



Newsletter of Companion Community Development Alternatives

Vol. 2 No. 2

CONFRONTING REALITIES

Determined Cuscatlán Women Organize to Seize Social, Economic Opportunities

Mercedes Menjívar knows how to work: she cares for nine children, cultivates crops, maintains her home in Sitio-Lago, and works full time with the CRC. She has stamina and dedication.

She knows how to organize too: she has been involving women in the social movement for more than 15 years, she served as president of her community, and she now organizes women in Cuscatlán. She is a humble and charismatic leader.

She is realistic and ambitious as well: while she knows the tremendous challenges women face, she is convinced of their will to confront them.

Menjívar was given an opportunity to apply her convictions on April 7 when the CRC's General Assembly elected her as

Coordinator of the new Women's Secretariat. She was intimidated by her lack of formal experience, yet she accepted the opportunity to work with the women in CRC-affiliated communities.

"In view of the necessity that there was in the area, I accepted ... And since that day, I have been working with the few abilities I have to offer," she said.

Menjívar accepted the position, recognizing the urgency for women to become organized, as they were during El Salvador's civil war. During that period, women defined their own participation by assuming roles traditionally reserved for men—they garnered respect from their peers and bolstered self-confidence.

(continued on page 6)



Mercedes Menjívar, Coordinator of the CRC's Women's Secretariat, discusses El Salvador's Family Code with the women's group in Las Delicias. Menjívar organizes a variety of the Secretariat's program activities, the newest being a rotating loan fund for productive initiatives.

Kathy Revtyak, CoCoDA intern from Indiana University, spent May-Aug. 1997 with the Women's Secretariat of the Committee for the Reconstruction and Socioeconomic Development of the Communities of Suchitoto, Cuscatlán (CRC). The CRC, CoCoDA's associate in Cuscatlán, supports sustainable development in 29 communities. The Women's Secretariat, a newly-created entity, actively promotes women's development through local leadership and community activism. Revtyak accompanied the Secretariat in defining its strategies and establishing the administration of a rotating loan fund.

In This Issue

This issue of *The Companion* highlights the many ways that Salvadorans and North Americans are working together through CoCoDA's program of Companionship in Development. The "Program Update" presents the five themes of development in which CoCoDA is active. Kathy Revtyak's feature article testifies to the role of Mercedes Menjívar, just one example of the inspiring Salvadoran leadership working with us. In the "CoCo Forum," we feature the talents and perspectives that North Americans bring to and take from participating in our program activities. The spirit of companionship was evident at the 1997 CoCo Encuentro where activists from CoCo Groups came together to share ideas and coordinate community-level support for CoCoDA's initiatives. There are many ways to participate in the Companionship in Development Program—we hope each reader will be inspired to contribute to our shared vision of democratic, human development.

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to bring together the perspectives and ideas of diverse participants, project our shared challenges and goals, and chronicle the achievements of our Companionship in Development

✦ Companionship in Development

The Companionship in Development Program has two objectives:

1) to support democratic, sustainable development in El Salvador;

2) to promote awareness, activism, and social responsibility in the United States for more just relationships with Latin America.

Local groups and organizations in the United States, "CoCo Groups" (see side bars, pp. 5 and 7), provide leadership and support for national program initiatives. CoCoDA's Coordination Team, a network of committed individuals based in the United States and El Salvador, gives support for the coordination of activities, such as delegation visits to El Salvador and U.S. speaking tours.

In El Salvador, CoCoDA works in partnership with Salvadoran organizations that promote democratic, integrated human development (see side bar, p. 3).

This Program Update presents an overview of CoCoDA's current initiatives. For more information on ways you can get involved, contact the CoCoDA national office by phone at 317/920-8643, or via e-mail at <cocodaindy@igc.apc.org>.



Community Health



Kelly Lubeck (far left), part-time CoCoDA field staff, works as coordinator of ADES's mental health program. The program places strong emphasis on outreach to children and youth of the community.

✦ Leading CoCo Groups:

- Dumbarton United Methodist, DC
- Greencastle, IN / DePauw CoCo Group
- Patchwork Central, IN
- River Road Unitarian Church, MD
- St. Harold's Catholic Community, IL
- Takoma Park, MD

✦ Supporting:

- Basic Health Care
- Community Clinics
- Health Education
- Mental Health
- Potable Water

✦ Salvadoran Partners:

- ADES, CRC, IBE

Women's Development



Mercedes Menjivar, coordinator of the CRC's Women's Secretariat, explains the rotating fund loan process to beneficiaries María Dolores Márquez and María Edit Guardado. Both women received a small loan for sesame cultivation.

✦ Network Coordinator:

- Nancy Murphy, Rainbow Lake, NY

✦ Salvadoran Partners:

- ADES
- CRC

✦ Leading CoCo Groups:

- Bloomington, IN CoCo Group
- Bluegrass CoCo Group, Central KY
- Greencastle, IN / DePauw CoCo Group
- River Road Unitarian Church, MD
- University of Iowa Central America Solidarity Committee, Iowa City, IA

✦ Supporting:

- Clothes Marketing
- Community Organizing
- Microenterprise Initiatives (Business and Agricultural)
- Microlending
- Vocational Training

Associate Organizations

ADES *Association for Socioeconomic Development, Santa Marta*

 Cabañas

ADES's fundamental purpose is the promotion of sustainable human development in poor communities of northern Cabañas. ADES reaches out to 30 communities through health, education, community radio, and business initiatives.

CRC *Committee for the Reconstruction and Socioeconomic Development of Suchitoto,*

 Cuscatlán

The CRC, located in northern Cuscatlán, promotes integrated and sustainable socioeconomic development in 29 affiliated communities. Microenterprise development, education, health, and agricultural production are cornerstones of its work.

DIMECONU *Councils for Community Improvement in Northern Usulután*

 Usulután

DIMECONU advocates community organizing for development and promotes cooperative production and marketing.

Other Partners

ARPAS, the Association of Participative Radios and Programs of El Salvador, represents community radios in their struggle for legalization.

IBE, the Emmanuel Baptist Church, is a Salvadoran church that accompanies rural communities in agricultural work and social outreach.

REDES, the Salvadoran Foundation for Reconstruction and Development, a national NGO, unifies and accompanies urban and rural sectors in self-development.

Democratic Communications

- ❖ **Network Coordinators:**
 - Mimi Hurd, Takoma Park, MD
 - Wendy Wallas, El Salvador
- ❖ **Leading CoCo Groups:**
 - Bloomington, IN CoCo Group
 - Putney/Brattleboro, VT
- ❖ **Salvadoran Partners:**
 - ADES
 - ARPAS
 - CRC
- ❖ **Supporting:**
 - Grants for Local Community Radios
 - National Struggle for Legalization of Salvadoran Community Radios
 - Recording and Broadcasting Equipment
- ❖ **Campaign Notes:**
 - 45 signers contributed to a CoCoDA ad in the Salvadoran press to support community radio legalization.



Guillermo Chavez, coordinator of Radio Victoria in Villa Victoria, Cabañas, interviews CoCoDA Board Chair, Craig Auchter, during the April-May 1997 CoCoDA Board of Directors and Staff delegation to El Salvador.

Popular Education

- ❖ **Network Coordinator:**
 - Mary Jude Postel, Chicago, IL
- ❖ **Leading CoCo Groups:**
 - First Congregational Church, Walpole, NH
 - Greencastle, IN / DePauw CoCo Group
 - Portage County Coalition for Sanctuary, OH
 - River Road Unitarian Church, MD
 - Toledo Area Committee on Central America (TACCA), OH
- ❖ **Salvadoran Partners:**
 - ADES
 - CRC
- ❖ **Supporting:**
 - Adult Literacy
 - Arts and Recreation for Children
 - Basic Education
 - Vocational Training

Community Economic Development

- ❖ **Leading CoCo Groups:**
 - Dumbarton United Methodist, DC
 - Patchwork Central, IN
 - Plow Creek Fellowship, IL
 - Portage Area Coalition for Sanctuary, OH
 - Reba Place Church, IL
 - St. James Catholic Church, MI
 - Toledo Area Committee on Central America (TACCA), OH
- ❖ **Salvadoran Partners:**
 - ADES
 - CRC
 - DIMECONU
 - REDES
- ❖ **Supporting:**
 - Agricultural Production and Marketing
 - Community Land Purchases
 - Ecotourism

The CoCo Forum

The Face of A Tortilla

for Lita

I am so white
I was stewed in milk and rice.

There is only corn here.

The freckled face of a tortilla
is a mirror of this short life grinded
between stones then pressed to fire.

Enough water softens the kernels.

Too much ruins the roots.

Immigrant piles of white flower arrive
wrapped in moist orange Mexican
restaurant napkins. No one else immigrates
to this cracked land, further south,
where farmers know the ears are ready
when their silk ponytails deepen
from blond to red then brown like the skin
of corn people baked in beans.



Some worlds are shaped
from a handful of meal
into a flat sturdy wheel
or a full moon
with a charred face and a bridge pressed
along the rough edge strong enough
to cross every morning of your life.

La Mora, El Salvador, July 1997

Jenny Browne is a writer living in San Antonio, TX. She first visited El Salvador with CoCoDA two years ago and now is a member of the CoCoDA Coordination Team. She wrote this poem while in Cuscatlán.

On his first trip to El Salvador, photographer Scott Martin took these images while participating in the Patchwork Central, IN delegation to Usulután. The delegation visited rural communities, providing dental care in the region and investigated water issues together with DIMECONU and IBE.

The CoCo Forum presents reflections and insights of participants in the Companionship in Development Program. Opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of CoCoDA or its members.

PAST MEETS PRESENT

Activist María Teresa Tula Returns to El Salvador After Ten Years of Exile

When human rights activist María Teresa Tula returned to El Salvador in May she found a country much different than the one she fled in 1986.

The bitter fighting between the government and guerrilla forces had ended; areas of the country decimated by government bombings had been rebuilt; depopulated communities destroyed in the fighting had been resettled; and the death squads that once threatened her life were disbanded.

After the 1992 Peace Accords things had changed in El Salvador. But as María Teresa walked the streets of the capital, the memories of the destruction she left a decade earlier were still fresh in her mind.

She remembered the sacrifices she and others in the "popular movement" made to address Salvador's deep-rooted social, political, and economic injustice. She thought of her husband, among those killed by the government for his union involvement. She thought of the death squad victims she and the other women of

COMADRES identified and photographed. And she remembered her own imprisonment and torture in El Salvador and exile in the United States.

She felt that these sacrifices had not produced the profound changes she expected, but she did see signs of hope. The political opposition had broken the hold of the right-wing ARENA party on Salvadoran politics, and formerly landless peasants had an opportunity to become

owners of the land they worked. Yet despite these changes, María Teresa still believes the interests and well-being of the common people are subjugated to those of the rich and powerful.

"I had come with the illusion of hoping to see changes, but the struggle for real change is not finished. The economic war is still not over," she said. Though disappointed, María Teresa was inspired by the efforts of people in rural areas of the country.



J. Hobson

María Elena, resident of San Rafael, Cuscatlán, helps prepare breakfast for the Bloomington, IN delegation in the home of Lita Andrade.

María Teresa spoke of the importance of the friendship of North Americans to the people in the communities. She said, "We Salvadorans don't want pity. We have a head and hands to move forward. Don't feel guilty for what happened in our country. It wasn't you; it was your government. Just continue to send your love. It motivates us, because we know we are not alone." ❖

Jason Hobson

Jason Hobson, a Senior at Indiana University, travelled to El Salvador with the Bloomington, IN CoCo Group delegation. This article is excerpted from a piece that was first published in the Indiana Daily Student. **María Teresa Tula** is a human rights activist with COMADRES and a member of the CoCoDA Board of Directors.

LOCAL COCO GROUPS: WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY ARE DOING

❖ **Bloomington CoCo Group, Bloomington, IN** held a benefit concert to support CoCoDA's Democratic Communications Campaign. A month later they sponsored a delegation to Suchitoto, Cuscatlán which focused on community radios and women's social and economic development.

❖ **Bluegrass CoCo Group, Central KY** raised over \$15,000 for a CoCoDA grant to establish a rotating fund for the CRC's Women's Secretariat.

❖ **Dumbarton United Methodist Church, Washington, DC** is supporting Connie Wilkinson, a long-time coordinator on their Central America Committee, who is working as a volunteer with ADES and the pastoral committee of Santa Marta and Valle Nuevo in Cabañas.

❖ **Greencastle/DePauw CoCo Group, Greencastle, IN** is preparing for its third DePauw Winter Term trip to Suchitoto, Cuscatlán. Students, faculty and professionals will construct a clinic in the community of Las Delicias and accompany local health promoters and educators in their work with the CRC.

❖ **Harping for Harmony Foundation, Morgantown, WV** has raised money for the CoCoDA Development Fund through the sale of artistically-decorated harps.

❖ **Patchwork Central, Evansville, IN** hosted the 1997 CoCo Encuentro which featured a coffee house fundraiser with poetry and music. Their annual delegation to northern Usulután focused on a dental campaign in conjunction with the Emmanuel Baptist Church and the community health program in Usulután.

After describing such roles, Menjívar stressed that, given their abilities and strong will, women should be able to engage in occupational and educational opportunities to further their growth. She argued for women's activism by saying: "At this time there remains a need to be and stay organized—to see how we, the women, can develop and prepare ourselves for the challenges we will face."

Re-Activating Women's Organizing

The first task of the Secretariat, aided by local community leaders Amanda Girón and Eva Martínez, was the revitalization of inactive or disbanded community-based women's groups. This task required visits to CRC-affiliated communities in which the Secretariat presented its program plans.

Women responded favorably to the Secretariat by voicing their needs and concerns. For example, Palo Grande community leader Melia Martínez spoke to gathered community women: "We as women are very timid. Culturally the woman is marked—for washing, ironing, cooking, whatever. But, we do have the ability to express ourselves and organize."

The challenges faced by women repeatedly surfaced in these meetings, and Menjívar and Girón complemented their meetings with discussions addressing those needs. In five such *charlas*, the pair shared information about El Salvador's Family Code and domestic violence.

Four months of working with the women resulted in formal visits to 15 of the 29 CRC-affiliated communities and the organization of 11 women's groups. It also allowed Menjívar and Girón to understand the needs of rural women.

Women repeatedly expressed their frustration with rhetoric and promises of opportunity accompanied by concrete initiatives. Women wanted projects which translated into opportunities for self-development. As Menjívar explained, "The women are ready and prepared for anything. They keep telling us that they want something practical [to do]."

Creating Economic Opportunities

The Women's Secretariat began searching out ways to connect women of the region with social and economic opportunities. Communities in the United States responded through CoCoDA and the CRC by providing the Secretariat with a seed grant for a rotating loan fund.

This loan fund, according to the Secretariat, would provide capital to women interested in agricultural or business initiatives. Most significantly though, it would generate enthusiasm and motivate the Secretariat and women organized in community groups to collaborate in long-term planning.

Menjívar expressed her enthusiasm: "This is the only support for women's organization that we've seen ... (N)ever has a fund been destined specifically for women ... This is a huge step that has been taken thanks to our friends in CoCoDA."

Moreover, said Menjívar, this type of economic opportunity engaged women's creative and productive energies. Immediately, some women coalesced around group initiatives such as bread



Guadalupe Alas of the UNGO Foundation offers, with Mercedes Menjívar of the Women's Secretariat, a baking workshop to the women of Hacienda-Sitio. These women will become better candidates for microcredits from the Secretariat's rotating loan fund.

production, sewing groups, or agricultural cooperatives. Others felt more comfortable with individual, agricultural projects.

The availability of loans also complemented the work of the UNGO Foundation, a Salvadoran non-governmental organization (NGO) that coordinated training workshops with the Secretariat. Through this cooperation, 69 women trained in several communities were eager to make use of their new skills and became better candidates for credit.

Meanwhile, the Secretariat set to work defining the fund's administrative policies by seeking the collaboration of other organizations. Recent MBA graduates from Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management offered recommendations for the fund's administration during their CoCoDA-sponsored visit to the region; and REDES, a Salvadoran NGO with lending experience, also offered expertise.

By August, the Secretariat had

extended small loans to 16 women engaged in diverse initiatives. Among the beneficiaries were peanut growers from La Mora, a small-scale baker from Sitio-Lago, and women interested in beginning or expanding agricultural production.

Cristina Gongo, bakery group member from La Mora, said "We all have a lot of difficulties, many of them economic. With this [credit], we're going to do something and see if we can alleviate this great [economic] necessity that we have."

Confronting the Realities

While the women of the Secretariat recognized the limits of their efforts, they continued to make gains with individual efforts and close institutional cooperation.

"... (O)ur development work with the

women will be in the hands of the CRC and our friends ... (D)evelopment without our friends is difficult—we are in an economic crisis and we know we need accompaniment," Menjívar said.

As she sees it, however, the Secretariat is not just rhetoric: it is a concerted effort aimed at integrating social and economic development. She highlights women's enthusiasm: "... (Y)ou see the difference ... They want to participate—you see them voicing opinions."

Yet the women of the communities continue to face serious challenges—ones which the Secretariat cannot eradicate. Still, Menjívar believes in opening social and economic spaces for women.

"The opportunities are there now, and we women must continue to grow through knowledge, training, and preparation. With the work of the Secretariat, we know it's necessary and possible." ❖

Kathy Revtyak

1997 CoCo Encuentro

Activists from Coast to Coast Gather in Evansville, IN



C. Scright

Mary Jude Postel (second from right) facilitates the meeting of the Popular Education development theme network at the 1997 CoCo Encuentro. More than 30 people from 11 states convened in Evansville, IN on April 25-27 to participate.

CELEBRATION IN SANTA MARTA

ADES, Santa Marta Celebrate Tenth Anniversary of Refugees' Repatriation

The tenth anniversary of the first return by the civilian population to Santa Marta was celebrated October 10. This event is the result of the cumulative trials and initiatives of Salvadorans living in the refugee camps of Mesa Grande, Honduras. It is the synthesis of the aspiration, commitment, and intensive work of a wide contingent of citizens who were determined to return to their communities of origin.

The tenth anniversary has valuable meaning for the current residents of Santa Marta. It is a re-encounter with their land, with their culture, with their roots, with their lives. Their achievements are an expression of the struggle by a people resolved to pursue the right to determine its future regardless of the sacrifices; a people prepared to contribute to the growth of freedom and democracy; a people that struggles to establish a better life and a respect for human rights.

Over the last ten years, life in Santa Marta has been one of learning, rebuilding, and tireless persistence in the face of the challenges and obstacles of this endless journey. But, it is important to note that ten years have not passed

without leaving their mark. These years have been valuable, for the positive as well as the negative results [they have produced]. This experience has permitted us, day by day, to continue learning about our strengths and weaknesses. It has helped us to realize what it means to open new roads that offer opportunities for those who have been forgotten.

This decade has allowed us to grow and understand what it means to realize our mission that, at one time, seemed impossible. It has also allowed us to learn the most thorough way to fulfill each task. It serves as a basis for defining the path that we have cleared and points us in the direction we should continue walking. This tenth anniversary, as all of those before, should be a time for happiness, hope, and facing new challenges—for those of us who live in Santa Marta, as well as all those brothers and sisters who have joined in solidarity with our people and their struggle. This anniversary is a good moment for reflection, to remember where we began, recognize how far we have come, and to orient our compass to a course for future success. ✦

Editorial, El Sol

El Sol is ADES's monthly newsletter published for the people of the more than thirty communities where ADES sponsors projects. Each issue features an editorial dealing with timely and regionally-specific topics. CoCoDA has accompanied ADES and the communities of northern Cabañas since 1992. Mary Jude Postel, member of St. Harold's Catholic Community and the CoCoDA Coordination Team, traveled to Cabañas to celebrate the anniversary. She presented a banner with greetings from U.S. communities and individuals that support Santa Marta and the surrounding communities.

LOCAL COCO GROUPS: WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY ARE DOING

Plow Creek Fellowship, Tiskilwa, IL hosted Erlinda and Angelica Cabrera, two sisters from Valle Nuevo, Cabañas, to live and work on their farm this summer. Proceeds from their work will go towards a CoCoDA grant for the Valle Nuevo Land Purchase project and community development. ✦

Portage Area Coalition for Sanctuary, Kent, OH is leading efforts alongside CoCoDA staff to strengthen the CoCoDA Development Fund. ✦

River Road Unitarian Church, Bethesda, MD organized their second youth cultural exchange to Santa Marta, Cabañas with five Unitarian churches. The delegation supported ADES's mental health program and helped construct a playground. ✦

St. James Catholic Church, Ferndale, MI contributed from their Lenten offerings to a CoCoDA grant for community development in Valle Nuevo, Cabañas for the fifth year. Erlinda and Angelica Cabrera from Valle Nuevo participated in mass at St. James in June. ✦

St. Mark's United Methodist Church, Carmel, IN held a two-night 'murder mystery' fundraiser for the CoCoDA Development Fund. ✦

Toledo Area Committee on Central America, Toledo, OH mourned the death on May 24 of long-time activist and CoCoDA Board member Cal Krueger. His life was remembered and celebrated on Cal's 72nd birthday in Sylvania, Ohio. Friends and family have contributed over \$1,000 to CoCoDA in his memory. Cal's wife Gena continues to work for peace and justice participating on the CoCoDA Board of Directors. ✦

We envision
a global
community
founded on just
relationships
among people
and nations,
rooted in the
democratic
sharing of
resources for
sustainable
social and
economic
development.

CoCoDA

Vision Statement

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The Companion

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Based on interviews with the women of Cabañas,
CoCoDA member Nancy Murphy presents her video:

Mámi Works: A Story of the Women of Cabañas Province, El Salvador

This 16-minute video details the daily lives of rural Salvadoran women. In addition to depicting the courage with which they face daily challenges, it describes the various productive enterprises women have undertaken in Cabañas. It also highlights ADES's revolving loan program as an important and successful way to address current problems. It is an educational tool for both those familiar with and new to the Salvadoran struggle.

With interviews conducted in February 1997, the film features 17 women of Cabañas. It was made with the assistance of ADES, our associate organization in Cabañas, and CoCoDA.

The video can be purchased for \$25 from
Nancy (Chisholm) Murphy, Box 245, Rainbow Lake, NY 12976;
phone: (518)327-3044; e-mail: heronpt@northnet.org.