

Colby College: Sara LoTemplo, Catherine McClure, Hannah Twombly
"Project Cuidamos," Nicaragua, Summer 2014

Background:

Nicaragua is one of the most impoverished countries in the Western hemisphere with almost half its citizens below the poverty line (42%), and still more (79%) living on less than \$2 (USD) a day. This crushing poverty affects Nicaraguans daily in a variety of different planes of life- lack of adequate healthcare, illiteracy rates of roughly 1 in 5, and underemployment rates of 47% (statistics taken from CIA world fact book 2013).

Some of the most striking issues that are often overlooked are the environmental injustices that affect the lives of the Nicaraguan people. This manifests itself in variety of different ways. In one of the most visible, garbage is frequently strewn across the land and left there. Those that attempt to take care of their garbage do so in an unhealthy manner: an estimated 57% of Nicaraguans burn their trash in order to get rid of it. Recent studies have shown (according to the EPA) that trash burning significantly increases air toxic metals such as mercury and arsenic, and increases other noxious chemicals such as hydrogen chloride and carbon monoxide into the atmosphere. The most striking visible of this is La Chureca dump in Managua, where about 1,000 people live in the largest open-air landfill in Central America; and it almost constantly filled with burning trash.

Nicaraguans have also been exposed to dangerous pesticides when working on banana and cotton plantations for United States export companies. These pesticides, while illegal to use in the United States have still been shipped for Nicaragua laborers to use. These pesticides, particularly DBCP, have caused health problems for thousands of workers. Workers and families have reported testicular atrophy, skin and breast cancer, liver, pancreas and kidney problems, miscarriages and more, and an estimated 1,000 former banana workers have died from pesticide related diseases (according to the international foundation for sustainable development). There are a multitude of other examples of situations like these, with the main point being that Nicaraguans suffer from a wide variety of environmental injustices that hurt not only themselves, but the entire world, and not enough has been done to counteract them.

The Team

Sara LoTemplo is a sophomore majoring in environmental policy and psychology with a concentration in neuroscience. She is a trip leader for Colby's Alternative Spring Break program, which leads volunteer spring break trips all over the US and Latin America. She is leading a green energy and landscape conservation trip to Arizona. She is also co-chair of Colby's chapter of Amnesty International, which focuses on stopping violations of human rights worldwide, and founded a chapter of North Country Mission of Hope at Colby (NCMOH). She has traveled to Nicaragua 3 times to volunteer through North Country Mission of Hope. Catherine McClure is a sophomore environmental science and biology double major and is fairly fluent in Spanish. She has been to rural Mexico to do humanitarian work in high school. She is also an Alternative Spring Break trip leader, leading a trip in spring 2014 to New York City to work with the homeless. Catherine is a resident of Colby's green dormitory, which pledges to commit to living in a manner that is least detrimental to the planet. Hannah Twombly is a sophomore environmental policy major. She is an active member of Colby's environmental coalition (EnvironCo) and CARE (Colby Alliance for Renewable Energy.) Hannah spent her first semester abroad in Spain and is fluent in Spanish. Both Catherine and Hannah have been to Belize for a month long field study in environmental studies.

Objectives and Goals:

We believe the most effective way to counteract these injustices is to educate and involve the youth of Nicaragua and to provide them with a strong basis of knowledge and with the tools needed to become conscious global environmental stewards and to stand up for their rights to a clean and safe environment. I have personally witnessed that it is a subject of importance to several of the children in Nicaragua. While I was in Chiquilistagua this past summer of 2013, I led a creative prayer/reflection flag project with students at the local school. Several of them, without prompt, dedicated their flags to messages reading "cuidamos los arboles," "cuidamos la naturaleza," or

“cuidamos nuestra planeta”: – protect the trees, protect nature, or protect our planet. The desire and passion for the planet is present; and I believe it needs to be nourished so it can thrive. We believe that providing Nicaraguan youth with the tools they need to be well versed in environmental issues will allow them to achieve a more healthy and sustainable environment, further the overall well-being of the entire planet, and give the Nicaraguans the tools they need to combat future environmental injustices.

Therefore we propose to implement a program in the Chiquilistagua schools to educate Nicaraguan children in environmental sustainability. This program will last two weeks, plus or minus a few days. It will consist of two parts: classroom based education and hands on experience of the youth. Classroom based education will consist of lectures about environmental issues in Nicaragua, such as the trash-burning issue and environmental injustice issues, as well as information provided in the form of pamphlets. We will conduct these lessons in the local schools, Nino Jesus de Praga and Chiquilistagua Public School. Lectures will be given in Spanish with the help of local Nicaraguan translators. Our team will develop the lectures, with the valued input of our Nicaraguan partners, and deliver them through the translators. Of particular use will be Fabricio Martinez, a local Nicaraguan who is totally fluent in both Spanish and English and knowledgeable of the local area, and who has been used for all past NCMOH endeavors.

For hands on experience, we will take students with us on several ECO projects that will be based on community needs of local barrios. These projects will be teaching local barrios about water filters and distributing them, and construction of rocket stoves. Students will be selected by application process or through teacher recommendation. Students would be educated about these projects and briefed on safety procedures before participating. Students would get hands on experience helping their local communities solve problems in sustainable and impactful ways, which will hopefully empower them to continue this work, and further it in the Nicaraguan communities. In addition, the lives of those in the community who receive water filters and rocket stoves will also be improved. In the past, American volunteers have always done these projects, but this is an attempt to empower the young Nicaraguan students to improve their own communities.

We also believe in the power of education itself as a sustainable means of change and a basis off which the youth can build more and more knowledge. This will contribute to world peace as it will enable Nicaraguans to do their part in keeping our planet clean, promoting a global community, and as it will give them a strong basis of knowledge which will allow them to ensure equality in environmental conditions across all nations through mutual respect. Environmental sustainability can also act as a tool to stop current conflicts over natural resources or prevent more from happening in the future.

Partnership

We will partner with the non-profit North Country Mission of Hope (NCMOH), which is an organization based out of my hometown, Plattsburgh, NY, which has agreed to lend support and provide accommodations. NCMOH has worked in the village of Chiquilistagua, Nicaragua since February 1998 after Hurricane Mitch hit. Its mission is to “foster hope and empower relationships with the people of Nicaragua.” This manifests itself in a variety of different projects that fall under the categories of healthcare, education, community development, Orphan’s Hope, and eco projects, working with a local Nicaraguan junta. Sara has traveled to Nicaragua 3 times with this organization, interned with them, and served on the executive leadership board her senior year of high school. There are no paid US volunteers.

Conclusion

We are extremely excited about the project and hope and believe that we will be able to link the passions of the youth in Nicaragua with our own environmental passions, creating a common ground among students in the US and Nicaragua. We hope our project will give the Nicaraguans the resources and to make them comfortable enough to turn these passions into actions, and to work toward the shared goal of making Nicaragua, and the world, a better place. This shared goal, we believe, will unite more people to a more global community for world peace.