

# Annual Report July 2016 - June 2017

## EPIC Works Where Need and Opportunity Intersect!

**Epic partners with inspired local leaders who have creative ideas to solve local problems. Then EPIC affirms and empowers these leaders. This year many of the problems were environmental.**

### **Problem: Learning to care for the environment - issues of water scarcity, deforestation, soil erosion and depletion, and trash disposal**

Laureano Jacobo, director of **La Semilla** in Honduras, is working with his son Patricio to promote sustainable resilient agriculture in Honduras. They have expanded the program's outreach to 9 new communities in an exceptionally poor area of the country. As moral reinforcement for their teaching, they have found a great partner in Pope Francis. Pope Francis has written Care For Our Common Home, an encyclical on creation care which gives the Biblical and scientific background for the sustainable farming and soil and water conservation practices that La Semilla teaches.



Introducing the Pope's teachings alongside practical conservation actions has been so successful in Honduras, that EPIC said, "Let's multiply it!"



On a cold morning, Achi Maya teens read Care for Our Common Home.

EPIC brought Laureano and Patricio to Guatemala to give workshops with 3 other EPIC programs.

**1. FUNDAMARCOS** hosted a 2-day workshop on Care for Our Common Home in the Achi Maya area of Baja Verapaz. It had broad participation by Maya leaders: men, women, and youth. Each leader received a 10 page summary of the encyclical which EPIC produced, plus a spiral notebook of lesson plans written by Tony Brun. This will enable them to give classes to their own groups, thus greatly multiplying the workshop's impact.

**2. The Maya Cultural Center's** conference on the Pope's environmental encyclical brought together a diverse group of persons who would seldom have had such an opportunity to jointly discuss their environmental concerns. For a whole day, young and old, Maya and Ladino, persons internationally known and villagers from rural Guatemala, shared their thoughts on environmental issues.



Maya Cultural Center: Socializing over a traditional lunch of locally produced foods





**3. Mujeres en Acción** is a micro-credit organization of Maya women. They hosted the third workshop, inviting the leaders of their micro-credit groups, plus leaders of other non-profit organizations. The women in these photos demonstrates the interest and active participation all felt. As with the other workshops, the participants received the 10 page summary of the Pope's encyclical, plus the teaching curriculum to help them give classes on what they had studied.



### **Problem: Food Security in times of changing weather patterns → downpours and droughts**

This year EPIC supported 7 programs in Guatemala and Honduras that promoted “Resilient Agriculture”. This involves teaching a variety of agricultural practices that combine recent scientific work in agro-ecology with the wisdom of many of the participants’ Maya and Lenca indigenous ancestors.



#### **Using native, heritage seeds and preserving biodiversity**

Food security is enhanced by preserving and planting native, heritage seeds which are more resistant to adverse weather and pests. Using carefully selected heritage seeds harvests increase.

The farmers in the photos (left) are father and son. Because he understood the importance of preserving biodiversity, the father convinced his adult son to also save traditional native corn seeds which they will both plant next year. In addition, they have participated with other groups of farmers in Honduras to exchange native seeds.

**Hedging against downpours and drought** means planting some food crops that will still produce when there is very little rain, and other crops that will produce with copious rain. This insures food security for families.

### **Problem: Youth in Guatemala and Honduras are growing up with few opportunities and little hope in societies saturated with drugs.**



#### **Restoring Hope and Values Through Music**

Felipa Xico founded **Mujeres en Acción** out of concern for widows left without a means of support due to civil war. Over the years it has become a strong women’s micro-credit organization that responds to multiple needs of its participants.

Starting a music program is an example the way Mujeres en Acción responds to its participants. Mothers in

some of the micro-credit groups were worried that their older children would follow their attraction to music and venture into risky venues where drugs are sold. The program developed by Mujeres en Acción appealed to the kids’ desire to learn to play music and also taught them traditional Maya values. It has been very popular as it enables youth to learn to play an instrument and belong to a social group.





This music program increases self-esteem, and participating Guatemalan youth can enjoy music without going to music venues where drugs are traded and gang members recruit.

### Youth Health Promotion Program in Honduras

In February 2017, EPIC began a new health promotion program for teens in Honduras. It is the initiative of 2 students of the University of Honduras. In each town where they worked, the university students gave 6 workshops, one every other Saturday. The topics covered were self-esteem, nutrition drugs sex, and dental hygiene.



The university students who designed and are teaching this program had first volunteered with EPIC, teaching dental hygiene with La Semilla.



After the teens had learned about dental hygiene, they had the chance to go to an elementary school and teach the kids there about tooth brushing.

The teens say that no one had ever talked to them about these issues and that they certainly wouldn't ever feel able to ask adults about them. However, the university students are only a few years older than they are and are from the same area of Honduras, so the teens feel comfortable talking and asking questions.

### The Mobile School of Soil and Water Conservation teaches school kids that they can do things to help the environment

This year the **Mobile School of Soil and Water Conservation** in Guatemala began a pilot environmental education program with schools. The Guatemalan government's curriculum guidelines require that environmental education be taught. But teachers have no preparation, and they are provided no books or supporting school supplies.



The mobile school's new (2009) pick-up used to take education materials to schools

Eusebio Tomás saw the government's mandate for environmental education in schools as an example of "Where Need and Opportunity Intersect". Eusebio is a university educated forester who works in forestry for the UN in Guatemala. He is the oldest grandson of Felipe Tomás, director of EPIC's FUNDAMARCOS



program. He is also the third generation of his family to currently be carrying on the EPIC vision of service in Guatemala.

Working as a volunteer, Eusebio led a day-long pilot course in May on environmental care for elementary and middle schools in the town of Palin. The kids loved it! Each child also took home a tree seedling to care for and plant - a new experience for them.



Using discarded pallets to make seed beds on the school's cement patio floor in order to plant vegetable seeds.



## **Problem: Escalating disasters throughout the world**

Several years ago EPIC's Board of Directors decided that as part of continuing solidarity with our partners, EPIC would assist our programs responding to disasters occurring in their geographic areas.

### **Flooding in El Salvador in June 2017**

EPIC first worked with APRODENI (Association for the Promotion of Human Rights for the Children of El Salvador) in 2000 with a grant related to rebuilding civil society in a post-civil war country. APRODENI's mandate is to work with the poorest children, and the poorest usually live in areas vulnerable to disasters.

Over the years, EPIC has teamed up with APRODENI after 2 major earthquakes and several hurricanes that hit El Salvador. Because their work is in such disaster prone areas, the APRODENI staff has given priority

to training in disaster mitigation and response. They are ready when a disaster hits, and they are the most efficient organization in disaster relief that the McKays have seen in operation.



In June of 2017, APRODEHNI sent EPIC an urgent appeal for assistance as they responded to torrential rains. The principal need of families was for food and for hygiene kits in order to get by until the water subsided. EPIC provided assistance to 85 families in the communities of El Porfiado, Los Ranchos, and Divina Providencia.

## **Problem: Indigenous cultures are under threat worldwide. In Guatemala, Mayas face prejudice and their traditions are often belittled.**

The Maya Cultural Center's aim is to preserve, esteem, and promote Maya culture and to provide Mayas a place to engage in this process. This year saw the further development and active use of the exhibit room emphasizing sustainable agriculture

and environmental protection. This exhibit relates to the Maya's heritage of deep agricultural and environmental knowledge that is the basis of most of the agricultural work that EPIC promotes in its other programs.



Folk art exhibit showing how to best farm a hillside  
The exhibit relates to the Maya's heritage of deep agricultural and environmental knowledge that is the basis of most of the agricultural work that EPIC promotes in its other programs.



Maya Cultural Center:  
Events that include food are the most popular! Better yet if what is served are traditional Maya dishes made from local foods.



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