



Dining for Women

Program Fact Sheet: May 2007

Program: Center for Development in Central America (CDCA), Jubilee House Community (JHC)

Web Site: <http://www.jhc-cdca.org>

Mission: The Center for Development in Central America (CDCA) is a non-profit organization seeking to address human needs created by poverty in the Western Hemisphere's second poorest nation by helping communities become self-sufficient, sustainable, democratic entities; by working *with* Nicaraguan communities to help them realize their own goals, rather than bringing in *ready-made solutions*.

Who They Serve: The poor in Nicaragua, mainly in Ciudad Sandino.

History: The Center for Development in Central America began in 1993 as a project of the Jubilee House Community, Inc. (JHC), a non-profit organization established in 1979 to work with the poor. From 1979-1990 the JHC worked with the homeless and battered women in North Carolina, USA. In the 1990s, after deciding they wanted to help desperately poor people, the focus of JHC's volunteers shifted to Central America. The volunteers visited a few Central American countries and determined that they wanted to help improve lives in Nicaragua. The shelter and related North Carolina service work were transferred to another nonprofit to be continued, and in 1993 the JHC founded the CDCA to address the immense poverty that is choking much of Central America. In 1994, the Jubilee House Community's five adults and three children settled in Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua, after being invited to assist by a Nicaraguan developmental organization.

After Hurricane Mitch struck, CDCA's volunteers began helping the people living in a post hurricane resettlement camp called *Nueva Vida* or "new life." Following the hurricane, the mayor of Managua moved more than 12,000 flood victims from Ciudad Sandino (a city built to accommodate 30,000 to 40,000 residents yet approximately 100,000 lived there even before the hurricane hit in 1998) onto two fields, and gave each family a plot of land measuring 10 yards x 15 yards with a big piece of black plastic for a new home. Many hard feelings were created when so much international aid came to those being moved into Nueva Vida and nothing to the poor already living in Ciudad Sandino. Hearing these complaints, the CDCA opened their clinic and expanded program efforts to include the people of Ciudad Sandino.

CDCA began by listening to the leaders in the community. They then hired four community promoters for two years, and helped organize the community for building temporary shelters, latrines, and for holding medical clinics. Their work expanded to establish a permanent clinic. Other development projects have included bringing potable water to the communities and building feeding centers and schools.

CDCA continues listening to Nueva Vida, but have expanded its focus to the whole of Ciudad Sandino. Now most of their efforts go to helping families provide for themselves through sustainable economic development.

Nicaragua



Brief History: Nicaragua began as an early 16th century Spanish colony. In 1821, independence was declared from Spain, and Nicaragua became its own country.

In the 1900s Nicaragua was controlled by dictators from the Somoza family. That ended in 1979, when the Sandinista guerillas won the revolutionary war and took power. In 1984 the Sandinista party was elected to govern following Nicaragua's first free elections. In 1990, a newly created party, UNO, was created by joining opposition parties and

after winning the election, the war ended. Meanwhile, the U.S. government continues to be in and out of Nicaragua: militarily, economically and politically.

Since 1990 the country has slowly become privately owned, resulting in fewer public schools, less health care and less social security. Corruption and natural disasters have further weakened the already weak economy. In 1998 when Hurricane Mitch hit Nicaragua it was indeed the final blow.

In 2006 Daniel Ortega was elected President of Nicaragua, with many promises to reverse the privatization process and to reverse the exploitation of the poor. In January 2007, he was inaugurated and began to fulfill some of those promises within his first 100 days in office. According to the CDCA, at this time he has made public education free again; made public health care free (as the government is able to redirect funding); and lowered the Presidential, Vice Presidential, and cabinet level salaries tremendously.

Country Facts:

- Nicaragua is the largest Central American country and shares borders with Costa Rica and Honduras.
- Nicaragua has rainforests to the east, mountains with tropical dry forests in the north, and deforested, populated areas in the west.
- It is smaller in land mass than New York state with a population of 5,570,129 (World Factbook).
- A little less than a third of the population lives within the capital city of Managua.
- 75% of its citizens live below the poverty line (United Nations Human Development Report 2002).
- 45.15% live in extreme poverty (Care International UK).
- One in every three children in Nicaragua is malnourished while 9% are chronically malnourished (Pan-American Health Organization).
- The national unemployment rate is around 54%, in addition to considerable underemployment.

Note: More detailed history and country facts can be found on the CDCA web site.

How They Work: The **CDCA's** philosophy involves *community organization*, a flexible approach to needs and priorities as they shift over time, identifying areas where the **CDCA** can be of service, and following through in those areas, while empowering Nicaraguans and gradually phasing out the need for the **CDCA's** assistance.

The focus of the **CDCA** is in community development, sustainable agriculture, health, cooperative development, appropriate technology, micro enterprise endeavors, and education. The **CDCA** only serves in response to local needs and priorities, working in partnership with representative Nicaraguan leadership, connecting these needs with resources of time, expertise, funding, and supplies found primarily in the U.S.

What this means for the **CDCA**:

- they work with poor people, focusing in the municipality of Ciudad Sandino; the poorest urban area in Nicaragua with 80% lacking formal employment and many living on less than \$1 U.S. per day.
- they help communities and do not choose individuals in which to help. The **CDCA** helps communities organize into democratically elected entities and then help the leaders identify needs and set priorities.
- they want the communities to become self-sufficient and sustainable and do not want people to become completely dependent on aid.

In order to accomplish the above, the **CDCA** works in the following areas:

- Sustainable economic development (developing long-term jobs)
 1. **Women's Sewing Cooperative* is where DFW donations will be directed.**
 2. Organic Agricultural Cooperative
 3. Security Cooperative
 4. Spinning Plant
- Sustainable agriculture (so poor farmers don't lose their land)
- Primary health care
- Education
- Appropriate technology

*The **Women's Sewing Cooperative**, the Fair Trade Zone in Ciudad Sandino, is now seven years old and is the first worker-owned free trade zone in the world. The cooperative sews organic and fair trade cotton clothing for export to the U.S. and Europe.

Organic clothing is made from cloth using organically certified cotton, important for the environment since cotton is the second most pesticide-laden crop in the world. The Fair Trade Zone has been made in a factory where workers receive fair wages, benefits, good working conditions and where they are not exploited.

The cooperative started out with twelve workers and have grown to around sixty-five women. The workers are the owners, and they alone decide how they themselves are treated. With the **CDCA** providing capital for building and machinery, the women worked for two years with no pay to construct their future work site, but that was *their* choice. Their sacrifice continues to pay off.

- The co-op now employs 65 heads of household from Ciudad Sandino.
- The minimum wage is now 133% of the minimum wage in Nicaraguan sweat shops.
- More than two-thirds of the Fair Trade Zone's workers now earn more than the co-op's own minimum wage.
- Sales for the 2005/2006 fiscal year were up by 40% over the previous year.

The women struggle day to day with little capital for an inventory. Their permanent work is not yet secure and they are still learning. Many of these women come from no formalized education and they have had to scrape and scratch to survive. Now they are struggling to learn cooperativism, management, accountability, administration, quality, marketing and import/export laws.

The women started off selling t-shirts and those are still their bread and butter. Some of their customers include the Presbyterian Church USA, Maggie's Organics and clothing designers seeking custom orders.

Financial Profile: Of \$922,137 total expenses in 2005; 82% was spend on programs while 18% was directed to administrative and fund raising costs.

DFW Giving History with Program:

2006 \$ 4,600

*Resources: The **CDCA** web site, World Factbook, United Nations, CARE International, Pan-American Health Organization*