

Support Safe, Sustainable Water Systems for Rural Communities in Northern Nicaragua

Anywhere you travel in northern Nicaragua you will find communities with limited or no access to safe drinking water. In this drought stricken area of cash-crop agricultural production, people rely on rivers - that frequently slow to a trickle or dry out entirely - or on old and contaminated wells that are regularly dry. Lack of access to potable water is not only extremely detrimental to health - especially that of children - it also impedes economic and social development. Women and children in communities without consistent access to potable water spend a considerable portion of each day seeking water. This takes time away from other important activities such as school, work and time with family.

Since 2004, working with Centro Humboldt in Nicaragua, and with the support of CIDA and our generous donors, Change for Children has provided potable water systems for 73 communities in northern Nicaragua. This project has accomplished far more than the awesome task of providing clean water to 25,000 people, it is a project with a holistic vision of environmental protection and preservation as well as a project that promotes access to water as a human right. This project provided the resources for Centro Humboldt to participate in the drafting and consultation process for Nicaragua's new water law, which leaves control of the precious resource in the hands of local people. Furthermore, the project also involves measures to maintain rights and access to water under local control through a training process for municipalities without sufficient capacity to manage water resources.

Centro Humboldt (www.humboldt.org.ni) has been a leading organization in Nicaraguan civil society since 1990. Their award winning work is based on the belief that community development revolves around sustainability. Since Humboldt's beneficiary communities have been victim to extreme environmental disasters such as flooding, hurricanes and drought, this approach resonates and creates positive change.



Today, Change for Children and Centro Humboldt are working together to introduce sustainable potable water systems into 120 communities in rural North-western Nicaragua. Through a needs assessment process, Centro Humboldt prioritized communities for water access and engaged community members in choosing the water system most appropriate for their communities. Depending on population, available water table, average rainfall etc., communities decided among a variety of water systems including drilled wells, water catchment systems or gravity fed systems from underground streams.

As construction begins in each community, residents come together to participate in digging, drilling and building water systems. Centro Humboldt engineers and social workers facilitate the process, which concludes in the formation of Community Water Management Committees. These Committees, made up of the women and men who will provide for the sustainable management of the water systems, and ensure that they are well maintained.

As the 25 communities that benefited from an earlier CFCA-Centro Humboldt project can testify, the project methodology has already proven successful. Three years since the installation of water systems, Community Water Management Committees continue to ensure the sustainable use of this precious resource. The space opened by the Committees for community health education continues as Centro Humboldt supports campaigns for waste reduction, hygiene and safe and healthy cooking.

Safe drinking water, taken for granted by so many, can truly transform the reality of an entire community. Especially when that community is involved in its provision and its management - in other words, when it becomes a resource that is truly theirs and theirs for the long run.

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Human Dignity, Healthy Communities, Global Justice

Change for Children is an Edmonton-based charitable organization with a 32 year history of supporting sustainable grassroots community development in Latin America and Africa. In Canada, CFCA provides an award-winning Global Education program that engages the public in a process of awareness raising, analysis and action on issues of global justice.