

## Completion and Implementation of a Library in Sutiava

Nicaragua

Sarah Lawrence College

Catherine Knoedler, USA, Sarah Lawrence College

### Section I

The goals of my project were to finish the construction of a library in an impoverished village in Nicaragua and to implement a sustainable library system in the community. I hoped to allow children and adults to gain reading and writing skills, further their education, and to increase their knowledge of the world through the use of educational materials and resources provided in the library.

I originally established this project in 2013 and I raised \$4,000 for the initial construction of creating the physical shell of the building. I used the \$10,000 grant from Davis to put a zinc roof on the building, hire a local craftsman to create four wooden windows and two wooden doors for the facility, as well as hire another local craftsman to create metal grates for the doors and windows and put a ceramic tile floor down. I was also able to furnish the building with plastic tables and chairs and wooden bookcases, as well as buy educational materials and resources.

When I arrived in Nicaragua at the end of May I was extremely excited to finish the construction of the library I had been working on for the past year. There was excitement among the members of the village as well. Right away I contacted a local craftsman to design and create the windows and doors for the library as it was a long process until the wood dried. In the meantime, a zinc roof was put on as well as the ceramic floor. After these two steps were completed, I contracted another local craftsman to create metal grates called *verjas* for the windows and doors, a decorative norm in Nicaragua. The wood drying process took longer than expected due to rain and as a result at the end of July, the windows and doors were installed, giving the building its first sense of a being a real functioning library! This delay, which is quite typical in Nicaraguan life, allowed me to become more patient in the process. The final step before the library was initiated was to paint the inside and outside of the building, a process in which many children and teenagers from the community participated in. Through this construction process I discovered that many prices of materials had increased, leaving my budget a bit constrained. However, in the end, there was still enough money to buy enough materials and supplies for the library.

Once ready, the library opened from 10 to 12 and 2 to 5 on a daily basis throughout the month of August. Although the library had a late start, I will be spending the fall 2014 semester in Nicaragua volunteering at the library through an independent study program. Members of the community visited on a daily basis to engage with the books, puzzles and games, and other materials the library offers. In addition, they had access to an iPad which had a variety of interactive learning applications in Spanish. Throughout the course of the week the library had a variety of programs such as daily story hours, homework tutoring sessions, and arts and crafts activities. One of the difficulties I came across during this time period was in lending books to children and adults. Unfortunately, many of the books were never returned to the library. As a result, we had to halt the lending of books outside of the library for a period of time to allow the library visitors to understand the importance of the concept of lending and that if books are not returned, other visitors will not be able to use these materials. This problem is not

surprising to me as I know a book is a rare item to the people of Sutiava and to be able to hold a book is like a treasure to many. As of now, the lending of books has not been resumed, but I have already noticed a change in the way library visitors use and handle the materials. I hope the library can begin lending books very soon. Both children and adults have benefitted from the implementation of the library and they will continue to do so in the future.

## Section II

Peace can mean different things in different situations. For example, peace can mean the cessation of war or violence and it can also mean tranquility, mental calmness, or serenity. When I think about what peace means to me personally, I cannot write about it in terms of the cessation of war as I have never directly experienced such things. For me peace has always been associated to emotions such as being mentally free from stress or fear. I have always loved reading and spending the day in the library with a book. Such an activity has put me in a tranquil state of mind and at peace mentally as well.

The people of Nicaragua have faced and lived through civil warfare and conflict. Although war is not present today, children in Sutiava live in extremely vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. Sutiava is one of the poorest communities in Nicaragua and children and women face violence in their homes and on the streets. In addition, many children here do not have the opportunity to attend school. Through the presence of the library, I hope children and adults can use its resources to reach their fullest potentials and to enrich their lives. An education is an effective way to break the cycle of poverty, while also empowering and enriching people. A book serves as a symbol of peace and as a new opportunity for Sutiava. In addition, I see this library as a peaceful community center in which meetings can be held and a variety of enrichment activities can be held in the future. I hope that the Sutiava library will be a tranquil space for children and adults. Books have the ability to take a reader to a different world.

My time spent in Nicaragua working on the library project has taught me not to take for granted books, games, and technology. The first time I visited the local preschool in Sutiava I was astounded that the school had one book. It is astounding to believe that a school could function without books. I will never forget the reactions of the children after opening their first book and seeing the beautiful pictures or when they played with the interactive applications on the iPad. Both the children and adults love the educational materials present in the library. I truly hope the library is a transformative experience for all who visit.

*A book can open a world of possibilities for a reader. I hope the Sutiava library inspires both children and adults to never stop learning and to reach their fullest potentials in life.*

