

Wisconsin/Nicaragua
Partners of the Americas
Farmer-to-Farmer Program

Las Lagunas, Nicaragua
A Case Study

Investigators:

Yvonne Roul hac Horton, Northeast District Director
University of Wisconsin – Extension
Yvonne.Horton@ces.uwex.edu

John Preissing, Northern District Director
University of Wisconsin-Extension
John.preissing@ces.uwex.edu

Edith Méndez Vil l anueva
Ing. Agrónomo
Edith190473@hotmail.com

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Introduction

As part of their Farmer-to-Farmer sponsored volunteer work in Nicaragua, Yvonne Horton and John Preissing were asked to conduct a brief case study on the impact of the Farmer-to-Farmer programs on Las Lagunas, a rural community in Nicaragua. Edith Mendez Villanueva, a Nicaraguan national and recent graduate from CATIE, joined them. To complete this case study the team opted to utilize the logic framework.

The University of Wisconsin Extension uses the logic model in program planning, implementation, evaluation and communications. A logic model describes what the program is and will do - the sequence of events that links program investments to results. The UW-Extension logic model contains six components: the situation; inputs; outputs; outcomes; assumptions; and external factors. These components are analyzed in light of the initiatives in Las Lagunas. For more detailed analysis of the logic model for program development or evaluation please see the University of Wisconsin Extension's Program Development and Evaluation web pages at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation>

In July 2003 this small team of volunteers visited Las Lagunas. The investigators spoke with one family in their home and with a group of children, women, and men in the school about their experiences with Farmer-to-Farmer. This is a report of the impact of that relationship.

Situation

Las Lagunas, Nicaragua is situated 600 meters above sea level about 12 kilometers from Boaco. The last census reports 405 residents residing in 69 homes. Within the community are three churches and a recently built school. The school reaches multi-grades of youth in grades one to four.

The principal crops of this farming community are red beans, corn, coffee, yucca, and a variety of citrus fruits grown predominately for personal consumption. Some small animal livestock of chickens and pigs are apparent. Horses are used in the area for transportation. There is no electricity in the community and batteries are used to power the few televisions.

Some environmental factors that influenced the program efforts include the weather, educational level of the residents, and transportation. In the dry season water is scarce. Family members must leave the community to find work and the availability of health care is sporadic. The village is accessible via relatively rough roads, paved and unpaved.

Wisconsin/Nicaragua, Partners of the Americas, Farmer-to-Farmer Program was the first organization to extend its outreach to this community in 2001. This effort was

initiated under the assumption that volunteers can make a difference and that the community of Las Lagunas was receptive and welcomed assistance.

Inputs

The U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID, sponsors the Wisconsin/Nicaragua, Partners of the Americas, Farmer-to-Farmer Program. Over the past few years, Ronald Blandon, the Farmer-to-Farmer Coordinator in Nicaragua, brought nine volunteers in eleven visits. The time volunteers spent in the community ranged from one day to two weeks.

Since 2001 the following equipment and supplies have been provided to the community: sewing machines, sewing supplies, bicycles, school supplies, sports equipment, yarn, fabric, chicken wire, vegetable seeds, and clothing.

Outputs

In the two-year period of 2001 - 2003, volunteers conducted numerous activities where children, women, and men were the participants. The elementary school teacher participated in a number of the activities as well as the 60 youth attending the local school.

Volunteers facilitated sessions in asset mapping and conflict resolution. Residents attended workshops in clothing construction, vegetable gardening, seed storage, pest management, and organic fertilizing. The benefits of an improved stove and ventilation system were the topic of numerous training sessions. Families also learned how to use sports and recreational equipment.

The elementary school teacher received mentoring and training on reaching special needs youth in the community.

Outcomes

The immediate and short-term results of the collaboration between Las Lagunas residents and Farmer-to-Farmer Volunteers were the exchange of learning that occurred. Residents were motivated to try new things and to embrace the outreach from volunteers.

The medium term results demonstrate social action on the part of the residents. Community residents are organizing and working together to achieve more. More children are able to attend school longer because of the availability of uniforms and school supplies. Parents want their children to have additional schooling beyond the primary grades and they are exploring how to accomplish this. Women have formed sewing circles and are constructing clothing for their families. During a conversation

with one of the women she commented: *“Sewing materials will run out, but the training will last.”*

The long-term impact of the work of Farmer-to-Farmer volunteers in Las Lagunas is still being felt. One of the first social impacts is the increased skill level of the schoolteacher. She has been motivated to reach out into the community to make contact with special needs youth that are unable to attend the school because they have no shoes or uniforms. Women and their families have improved their health conditions as a result of installing stoves that have chimneys that change the directions of the smoke flow. Learning how to use chicken wire to protect gardens has enabled residents to have fresh vegetables for improved health and nutrition.

The introduction of the vegetable garden also had an impact on the economics of some households. Youth taught their parents how to garden at home. Prehistoric carvings are visible in this community. Residents are exploring how to market this for tourism and to share their art. Women have explored ways to market their sewing efforts.

During the investigators' visit, they had an opportunity to observe firsthand the civic impact of the Farmer-to-Farmer program. A community leader and other residents shared the maps that they developed as a result of learning how to asset map. The residents have the ability to verbalize their goals and to share the asset maps that describe their community. There appears to be a clear vision and community involvement is evident.

Additional Observations

This case study was prepared as a result of interviews with nine residents over a three-hour period. The investigative team found the residents to be positive and pleased about the assistance that they have received and extremely grateful for Ronald Blandon's presence and involvement.

During the group meeting with the residents two volunteers were present in addition to the investigators. Farmer-to-Farmer volunteers are passionate about their work and the people of Nicaragua. This brings the volunteers back to the community of Las Lagunas.

Residents expressed an interest and need for training and information in the area of Agribusiness. Specific requests were made for assistance in marketing organic coffee, raising small animals for resale and the production and marketing of crafts items.

While this visit was brief it was clear that the Farmer-to-Farmer program had positively impacted the community. A longer visit and analysis of prior field assignment requests and trip reports from the Las Lagunas area would provide insights for a more in depth analysis.