PHP – Working in Partnership in Nicaragua

The Presbyterian Hunger Program partners with organizations in the United States and around the world who are working to help alleviate hunger and eliminate the underlying causes.

Asociación Fénix (Asofenix) has partnered with PHP for more than five years. The small community development organization in Nicaragua seeks to assist rural communities with improving living conditions and advancing food security. The organization has supported communities in a variety of ways in the municipality of Teustepe.

In El Bálsamo, a water well system now provides a sustained supply of water for all the families in the community. Families assisted with installation of the pipes, workshops provided training on water management, and a Drinking Water Committee was formed to administer and manage the system. Families in the highlands previously had access to water only for 20 minutes every other day; now they have daily access in their homes. At school, the children now have enough to drink, the orchards and planted trees can be irrigated, and classrooms can be kept clean.

Increasing the well-being of communities not only affects their daily lives; it can also help to mitigate future events. Jaime Muñoz, the director of Asofenix, reflected on the impact of the water system in light of the recent pandemic:

Installing the water system.

"… this project has made it possible to improve the conditions in the schools so that children, teachers, and parents apply the appropriate sanitary measures to prevent the spread of COVID 19."

In El Bálsamo and El Jazmín, Asociación Fénix provided training in beekeeping. During the first year, the beehives produced, but high levels of deforestation in the area created a lack of systemic flowering, resulting in low yields of honey. So along with further training on hive management, participants attended workshops on reforestation and managing plantations. Working with a project technician, the beekeeping families determined which areas were the most suitable to reforest. 700 fruit trees were planted in their yards to best allow for irrigation. When they reach the productive stage, these trees will provide a source of nutritious food—like mangoes, avocadoes, and citrus fruits—*and* generate income.

The 1,000 trees of timber and honey species that were also planted will help protect water sources, improve environmental conditions, and ensure the flowering required by bees.

The beekeepers were also supported in their development of a business plan, including marketing strategies. They now have a label that provides key information about their product and facilitates sales. With the honey harvests, families' incomes have improved.

Tagging the honey.

Most recently in the El Espino community, and previously in other areas, Asofenix provided training in the construction of improved stoves. Traditional indoor stoves emitted smoke, causing headaches, burning eyes, and damaging utensils, clothes and roofs. Now in addition to the health benefits of the smoke-free environments, firewood consumption is reduced, which helps preserve the forest and protect water sources.

Mrs. Angela Castillo, 57 years old, had cooked all her life on a traditional stove, but the problem of smoke saddened her. There was always smoke in the kitchen, and it reached the living room and the bedrooms.

> "I had to cook, so I could only cook by crying. Because when there is a lot of smoke one cries with pain, the eyes burn and they are tearful. I saw the improved stoves when I went to Jocote to visit my friend Corina Rivas and she loved it. There was no smoke in that house . . . Since then I dreamed of having a stove in my house. We waited three years, but it was worth the wait."

Family gardens are also benefitting people in participating communities. Muñoz shared, "Women grow vegetables on a small scale in the backyards of their homes, which improve food security conditions, and the health of families. Now they have access to a diversity of foods that are more nutritious.

In four rural communities, teachers, parents and students received training on establishing and managing agroecological school gardens. Tools, seedlings and other supplies were provided. The school gardens were created, and parents helped to install drip irrigation systems. A kitchen *(third photo above)* was also built for each of the schools, where food can be cooked and served. Teachers facilitate the work of school gardens, and students and parents work together with them to produce vegetables, including corn, tomatoes, cilantro, onion, lettuce, celery, beans, papayas, spinach, and cabbage. Parents use some of the produce to prepare snacks, such as salads and drinks, during the school days.

Among the students, ages 4 – 15, and their communities in the dry zone of Nicaragua, there is now greater respect for the environment, sustainable agricultural practices, and healthier eating habits. Students are not only learning in the classroom – the young community members have helped with the school gardens as well as reforestation activities.

In 2021, AsoFenix is working with five rural schools to improve health conditions. Plans include installation of water filters; laundries for cleaning; sinks; construction or rehabilitation of two latrines per school; hygiene education; and the cultivation of natural medicinal plants in the school gardens. Improved sanitary conditions will contribute to better health conditions for children, teachers and parents and will allow the schools—a space for training and learning—to be better able to fulfill their purpose.

The Presbyterian Hunger Program is glad to partner with organizations like Asociación Fénix. Around the world in places where poverty, greed, and injustice have impacted communities, we can continue to lift our voices and work together to make a difference. *www.pcusa.org / hunger*

All photos courtesy of AsoFenix