



AFTER THE EARTHQUAKES: CoCoDA ASSOCIATES RESPOND TO CRISIS

A visitor's perspective of El Salvador after the earthquakes and how relief efforts are responding to the needs of Salvadorans

When the second earthquake hit El Salvador on February 13, I couldn't imagine staying in the States to read about it in the paper. With CoCoDA's help, I was in San Salvador a few days later to meet with four CoCoDA associate organizations:

Committee for Reconstruction and Socioeconomic Development of Communities of Suchitoto (CRC), Salvadoran Foundation for Reconstruction and Development (REDES), Emmanuel Baptist Church (IBE), and Association for Economic and Social Development, Santa Marta (ADES).

All of these organizations are involved with earthquake relief in the most heavily damaged areas of the country.

In order to better understand the crisis and the role of these organizations, I interviewed dozens of Salvadorans from mayors and priests to mothers and construction workers. I spent time with earthquake victims in rural and urban areas and learned about their living conditions first hand.

First impressions

Despite my background in Latin America, I had never been to El Salvador and never experienced a crisis of that magnitude. Before I started working officially, I decided to spend a day in San Vicente to get a feel for the situation. Walking into the town of Verapaz, I was overwhelmed by the monotony of the landscape. As they cleared fallen buildings, Salvadorans piled debris on either side of the main

road, so there was only a trench to walk in. Aside from the road and the rubble, there was nothing to see. The town has been literally flattened.

Imagining the crisis from the United States, I had envisioned rapid change and widespread panic: the adrenaline pumping chaos of the movies. Instead I found that Verapaz had a normal quality, a sense of calm. People were not dying in the streets. Indeed, there was no evidence that anything had changed; without a point of comparison, it seemed Verapaz had always been this unbearable moonscape.

I helped a young woman clear rocks around furniture and walls that might be repaired. As we shoveled, I began to read the clues about the house that had been there before. The location of the stove indicated a kitchen, and suddenly I saw a destroyed house where there had been a pile of rocks. Leaving the town, I envisioned the colors and ironwork that had once decorated the streets. I realized that when the Salvadorans refer to the "ruins of Verapaz" they still see the original town behind the chaos.

I did get my adrenaline rush, in San Salvador that night. The earth shook me awake around 2:30 and I stumbled to the door. Standing in the street, I watched neighbors count and recount

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Photo by Laura Chinn (2001)

Residents of Verapaz (above) walk by rubble left by the the 7.9 earthquake that hit El Salvador on January 13, followed by 6.6 earthquake that rocked the country on February 13. Approximately 1 in 6, Salvadorans suffered damage from the earthquakes which killed more than 1,400 people.

Laura Meredith Chinn is a CoCoDA intern who visited El Salvador, February 23 to March 10, to document the emergency response efforts supported by CoCoDA's Earthquake Relief Fund. Laura graduated from Vassar College with a degree in Geography in 2000.

Program Update

❖ *CoCoDA helps Radio Victoria buy house*

On Sunday, July 15, the Coordination Team, volunteers and listeners of Radio Victoria in Ciudad Victoria, Cabañas, will celebrate the 8th anniversary of their community radio station with a sense of long-term stability: With the organization ADES, they are purchasing the house and land where they have been broadcasting since 1993.

Equity Trust, a non-profit organization based in Voluntown, Connecticut that provides land tenure counseling, technical assistance, and financing to land trusts and other community groups, is financing the property purchase with a combined grant (\$19,000) and loan (\$10,000) to CoCoDA-ADES. The project includes some building improvements.

Equity Trust is also offering to match contributions that Radio Victoria, ADES and CoCoDA are able to raise to upgrade the radio's equipment, up to \$15,000! So now is a good time to hold a fundraiser or to make a tax-deductible contribution for CoCoDA-Radio Victoria, and have your money doubled -- how about a gift for the Radio's 8th anniversary?

Radio Victoria is part of a network of community radios in El Salvador.



Photo by Wendy Walko (1999)

Coordinators and volunteers of the Radio Victoria community radio station in Ciudad Victoria, Cabañas are now assured a home in this house purchased by ADES, with a grant-loan from Equity Trust, arranged by CoCoDA.

Radio Victoria Property Purchase and Building Improvements Project (Equity Trust) - ADES

1st quarter/2001 disbursement for property purchase:
\$10,000 - Loan payable in 5 years at APR 5%
\$11,415 - Grant

❖ *Popular teachers in Suchitoto and Santa Marta rely on CoCoDA's Scholarship Fund*

Santa Marta, Cabañas

ADES reports a debt of US\$25,000 in their education program, which is benefiting 1,352 students and 37 popular teachers in six community schools in Santa Marta, Cabañas this year.

The Salvadoran Ministry of Education (MINED) has indicated that this year they will accredit 4 schools staffed by popular teachers in Santa Marta (Escuela 10 de Octubre, Escuela Nueva San Felipe, Escuela Arq. Javier Sagarra, Escuela San Francisco) through the EDUCO program. However, all funding for stipends, continuing education for the teachers, theme-focused workshops and classroom materials is still being covered by ADES with cooperation from international organizations like CoCoDA.

ADES will have to continue to find funding outside the government until the popular teachers get their university degrees and are certified by MINED. Eighteen popular teachers from Santa Marta are now in their 3rd year of studies in basic education at the University of El Salvador (UES), and are working to graduate in March, 2002. Another 19 popular teachers completed are in their 2nd year at the Lutheran University, and aim to get degrees in elementary education by March, 2003.

Suchitoto, Cuscatlán

Reflect-Action is what the CRC calls a part of their popular education program in which community leaders prepare a diagnostic of their community with participation of local residents, then prepare plans for community development. Community Development Groups are formed to oversee implementation of those plans. Seven communities are presently participating in the *Reflect-Action* process. CoCoDA's support focuses on Sitio Zapotal, Hacienda 2, Corozal and Ichanqueso.

One popular teacher in CRC's program finished university studies in 2000. Two expect to graduate in 2001, 5 in 2002 and 3 in 2003. CoCoDA's support for scholarships in Suchitoto this year benefits teachers in the communities of Las Delicias and Mazatepeque.



Photo by Kelly Lubbeck (2000)

These students at the 10 de Octubre school (right) are the first generation to attend high school in Santa Marta, Cabañas. Their education still relies on funding from groups like CoCoDA.

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Companion Community Development Alternatives (CoCoDA) supports democratic, community-based, social and economic development in El Salvador and promotes awareness, activism and social responsibility in the United States for more just relations with Latin America. CoCoDA supports development projects with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in El Salvador in the areas of:

- Popular Education •
- Women's Development •
- Community Economic Development •
- Democratic Communications •
- Community Health •



Salvadoran associate organizations:

- ADES: Association for Economic and Social Development, Santa Marta •
- ARPAS: Association of Participatory Radios and Programs of El Salvador •
- CRC: Committee for the Reconstruction and Socio-economic Development of Communities of Suchitoto, Cuscatlán •
- IBE: Emmanuel Baptist Church •
- REDES: Salvadoran Foundation for Reconstruction and Development •



The Companion is a publication of Companion Community Development Alternatives (CoCoDA), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Most of CoCoDA's funding comes from individual members who contribute \$25 or more per year (\$15 student and low-income) and from CoCo Groups, which are independent groups and organizations in the United States that cooperate with CoCoDA in program initiatives. New members and CoCo Groups are always welcome.

COMPANIONSHIP IN DEVELOPMENT

✦ Members and friends of CoCoDA contribute to earthquake relief and reconstruction

As of May, 2001, 136 individuals and community-based groups mostly in the United States have contributed \$27,039 for earthquake relief in El Salvador through CoCoDA.

Emergency relief efforts supported by CoCoDA in February and March included the distribution of food, clothing, water, and supplies for temporary shelters; transportation and communication support for evacuations, volunteer labor and emergency necessities; reconstruction planning with municipal governments, local residents, and national and international agencies; and emergency medical brigades and clinics.

Areas of relief efforts:

Cuscatlán: Santa Cruz Analquito, Candelaria, San Ramón, San Cristóbal, Monte San Juan, Cojutepeque, San Rafael Cedros; **San Salvador:** Santa Tecla, San Marcos, Santo Tomás, Santiago Texacuango; **Usulután:** Mercedes Umaña, Berlín, Santiago de María, Jiquilisco, Jucuapa; **Cabañas:** San Isidro, Ilobasco, Tejutepeque, Jutiapa; **San Vicente:** San Sebastián, San Lorenzo, San Esteban

Earthquake Relief

First quarter 2001 disbursements:
 \$6,000 - REDES
 \$3,000 - IBE
 \$3,000 - CRC
 \$2,000 - ADES



Photo by Laura Chirri (2001)

"El Salvador is a torrent of tears," said Mercedes Menjivar of the CRC after the second major earthquake hit El Salvador in February.

The CRC, here distributing mattresses in Santa Cruz Analquito (above), is one of many Salvadoran organizations that have mobilized to provide emergency assistance to earthquake victims and to accompany local democratic planning for reconstruction.

Farmers around Suchitoto donated 5,000 lbs. of corn, 1,500 lbs of beans, 1,000 eggs, 6 lbs. of cheese and 50 lbs. of salt for earthquake victims through the CRC.

Popular Education for Community Development & Scholarships for Popular Teachers in Suchitoto - CRC

First quarter 2001 disbursements:
 \$1,330 - Reflect-Action
 \$2,890 - Scholarships for 5 teachers

Scholarships for Popular Teachers in Santa Marta, Cabañas - ADES

Second quarter 2001 disbursement:
 \$4,000 - Scholarships for teachers

"Popular Education" is a movement in El Salvador for education programs that rely on local leadership in rural and urban communities. Popular education emphasizes social conscience, self-esteem, community service, and awareness of cultural history. "Popular Teachers" teach children, youth and sometimes adults, although they may not have the academic credentials to be certified by the government. Over the last decade, the creativity, pride, and commitment of popular teachers have earned the respect of educators and organizations internationally.

The CoCo Forum

A SHORT VISIT HOME IS AN UNFORGETTABLE ONE

Carlos Campos tells about the changes he saw in his home country

I am Salvadoran and I had the opportunity to visit my country El Salvador after one year and four months of being in the United States. My family and I came to the United States to pursue university studies and we will be here for about three more years.

I am really surprised how El Salvador has changed in a short time. Things such as the dollarizing of the economy, greater social risks, more blatant acts of corruption, and lack of adequate planning, especially after the two earthquakes, are noticeable. The first earthquake happened on January 13th and the second on February 13th (people said there were three, the last one on March 13th, but it was not officially recognized).

People I talked to told me about their painful experiences, and expressed gratefulness for being alive and disappointment about what the country offers them. Others expressed their hopelessness. Almost everyone I talked to shared their dramatic stories and had great need to be listened to. I could see rubble as a symbol of that horrible national tragedy in every place I had opportunity to visit.

I visited Santa Tecla, the city where I lived before I came here. My sister-in-law lost her mother, sister, brother-in-law and niece. They were living in Las Colinas, the place where a part of the hill slid down on 420 houses during the first earthquake. My sister-in-law and my brother drove me to the place three months after and I could not stop the tears streaming down my face. So much drama happened in that place, many people visit there to remember the ones who died.

I could see how people in the middle of such a recent national disaster were working: Families waiting for relief donations, but also politicians discussing and doing indirect political campaigning.

During my last day of travel it was raining in the city. There was a storm as often happens when the winter season

begins. The emergency of earthquakes has passed, but non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are worried because the rainy season is close and so many people don't have a safe house in which to live, and other dangerous situations threaten to arise. The earthquakes have very much affected the rural area where families are living in extreme poverty.

I talked with directors of NGOs who told me about an alliance they are forming called the Coalition for the Reconstruction



Carlos' brother and nephew at Las Colinas, where loved ones were among those buried in the landslide on January 13.

and Transformation of El Salvador. In my opinion, NGOs tried to work too independently during post-war recon-

I know we are living in a complex situation in El Salvador, but hopefulness is a feeling and value that so many Salvadorans still have not lost.

struction, which undermined their effectiveness. The country will benefit if they are able to work together in a more coordinated way.

They also mentioned the fact that many Salvadorans wish to emigrate to

other countries, as is often the case in these situations. Migration is related to the national economy that relies upon remittances of money that immigrant workers send to their families; to the migratory situation of Salvadorans in the U.S.; and to all the dangerous situations that undocumented immigrants face when they cross the U.S.-Mexico border.

There is an opportunity to rebuild the country, but infrastructure and emergency assistance are not enough. Economic opportunities, health and the environment are just as important. Every disaster in my country reveals the structural problems that exist, which must be addressed if reconstruction is to be effective. We have to consider what is the approach we are taking for rebuilding.

Cold analysis aside, in my mind appear memories of women, children and elderly people who have the right to a better future, one of justice, dignity and peace. From outside of my beloved country I am honestly impacted and worried for my friends and family. I know that we are living in a complex situation in El Salvador, but hopefulness is a feeling and value that so many Salvadorans still have not lost.

I must express my gratefulness toward so many North American people who have come to know our reality and have shown commitment and solidarity with El Salvador. I want express my admiration toward U.S. citizens who have shown their commitment before, during, and after the recent civil war. They are also now showing their solidarity and identification with Salvadoran people after the recent earthquakes.

❖ Carlos Campos

Carlos Campos lives in Muncie, Indiana with his wife, María Alicia, and their four children. Carlos travelled to El Salvador for CoCoDA April 14 - 25 to evaluate earthquake recovery strategies with Salvadoran NGOs. Carlos and Alicia attend Ball State University.

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.

The Doors

Hannah wanted to take a picture of the doors in Verapaz, but there was no time.

"They say it all," she said,

the doors which stand perfectly strong and upright
above the heaps of rubble and broken tiles
along the streets of once-neighborhoods,

doors which until recently had a purpose:

let people in,

let people out.

For me it is the clotheslines, strung over ruins,
small clean banners of tenacity.

Children still get dirty; women still do laundry.

People still live here.



Photo by Hannah Zazovska (2001)

Teatro at 10 de Octubre School

We crowded into the school's largest room.

The children were thrilled and attentive, pressed against the stage,

while those who actually remembered the events, twenty years gone,

sat or stood quietly in the back.

A soldier—a teenage boy with a crayon beard—
mimed the rape and intimidation of a poor woman.

The children screamed with glee.

A poor farmer in a paper hat, desperate for a way to make a living, was murdered by soldiers with wooden guns.

The children cheered wildly,

And when the whole population crossed the fateful Lempa,

arms windmilling to signify swimming for your life,

amid gunfire and terror, babies screaming

mothers running

drowning and dying on the school stage

the children were ecstatic, jumping up and down and clapping,

their faces beaming absolute joy at this delightful comedy.

There was no fear in them.

These replicas triggered no memories of brutality:

these are not their nightmares.

And seeing this, my heart rejoiced.



Photo by Zoe Mullery (2001)

Zoe Mullery is a member of the Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco, California, one of four Shalom Mission Communities with Reba Place Fellowship in Evansville, Illinois, Plow Creek Fellowship in Tiskilwa, Illinois and Hope Fellowship in Waco, Texas. Every year since 1992, members of these communities have visited the resettled rural community of Valle Nuevo in Santa Marta, Cabañas. Each year they accompany the commemoration of the Lempa River massacre in March, 1981, when the residents of this region were attacked by the U.S.-backed Salvadoran and Honduran armed forces. This year marked the 20th anniversary.

❖ REDES - CoCoDA awarded U.S. HUD grant for disaster mitigation in Jiquilisco

The U.S. Department for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) approved a 1-year, \$129,000 grant for a joint project with CoCoDA and the REDES Foundation: Strengthening Communities and Municipal Government for Disaster Mitigation in Jiquilisco and the Bajo Lempa Region of Usulután.

The project aims to develop a system of resources and local capacities, with the participation of residents from 30 communities and the municipal government of Jiquilisco, for disaster prevention and emergency response. This will include training, creating systems of coordination, installation of permanent resources such as radio networks, mapping of resources and risks, and developing a regional plan for disaster prevention and emergency response.

The Bajo Lempa was one of the regions most affected by flooding caused by Tropical Storm Mitch in 1998; by flooding in September, 1999; and by the January 13, 2001 earthquake.

❖ Computer classes now offered in Santa Marta

Classes began in the new computer center in Santa Marta, Cabañas on December 4, 2000. The first group of students includes 20 popular teachers and 8 ninth grade students.

Members of the River Road Unitarian Church in Bethesda, Maryland, who raised the funds for the center, will visit Santa Marta in July to participate in an evaluation of the computer center's first months of operation.



Rev. Miguel Tomás Castro (right) discusses the social mission programs of Emmanuel Baptist Church with members of Patchwork Central in Evansville, Indiana, while Kelly Lubeck of CoCoDA translates.

❖ CoCo Groups host Salvadoran visitors

Last November, Rev. Miguel Tomás Castro of the Emmanuel Baptist Church was featured in several programs organized by Patchwork Central in Evansville, Indiana. Alfonso Rivas, CoCoDA Projects Coordinator, toured to groups in six states with then CoCoDA Program Director Kelly Lubeck.

Yda Hernández of the community council of Santa Marta was hosted in the Washington D.C. area this spring by the Santa Marta - Takoma Park Companion Cities Project, the River Road Unitarian Church Central America Task Force and the Dumbarton United Methodist Church Inter-America Committee.

(After the earthquakes, continued from page 1)

their children before laughing at each other's pajamas and finally going back to bed. As I lay awake all night, I realized that there are no outsiders in El Salvador during this crisis. The constant anticipation of aftershocks changes the whole dynamic of the aid process because unlike a fire or a hurricane, the disaster does not end when help arrives.

Responding in Cuscatlán

The CRC has been constructing temporary shelters (*champas*) and distributing basic goods on the eastern edge of Lake Ilopango. One of the greatest challenges in the damaged areas is finding enough space to cut *champa* plastic into useful pieces, so this work is done in advance, in the CRC office lobby. From there the supplies are loaded into a truck, with mattresses stacking twenty feet in the air.

Driving from Suchitoto, we marveled at the random nature of the earthquakes. Destruction seems to

come only in extremes, leaving some towns flattened and others untouched. Approaching Ilopango, the highway itself is in poor condition and the view to either side is just one landslide after another. It is easy to imagine entire towns dragged off the cliffs or buried at the bottom. In many cases, communities have strung signs along the highways begging for help and listing their needs.

When we arrived in Analquito, I spoke with people about their needs. Clearly, temporary housing is the most pressing priority. Many families had already cleared a space in anticipation of these supplies so they were able to start building their *champas* as soon as we arrived. Even families with standing homes were afraid to sleep indoors, so nearly every family needed these materials.

"We are waiting for housing construction because they say that around here, in Analquito, they're coming to building provisional homes," an elderly man told me while he waited in line to receive a mattress. "The

people need them as soon as possible because the rainy season is coming... They are helping us a lot with this, because we cannot live inside our homes."

(continued next page)



A boy in Cabañas knocks down a home marked "I" for "Inhabitable", meaning "un-inhabitable". In some towns, 95% of the homes were left in ruins.

Photo by Laura Chen (2001)

One of the greatest accomplishments of local organizations like CRC is their speed and thoroughness in doing a census of the population and prioritizing basic needs, even in isolated areas. In each area I visited, I asked families whether they had been included in the census and what they thought of the process. There is a sense that aid is being distributed to those with the most need first, and this restores people's faith in order and justice.

Moving towards reconstruction

I also spent an afternoon with personnel from REDES in Candelaria (also near Ilopango), where 1,300 homes were destroyed. In Candelaria alone (one of REDES' seven focus areas) they had distributed 6,000 containers of water, 400 hygiene kits, 800 mattresses, and built a large storage tent.

We hiked around landslides and climbed over rubble to reach small communities and clusters of families that have been displaced from their homes. We spoke with local leaders within each of these groups and recorded the general living conditions. In most cases, these families have built *champas* and communal tents and kitchens to form temporary living spaces in anticipation of the rain. As one man told me, "although you live uncomfortably, with a little *chamrita* of corrugated tin, you won't get wet."

Beyond these basic huts, most people I interviewed don't have the resources to rebuild: "We still are not [thinking about rebuilding] because to put up something is costly - ¡cuesta! And right now there are no resources."

REDES is helping make this transition from simple survival to permanent reconstruction. We talked with local leaders about which locations and structures might best withstand quakes in the future. As they discussed this long-term vision with local people, I was struck by the sense of hope and solidarity they brought to the situation.

But Javier Martínez, Executive Director of REDES, expressed his frustration. "We are going around in circles with reconstruction, never advancing to the other half of [REDES'] goal [development]!" In the 12 years since REDES was established, El Salvador has been in a perpetual state



Photo by Laura Chinn (2001)

"Here you just have to resign yourself to the will of God..."

of crisis: the war, Hurricane Mitch, and now the earthquakes.

Poverty an accomplice in disaster

The strengths of the CoCoDA associate organizations are particularly clear in their work with rural *cantones* like Las Flores, outside of Sensuntepeque. Not only is ADES the only source of aid in this remote area, they have built strong relationships with local leaders and see the connection between underdevelopment and the impact of the earthquakes.

The situation of Las Flores is the most serious of the communities I visited and it demands a long-term approach. Eighteen families are situated at the base of a rocky mountain, between a natural spring and a government-built well. Only two houses survived the second earthquake, and these have significant structural damage. The others have already been demolished because they were a safety hazard. This was the case for one young woman I met with her son and daughter. She was wearing a white prayer covering, sitting in their *champa* by the side of the road.

"Our house was right here in front of us. In the first earthquake, just the roof was ruined. Then in the second one, the walls were destroyed completely and we

couldn't live there. There was the danger of the walls - they didn't fall at once, but with the tremors and shaking, they had to be knocked down. It was better to knock them down because children pass by there."

There is a sense that aid is being distributed to those with the most need first, and this restores people's faith in order and justice

Families in Las Flores have makeshift *champas*, but most are just plastic strung between trees. The spring has been choked with dust, and they are afraid to approach the well because it is below a boulder that may fall. The local mayor described the problem:

"There is a well next to a landslide, and the community can't go to get their water because it is dangerous. Some big boulders are still by the well and the people can't go to get water. They won't go near there for anything because they're afraid of another landslide."

Unfortunately, this fear of landslides is not isolated to the water supply. In fact the whole area is at risk. The hill that overlooks the village has three deep cracks running up a cliff. Even without an earthquake, last year's rainy season brought down a huge piece of the face, and it seems this year will be worse:

"We tell the mayor, 'Imagine, when it rains, the first layer that falls will be where the first crack was, because that is so weak. The next one will go, and then the next...' Everyone here is afraid. Here you just have to resign yourself to the will of God, that's what we say. We are eighteen families living here in a risk zone."

The long term environmental and educational projects of ADES compliment short-term relief toward a sustainable solution. In Las Flores and across El Salvador, the problem is not just earthquakes; underdevelopment and deforestation determine the effects of the shaking. The challenge is to respond to this urgent situation without losing sight of the larger development needs.

✦ Laura Meredith Chinn

*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

CoCoDA

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"The lack of viability of our country is directly related to the lack of a framework for solving the structural crisis of our society.

"The solution to this crisis should be pursued through a process of national reconstruction (environmental, social, institutional and ethical) that has sustainable development with social equality as its guiding point."

(notes from a forum of Salvadoran NGO leaders, March 2001)

