentennial year. With the change in context, they wanted to avoid the long bus trips that could possibly lead to several COVID infections. So instead, they are doing even more infrastructure improvements to their buildings. One room will be turned into a computer lab and another school will get a new electrical system.

COMMUNITY LEADERS OF JIÑOCUAO, JIÑOCUAO

Project: Casa-Pueblito has been partnering with this community for almost ten years. This year's project improves the health of several families living in precarious situations by building latrines and artisanal wells. The beneficiary families engage actively in the construction of the new

facilities or social work in the community. Educational workshops show them how to use and maintain the latrines and wells to ensure the families' health and hygiene.

COVID-19 response: There have been relatively few cases in the community. One of the leaders' main concerns is that many youths have recently migrated to Honduras because of the economic situation. They hope that the new GAC project will demonstrate that members can earn a decent living and have a dignified life at home.

FOOTPRINTS FOR PEACE (FORMERLY PODCASTS FOR PEACE), MANAGUA

Project: This community arts and learning centre near the city dump provides a range of services aimed at empowering different generations, including the elderly and at-risk youth. A long-time Casa- Pueblito partner, this year's program promotes gender equality through theatre, murals, painting and dance; develops economic self-sufficiency through skills training; provides psychological accompaniment for adults via conflict resolution and non-violent communication; and builds a new room to provide medical services.

COVID-19 response: In response to the high number of cases in the community, especially in the elderly population, the centre acquired an oxygen tank that it lends to those who need it. With the recent rise in cases, Footprints for Peace had to temporarily suspend a few programs to avoid infections and purchased a second oxygen tank.

THE ASSOCIATION OF ORGANIZED WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS (MOES), ESTELÍ

Project: Casa-Pueblito has been working this organization that supports women and children living near the city dump for a few years. This year's project focuses on providing school meals and nutritious snacks to children and teaching them personal hygiene practices as well. The aim is to encourage more children to stay in school by not having to worry about getting their basic needs met.

COVID-19 response: Estelí has been especially hard hit recently by the pandemic. MOES has continued its nutritious food service so children can maintain a healthy diet. It recently purchased additional masks and cleaning supplies to prevent infections at the centre.



image above: community members from Jiñocua, Somotillo with new grain harvest

As part of Casa-Pueblito's 5-year project, Gender Responsive ClimateSmart Agriculture (GRCSA) funded by Global Affairs Canada, we started implementing seedbanks in three beneficiary communities; in Granada, Managua and Chinandega. The goal is to improve the genetic quality of seeds by introducing drought resistant varieties of beans, corn and sorghum in these communities greatly being affected by climate change. In Chinandega, we are already seeing positive changes in agriculture. Seedbank beneficiaries received beans and sorghum which were planted during the second week of September. Community members from Jiñocua, our target community from Chinandega, reported that beans are growing fast and healthy. This community only had experience planting native bean varieties which were severely affected by changing climate conditions. These native varieties had a low yield capacity and were vulnerable to plagues too. During our first follow up visit, we found that beneficiaries were thrilled to see how the seeds developed. They confessed they were concerned about their limited experience with this variety of beans; however, the results made them optimistic about next year's planting season and the use of the new varieties of seeds. Stay tuned for further updates!

CASA - PUEBLITO PRESENTS:

Nadine Jubb, Project Assistant. Nadine has lived in Nicaragua since the mid-1990s and has been familiar with Casa – Pueblito since the 1990s as well. She has lived in Ciudad Sandino, Bluefields, and more recently in Managua, where she has worked and volunteered with a variety of organizations. She has also done consulting in other countries in the Americas, eastern and southern Africa, as well as south and southeast Asia. She is passionate about women’s rights and is dedicated to using an intersectional approach and ending violence against women and girls. Nadine is excited to be supporting our partners because of their dedication to improving equality and sustainability in their communities.

Fide Ávalos, Gender coordinator. Fide has over 20 years of experience in Nicaragua’s nonprofit sector, she has experience creating and editing technical material on gender equality and designing and delivering gender equality, human rights, and popular education workshops. She states working directly with women has been an enriching personal experience where she has learnt a lot at a personal and professional level. Fide believes collaboration between organizations is vital for tackling some of the most serious social problems in Nicaragua. She is a fan of photography and creative writing. These are hobbies she uses to relax and to raise awareness about gender equality issues and women’s rights.

Jasson García Doña, Country Director. Jasson is a Community development expert with more than fifteen years of experience working, alongside several cooperation agencies like the European Commission and USAID. He has been working in several countries like; Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Panama, Nicaragua, and The United States. Having interned for the Nicaraguan government delegation presidency at the 63rd United Nations assembly, his passion for climate change mitigation flourished. Jasson specializes in the management and implementation of cooperation programs, focus on economic development and climate change initiatives. Jasson has been using progressive systems and applications, including forestry software, mass communication procedures, and organizational apps. Jasson uses his positive attitude and tireless energy to encourage others to work hard and succeed. He is inspired daily by his mother, wife, and son.

Samantha Torres, Program Manager. Samantha brings both personal and professional experience working in community development programming in Nicaragua, Latin America and Canada. Having previously been an intern with Casa - Pueblito in 2014, in Managua, she carried out working alongside the school brigades and participating in the monitoring and evaluation of community programs. This experience helped pave the way in further continuing to volunteer with Casa - Pueblito in Canada. She takes pride in working with people while ensuring that the intersectionality of gender equality, human rights and environmental sustainability are at the forefront of program implementation. Samantha is thrilled to be part of the Casa - Pueblito family again to continue supporting the progress of our community partnership projects from our office in Toronto.

We also welcome **Walter González**, who has taken over for our dear, late friend Elizabeth Guillen as our bookkeeper in Managua.

And for **Sebastián Martínez**, our specialist in Agriculture, we want to thank you for all the talent, passion, and impetus that you gave to this project in such a short time. The Casa - Pueblito team wishes you much success in all your projects and dreams. It has been a pleasure to share your knowledge and experience with us.

We welcome all new staff!



Casa - Pueblito Staff in Managua, from left to right: Nadine Jubb, Darling Huerta, Jasson García Doña, Walter González, Fide Ávalos, Sebastián Martínez

ADIOS ASHLEY:

Despite the many challenges that COVID-19 presented throughout this year, Casa - Pueblito gained more staff on the team and is thrilled to accomplish its many programming goals. Thanks to the 5-year Global Affairs Canada Project, we have been able to grow our team in Nicaragua and Canada.



We also had to part ways with Ashley Rerrie, whose contribution to Casa - Pueblito has created an everlasting impact. ¡Muchas gracias Ashley!

Earlier this year Ashley Rerrie, our long-time colleague and friend, moved on to a great opportunity with another not-for-profit organization. But not without having made such a mark on Casa Pueblito, here and in Managua, as well as our community partners in Nicaragua. She first joined our team as a volunteer intern with Christine King Cooperativa in Esteli in the summer of 2015. Upon her return to Toronto that fall, she then became a regular volunteer in our office as an administrative and fundraising intern. When the time came to send another Global Education Coordinator to Managua it was not surprising that she was the successful candidate. That role quickly evolved into that of Country Director and Ashley took on the new responsibilities with great skill and maturity.

During her 5 years at the helm in Managua, she encountered, endured and conquered many challenges. I worked with her on the arduous process of having Casa Pueblito officially recognized as an NGO in Nicaragua after the amalgamation. Her determination and patience were inspirational. Then came the civil unrest in April 2018. We offered to bring Ashley home (as many other NGO's were doing with their staff) but she would have nothing of it. Instead, she made us so proud of how she responded to the crisis and provided leadership and comfort to our Nicaraguan staff. It did not go unnoticed as well by our partners in the communities there.

Then came the pandemic. This time it was essential that we bring Ashley home. This was not an easy step for her to take. But she did not take her eye off of the ball from her home in Nova Scotia. Daily she was in contact with our folks in Nicaragua and our community partners.

It is still hard for me to imagine my next trip south. I so much enjoyed my road trips with Ashley in the "Millennium Falcon" as our old but trusty truck was named. My last memory of those days will be driving down the Pan American highway singing along to a version of Stan Roger's Barret's Privateers!

So, fare thee well, Ashley Rerrie. You will be a part of Casa Pueblito always.

Un abrazo, Carl!



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