

# Annual Report July 2014-June 2015

EPIC's largest programs are in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, all countries suffering extreme adversity. However, EPIC is committed to work where there is urgent need, combined with the opportunity to be successful.

- *Honduras has the world's highest rate of violence and homicide for a country not in an active war zone.*
- *El Salvador's homicide rate passed that of Honduras during the first 8 months of 2015. If murders continue at this rate, it will be #1 in homicides and Honduras #2.*
- *Honduras, the poorest country in Central America, experienced a cataclysmic drought this spring and summer with 80% of the country losing its corn and bean crops. These are the crops the poor subsist on, and this drought has effected all the regions of Honduras where EPIC has agricultural work.*
- *Guatemala has the fourth highest rate of chronic malnutrition in the world and the highest for Latin America and the Caribbean. Currently 49.8% of children under 5 suffer from chronic undernutrition. (UN World food Program)*
- *Guatemala's President and Vice President recently resigned and are in jail along with 38 other top officials. They have stolen many millions from the incredibly underfunded public treasury. Trials are yet to come.*

Reflect on these working conditions and needs as you read of EPIC's accomplishments during 2014- 15. With tenacity and inspiration, EPIC's program partners have continued confronting root causes of poverty, and they are achieving impressive results with very small budgets. Their work is community based and grows out of years of experience.

## FUNDAMARCOS - AGRICULTURE AND HEALTH IN GUATEMALA

The UN World Food Program says that in Guatemala "the face of poverty and hunger is indigenous, young, and rural". FUNDAMARCOS is working with exactly these people.

FUNDAMARCOS is fighting malnutrition by teaching families to **grow vegetable gardens, plant fruit trees, vaccinate chickens, and increase corn and bean harvests**. To verify the program's effectiveness, the staff surveyed 241 families in 11 of the villages where they worked this year. Some of the accomplishments they recorded were:



- 2,084 fruit trees were planted - 21 varieties
- 7,676 chickens and turkeys vaccinated (whole village campaigns)
- 143 family vegetable gardens planted
- 10 large communal vegetable gardens grown by organized women's groups



During the last 2 to 3 years, most families have planted a variety of fruit trees, for instance - 3 orange trees, 4 peach, 2 plum, 2 avocado, 3 lemon and several bananas. This shows that the fruit is for family consumption, which is the objective of the program. Planting 25 avocado trees would indicate that the fruit is to sell. The increase in diversified food production definitely indicates that the children of these 241 families (about 80% of the program's participants) will not be among those the UN found to be suffering malnutrition! When families are enabled to produce abundant nutritious food - rural indigenous families in Guatemala eat well!

## Soil and water conservation, plus planting trees, help the FUNDAMARCOS farmers be more resilient to the effects of the climate changes already being experienced.

With undependable rainfall - downpours and then none - program participants are working hard to prevent soil erosion and catch rain water, enabling it to soak in and be available for crops. This year farmers laid out more than 32 kilometers of contours across hillsides and planted 17 1/2 kilometers of them with specially selected grasses to form filter barriers! The majority of this land was planted in corn and beans. Other contour lines were used to guide tree planting or mark routes for building rock walls and water holding contour ditches. All this was done with people power, no fossil fuels were used!

Filter barrier



Emphasizing tree planting resulted in 29,443 trees being planted in the 11 villages: 20,097 seedlings transplanted onto the hillsides for reforestation, firewood and lumber; 7,262 shade protected coffee trees planted in contour rows; and 2,084 fruit trees. Reforestation of hillsides both stabilizes the soil and enables more rain to be absorbed.

**The farming promoted by all EPIC's programs is chemical free.** Composting, raising worms, planting legumes and crop rotation are used to increase soil fertility. These practices also increase the organic material in the soil allowing it to hold more water. This is particularly important for increasing corn and bean harvests when no irrigation is available. Vegetables and fruit are protected with homemade organic insecticides and repellants.



Soil preparation - including contouring and adding compost



Planting and weeding

Controlling pests with homemade organic pesticides



Harvesting, washing the vegetables and learning nutritious new recipes



## Success in teaching high yield, resilient, sustainable farming takes many steps

### LA SEMILLA DEL PROGRESO - HONDURAS

Honduras was already the poorest county in Central America, and this year's drought has caused great suffering. La Semilla had been preparing farmers for weather extremes by emphasizing a resilient food production. Each family is advised to plant food crops that like lots of water and crops that do well with little. Still, when the rains stopped, even La Semilla's farmers lost crops - although fewer. La Semilla teaches multiple strategies to manage water, conserve and enrich soil, and control pests. In 10 villages where La Semilla worked this year, farmers with hillside farms implemented these water conservation practices to hold rain water and allow it to sink in slowly:

2,025 meters of contour ditches dug on hillsides to hold rainfall and prevent erosion  
592 meters of *zanjas productives* were dug. These are very large contour ditches filled with rich organic material and planted with food crops  
4,756 meters of special grasses were planted on the contour to form filter barriers

Also 28,592 trees were planted:

2,840 hardwoods for lumber  
24,805 coffee trees planted in contour rows, plus the trees planted to provide shade  
847 fruit trees

In addition to these results documented in the 10 villages surveyed, La Semilla has started work in a new area where they were first invited by the local Catholic priest. After seeing La Semilla's initial work, the 3 municipal governments of this area started providing meeting space for classes and food and transportation for participants in La Semilla's 3-day agricultural courses which stress resilient, sustainable food production.

**EPIC works in 2 ways: #1 - EPIC's major emphasis** is resilient, sustainable agriculture and it receives EPIC's largest grants. In Central America this year, EPIC supported 5 programs promoting an organic food production that turns impoverished farmers with small farms and low production into food producers for their countries. **#2 - EPIC makes small grants for a specific purpose to local nonprofits.** These are cases when a little money given for a specific need makes a big impact. EPIC's donations to the following 6 nonprofits fall in this category.

## FRIENDS OF NEPAL PARIWAR

**\$2,500 for supplies to enable reproductive health clinics to continue working after the Nepali earthquakes**



This small nonprofit supports 4 rural clinics and their 9 nurse midwives. The clinics and everything inside was devastated in the earthquakes that hit Nepal in April and May. These will need to be rebuilt to allow the nurse midwives and their patients to move out of tents and into proper facilities.



Meena Deuja, nurse midwife, consults with a new mother in a tent. Rubble from the old clinic is seen through the tent door.

The rebuilding of the clinics will be the goal as soon as the monsoon rains stop. To learn more see <http://friendsofnepalpariwar.org/>

## MUJERES EN ACCIÓN - GUATEMALA



**\$985 for a microphone with stand and a projector for classes and presentations**

Mujeres en Acción is a micro-finance organization of Maya women. It began in 1984 with widows left without a means of support due to civil war. It has now grown to have 431 women participating in saving groups. Mujeres addresses many needs of its members, including working in reforestation. This year they planted 1,960 trees. At the request of moms in the micro-



finance groups, a program working with at-risk teens to teach traditional values through music was developed. Mothers wanted to keep their kids away from music venues where drugs are easily available. Organizing teens into local bands and giving them music classes has proved very popular. There are now 54 youth, 12 to 18 years old, in 4 music groups all learning to play musical instruments. The microphone is enabling them to also bring in vocalists.

## LA BUENA TIERRA PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - MEXICO

The new playground means the kids can play outside during recess and the school can have a soccer team and a small school garden.



**\$1,800 tuition assistance for 6 especially needy children and \$1,116 for playground equipment and expenses**

La Buena Tierra started in 1999 as a preschool for children of very poor families and has gradually expanded. This year it graduated its second 6th grade class. The students come from the families who originally built houses of scrap materials along an abandoned train track in Cuernavaca. In this neighborhood there are no yards or playgrounds. A small property, filled with junk, right next door to the preschool was donated for a playground. This year in addition to helping buy playground equipment, EPIC enabled 6 especially poor children to stay in school.



## CASA DE LOS AMIGOS - MEXICO



### **\$4,000 for materials to remodel the kitchen**

La Casa de los Amigos in Mexico City is a Quaker Center for peace and international understanding. It is a unique and harmonious combination of a nonprofit organization, a popular guesthouse, a community center, and a meeting space for social movements doing critical peace work in Mexico and around the world. The multicultural staff also works daily to protect the human rights of migrants and support refugees in Mexico integrate into life in Mexico City.



La Casa had several talented volunteers including professional cabinet maker, Mike Brown, to remodel the constantly used kitchen, but they needed funds to buy materials. This is from a report the staff wrote to thank EPIC.

*With the grant of \$4000, we renovated our kitchen with handmade and durable custom cabinets, improved lighting, and new paint. It feels like a privilege not to battle with insufficient work spaces, old appliances and bad lighting as we continue to offer a welcoming community of faith, celebration, daily service and good will to the world. Mil gracias, compañeros.*

## CRECIENDO JUNTOS - SOACHA, COLOMBIA

### **\$3,710 contribution to the Director's salary Additionally, many slightly used educational preschool toys were donated.**



Several EPIC members took numerous early childhood educational toys to Columbia where they are expensive.

Soacha, on the outskirts of Bogota, has so much violence that families connected to the US embassy or USAID are not allowed to go there. The community center provides a range of services from after-school tutoring, to workshops on conflict transformation, to child care and programs for teens. Creciendo Juntos's director, Marta Garcia, is the coordinator and inspiration and for all the activities of Creciendo Juntos. But donors want to fund programs, rather than a coordinator. EPIC was able to help with this essential salary.



Marta, left, receives the toys.

## THE MAYA CULTURAL CENTER - GUATEMALA

### **\$3,825 - operation of the Maya Center and construction of the first Mobile Teaching Cart**



Present efforts focus on designing a large exhibit room with its accompanying patio. These are designated to show the Maya contributions to an eco-agriculture that could help confront present problems of soil and water degradation, low yields, and erratic weather. Four mobile teaching carts will reside here as part of the displays in this room when they are not touring. Hosting events and educational activities continues while proceeding on steps to have full-time staff. Another project related to the Cultural Center is working on preserving historical memory in San Mateo Milpas Altas. **\$640 restoring and framing 24 photos from the 1960's.**



Discussing the message to be communicated by the first Mobile Teaching Cart



Elderly resident of San Mateo looks at a photo of thatching a roof, a craft which has disappeared there.