

Highlights of Fact-Finding Trips early 2020

Three **SHEAF** board members and one associate of **SHEAF** spent 2 weeks in Nicaragua communicating, encouraging and listening to those who execute their programs in Nicaragua. Here is what they found.

A board member and two associates of **SHEAF** spent a few days in the village of Siksayari on the Rio Coco, accessible only by boat. It is a day's journey including navigation several sets of rapids. Both trips are summarized briefly.

Situation in Nicaragua.

The effects of the spring crisis in 2018 were still very visible.

- Government stability is tenuous. In spite of Ortega's, the current president, heavy hand, protests could erupt any time
- More political prisoners were released from jail. .
- Tourism is up a little but volunteers still have not been encouraged to come. Unemployment is still high and programs which have counted on volunteers have been jeopardized. Language schools still have an 80% reduction in students. Nevertheless, we found our partners ever hopeful and even though some projects were delayed during the crisis they have since continued and are progressing.
- It is suggested that the crisis has been politicized. The opposition and outside influences may have overblown the severity of the crisis making the situation more unstable. Ultimately, their goal is to seize power. Unfortunately, it is the poor that suffer, not those with financial largess or political power.

Our partners

- **SHEAF** relies on its partners to oversee the day-to-day management of the projects. They ensure the funds are spent where they are intended.

Casa de Niño (a day refuge for children and teenagers who have experienced traumatic events at home or elsewhere)



- Hope for the **Casa de Niño** came in the form of a donation from the Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church. The donation's purpose was to provide aid with the purchase and production of knitted comfort dolls. These dolls were knitted by women and girls in Masaya, a city overwhelmed by protests during the crisis. These women previously knitted hammocks to sell at the tourist market but currently there are no tourists. Moreover, the large tourist market was burned and

destroyed. The idea is that knitting of dolls will be therapeutic since participants knit in groups making the knitting time a social time for sharing as well as a productive time. The dolls will be used by teenagers or children who come for treatment at Casa de Niño to encourage them to talk about their feelings. They will also be used by patients at a psychiatric hospital. The surplus can be sold at local markets once they reopen.

Batahola Centre (A cultural and arts centre in Managua)

- Was a refuge during the crisis.
- SHEAF was able to fund their arts programmes, music, dance and fine art for poor children in their neighbourhood.
- They had restarted all their programmes but still felt they were being watched.



Scholarship students in Chaguitillo



- Students were back in school, after the crisis, full time.
- We met new students.
- We met students whom we have supported for 2 to 4 years.
- Some of them are graduating and were beginning to look for employment.
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Medical clinics

Managua

- The staff said the clinic was going well, seeing as many patients as ever.
- **SHEAF** helps with day-to-day operations and medicines with generous help from a private donor.



Siksayari



- A board member and 2 associates of SHEAF took the perilous journey up the Rio Cocoa to visit the village of Siksayari, including the clinic.
- **SHEAF** supports the clinic with medicines
- A nurse and a doctor are at the clinic full time.
- Doctors go to Siksayari on a rotation basis.

Agricultural Projects

Siksayari

- SHEAF discussed funding a cocoa project with the Siksayari community.
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San Ramon: Union de Cooperativas Agropecuarias UCA)

- **SHEAF** supports Macadamia and Cocoa Production
- Guatemalans have indicated an interest in growing macadamia in Nicaragua which provided an impetus for the current growers to realize the potential of their crop and wishing to begin growing Macadamia trees for themselves.
- The farmer pictured bought some nuts from a current grower and started these seedling



Cocoa Projects coordinated by the Asociación de Cristianos Jóvenes (ACJ-YMCA)

- In 2019 twenty four farmers received enough cocoa seedlings from the ACJ-YMCA to plant on 1 acre of their land. These plants will bear fruit in about 1-2 years. The hope is that the sale of cocoa will lift these farmers from abject poverty.
- Last year we saw these plants in a nursery but this year we were privileged to see them in the fields growing in the shade of banana trees.



Impressions by SHEAF Board

- Hope abounds in Nicaragua, people spoke of hard times but vowed to continue improve their lives.
- The crisis of 2018 certainly affected the lives of Nicaraguans more so in the cities than in the rural area. But we sensed a real sense of normalcy. The people just wanted to return to their normal lives in the cities and the countryside. They also want the tourists to come back.
- **SHEAF** is very thankful to their donors who have given generously and faithfully making it possible for SHEAF to fund those projects.

Aftermath

The covid crisis hit Nicaragua in April. All the gains that had been made after the crisis were annihilated. Please see read: 'Breaking News' on the web site.