



**FIESTA!**  
Shop for A Cause  
Saturday, December 3rd

# New Haven / León

Sister City Project

Fall E-newsletter 2011

## Environmental Youth Brigade: A View from Goyena, Nicaragua.

*By members of the Environmental Youth Brigade.*

In October 1998 Nicaragua faced a natural disaster - Hurricane Mitch - that like earthquake in Managua in 1972 - marked a milestone in our history. Hurricane Mitch was a natural phenomenon that displaced and buried rural communities, killing entire families and causing millions in infrastructure losses. Goyena's indigenous elders even commented on the hurricane, "We've never seen this before." "This never happened in my memory." "It is true what the radio also said that there had been hurricanes before but they were not as strong." Speaking of changes people are now seeing in the weather, "Today we can not fully predict the weather, we are concerned all the time if we will have a good rainy season, if we can harvest and if we will have enough grain to eat." "Today we know from you (the Brigade) about climate change, that we have done wrong, and how they could reverse this. We're glad you have started such a beautiful project here in the community."

Donaire Lysanias, 20 years old and a member of Goyena Environmental Youth Brigade, writes, "The Ecological Brigade Goyena is comprised of nine teenagers and young people in communities of Nueva Vida, Cooperativa, and Aristides Sanchez. We have the task of informing and raising awareness about environmental issues and climate change with children attending the after school program, and with other residents of these communities through lectures and workshops."

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*Students in the Afterschool Program in Goyena where 1st to 4th graders receive homework help and participate in other interactive learning activities.*

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*NH/LSCP supports education and sustainable development in Nicaragua and Connecticut.*

## Brigade *continued from p 1*

"We were able to reproduce this knowledge in our communities," says Raquel Delgado, 17, also a member of the Brigade, "to raise awareness among children and adults about the care of the environment." Yaranesi Agueda Perez and Agueda Matute, 20 and 19 years respectively, write, "We have had workshops and lectures where we have learned scientifically the reasons for climate change and the consequences not only in Nicaragua but also in the world. We believe we can reduce these effects in our community and we as teenagers and young people need to drive that change. All activities have been focused on children because they are the future of our community and we believe we can change the many years of poor environmental practices."

Said Norlan Osejo and Gleydis Osejo, "The Brigade has sown plants in the preschool. This was done with the desire to share with children and motivate them to learn to care for our environment, and also benefiting the children of preschool. We also developed a plastics cleanup day throughout the community of Nueva Vida, so villagers can become aware of the amount of waste being generated and how we can reduce it, recycle it, or reuse these materials in our community. We also do crafts with children of the after school project with the materials collected on this day."

"Another activity we do," says Hayde Alonso, 17 years old, "is the tour offered to delegates and volunteers

from the U.S. The tour uses bikes to take visitors to nearby communities where we explain the realities of other nearby communities, the history of our school and preschool, and some data about each. We also make stops at the river and explain how important it is for us and the different species of animals living nearby. We then offer various sweets typical of our country, but not before we show the vast fields of sugar cane crops. Men and women work there for themselves and their families but are also affected by poor hygiene and safety of this multibillion-dollar company. "

concluded Maribel Hernandez and Donaïre Lideta 16 and 22, "We also received a workshop in theater. This was given by members of a U.S. delegation who showed us ways to do theater in an easy yet comprehensive way... where we talk about our life



Members of the Daniel Hand High School delegation, local youth and artists in front of mural they completed in June on the side of the new computer lab in Goyena.

experiences, sharing with the group, and interacting through the theater with the audience. This helps us to better express our ideas and apply these techniques in our discussions of the environment. We will also use the forum theater as a tool for disseminating and reporting on environmental issues and food security next year." •

*Funding for the Brigade comes from a grant from the New England Biolabs Foundation*



Volunteer Shelly Altman helps a teacher in León prepare a bike as part of the Bicicletas Para Maestras (Bikes for Teachers) program in 1996. Over 1000 bikes were sent to León.

## Make the World Go Round!

Get Involved... a little... or a lot.

**Volunteer in New Haven...** helping with outreach...in the office...craft sales...

Organize/Join a **Family delegation...** parents, grandparents, kids welcome!

**Intern in sunny Nicaragua...** Learn.. Teach...Build...Create ...Explore!

**Intern in New Haven** - work on food security, rural education, climate change, theater.

# Forum Theater Comes to Goyena

By Bethany DeGant and Liz McLean

On August 13th, 2011, members of a theater delegation traveled to Nicaragua. The delegates came from varying backgrounds, including teachers, college students, political activists and writers. This delegation was particularly fascinating because it explored both the local labor and political climate, and ways to motivate change within the community through a theater workshop. Both the participants of the workshop and the audience they presented to in rural Goyena were given the opportunity to explore ways to transform issues seen within the community.

## Labor Realities

To gain a better sense for the realities of working in Nicaragua, the delegation started by meeting with a variety of labor groups, a labor union representative, and an agricultural cooperative. The agricultural cooperative we visited was comprised of ten women and sixteen men. These farmers banded together to form the cooperative to maintain a living without selling their land to the sugar cane plantation. Two members, Pedro and Santiago, told us that they are humble yet proud of the work they have accomplished through the cooperative.

We also met with Maria Jose Herbina, the secretary of women for the Association of Rural Workers.



Learning through theater games in Goyena.

Maria works with four private sector unions, two of which have negotiated collective bargaining agreements with their employers. Under these agreements, worker bonuses are dependent on the profitability of the company. The unions also negotiated for a higher food allowance, protection from chemicals, and health insurance for workers and their families (which is very rare in León). If worker rights are violated, the union can submit a complaint to the Nicaraguan Minister of Labor.

## Theater of the Oppressed

The delegation also brought Augusto Boal's "Forum Theater" to rural Goyena. To begin the process of Forum Theater, trainer Katy Rubin led thirty delegation and community participants in "de-mechanizing" games which aim to break participants free from habitual limiting behaviors. They also helped participants relax and feel more comfortable around each other. For example, we played a game in which participants had to walk when Katy said, "Stop!" and stop when Katy said, "Walk!" Within minutes, I was hysterically laughing with community members that I had just met.

After the games, the workshop proceeded with a story-telling process in which participants shared instances in their lives in which they felt oppression. The group chose the three stories that resonated with the most people. We then developed three different plays/skits based on these stories trying to clearly depict the instances of oppression, including presentations of the oppressor and the victim. When the play is performed, actors invite audience members to take the place of the victim in the play and try to change the situation.

One of the plays developed told the story of the contamination of the river in the community.



Delegate Bethany DeGant getting warmed up with Nubia Quiroz Osejo, a member of the community board in Goyena.

Chemicals from the waste of agricultural companies, such as Nicaragua Sugar Estates, Ltd (NSEL), have made the water unusable and people of the community developed skin rashes and chronic stomach illnesses. The play also looked at the lack of available health care in the community. In the final scene of the play, the effected community angrily riots at the door of Carlos Pellas, the owner of NSEL, and he ignores the pleas of the community. However when Doña Eugenia, a community leader, volunteered to enter the play in the role of the protagonist, she suggested that the community approach Carlos Pellas in a more diplomatic manner. The community members staged a sit-in and Carlos Pellas eventually yielded to their demands. Although idealistic, the second portrayal of the scene empowered the community and inspired them to take action on issues.

Another play depicted a situation that occurred several years ago in Goyena. There used to be a high school for students in which the teachers commuted from the city of León. Each day the teachers would make derogatory comments toward the students and eventually decided that the students were not worth the

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# NAFTA Is Starving Mexico

by Laura Carlsen

(Reprinted: Published on Thursday, October 20, 2011 by Foreign Policy in Focus)

Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) became the law of the land, millions of Mexicans have joined the ranks of the hungry. Malnutrition is highest among the country's farm families, who used to produce enough food to feed the nation. The latest reports show that the number of people living in "food poverty" (the inability to purchase the basic food basket) rose from 18 million in 2008 to 20 million by late 2010.



About one-fifth of Mexican children currently suffer from malnutrition and government statistics report that 25 percent of the population does not have access to basic food. The number of children with malnutrition is 400,000 kids above the goal for this year. Newborns show the highest indices of malnutrition, indicating that the tragedy begins with maternal health.

The dramatic change in Mexican eating habits since NAFTA is not only reflected in the millions who go to bed hungry. On the other side of the scale, Mexico has in just a decade and a half become second only to the United States worldwide in morbid obesity. Child obesity and diabetes now constitute major health

problems, alongside the more traditional problem of hunger.

It's not that the rich are getting too fat and the poor too thin, although inequality plays a role in the erosion of healthy diets for all. Fatness no longer represents abundance. It is the poor who drink cheap Coca Cola when they do not have access to potable water or who give their kids a bag of potato chips when local fresh food is no longer available. The International Journal of Obesity finds that worldwide the spread of what they call "the Western diet" ("high in saturated fats, sugar, and refined foods but low in fiber) has meant that "the burden of obesity is shifting towards the poor." The NAFTA

generation reflects the paradigm so eloquently described by food researcher and activist Raj Patel of "stuffed and starved".

## NAFTA's Food (In)security Model

Something has gone terribly wrong. Mexican malnutrition has its roots in NAFTA and other neoliberal programs. The

idea of food security based on market access comes directly from the main argument behind NAFTA of "comparative advantage." Simply stated, economic efficiency dictates that each country should devote its productive capacity to what it does best and trade liberalization will guarantee access across borders.

Under the theory of comparative advantage, most of Mexico was deemed unfit to produce its staple food crop, corn, since its yields were way below the average for its northern neighbor and trade partner. Therefore, Mexico should turn to corn imports and devote its land to crops where it supposedly had a comparative

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# 2011 Holiday Fiesta & Gift Bazaar

*Shop for a cause!*

*Fair-trade overseas crafts*



Batiked scarves from **India**;

Hand made goat milk soaps

from Connecticut farms;

Embroidered purses from

**Thailand**; Colorful woven products, organic coffee and

chocolate from **Nicaragua**

And...Eco Teas: Yerba Mate,

**South African** Rooibos & Tulsi

from India, Calendars & date

books designed and printed in

the U.S., **Haitian** star

ornaments & hand-painted metal

art, and more!!!

**Saturday,**

**December 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**10am – 3pm**

**608 Whitney Avenue**

**New Haven**

## NAFTA *continued from p 4*

advantage, such as counter-seasonal and tropical fruits and vegetables.

Sounds simple. Just pick up three million inefficient corn producers (and their families) and move them into manufacturing or assembly where their cheap labor constitutes a comparative advantage. The cultural and human consequences of declaring entire peasant and indigenous communities obsolete were not a concern in this equation.

Seventeen years after NAFTA, some two million farmers have been forced off their land by low prices and the dismantling of government supports. They did not find jobs in industry but became part of a mass exodus as the number of Mexican migrants to the United States rose to half a million a year. In the first few years of NAFTA, corn imports tripled and the producer price fell by half.

Conversion to other crops turned out to take years in most cases. Prices were volatile and harvests unreliable. It was not feasible on many small, often rocky plots where corn guarantees a subsistence diet for farm families. For the hungry, this means that prices set on the international market determine who eats and who starves. Mexican consumers now pay more for tortillas and food in general.

### Food Dependency

Before NAFTA, the country spent \$1.8 billion dollars on food imports. It now spends a whopping \$24 billion. In an interview, rural researcher Ernesto Ladrón de Guevara noted that in some basic foods, the dependency on imports is dramatic: 80 percent in rice, 95 percent in soybeans, 33 percent in beans, and 56 percent in wheat. The

country is the world's number-one importer in the world of powdered milk. NAFTA decimated Mexico's once-thriving dairy sector, and the market takeover by transnational powdered milk is linked to the crisis in infant malnutrition.

The U.S. department of agriculture estimates that if current trends continue Mexico will acquire 80 percent of its food from other countries (mostly the United States).



Farmers in Nicaragua give tour to delegates.

Transnational food corporations not only import freely into Mexican food markets, they are now the producers, exporters, and importers all in one, operating inside the country. Since NAFTA, corporations have gobbled up human and natural resources on an almost unbelievable scale.

### Feed the Hungry, Fix the System

Mexican organizations recently succeeded in reforming the Mexican constitution to include the right to food. Now the battle is on to make that right a reality. Small farmer organizations have joined with family farm organizations in the United States and Canada to call for the renegotiation of NAFTA to remove basic foods and agricultural production from the agreement,....and U.S. organizations are seeing an opportunity to join their demands to the Occupy Wall Street movement across the country. One of the grievances listed in the OWS

Declaration of the New York City General Assembly reads: "They (large corporations) have poisoned the food supply through negligence, and undermined the farming system through monopolization."

Corporate control of the food system locked in by NAFTA not only starves people in Mexico. It locks in a profoundly unhealthy food system for the entire region. As the crisis deepens, citizen movements are again heating up and seeking each other out across borders to protect their health, their livelihoods and their rights. In the future, what we eat, how we eat, and if we eat will depend on their efforts.

Laura Carlsen (lcarlsen@ciponline.org) is director of the Americas Policy Program in Mexico City. She is also a Foreign Policy In Focus columnist.

### Hopkins/Mann Delegation

Below (top to bottom) delegates play with preschool kids; on community tour led by Environmental Youth Brigade; group photo on roof of León cathedral.



**Food Security and Climate Change** There are clear links between human behavior and changes in the climate, and these climate changes are hurting small communities and farmers in Nicaragua and around the world. The soon to be launched **WalkBikeTransit** Campaign (see brochure excerpts below) will help people see the connection between their transportation choices and food security, affect local change, and build local support for sustainable transportation.

**FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE. | FIGHT HUNGER.**

*Climate change is a defining challenge of our times. Its impact will be far-reaching and largely irreversible. It is already increasing hunger and food insecurity among the poorest and most vulnerable.*

- The U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization

**WALK BIKE TRANSIT**

N E W H A V E N

**Our behavior matters.**

The links between human behavior, climate change and food security are increasingly clear. Climate change will create more frequent extreme weather events, and change temperatures and precipitation patterns. It will severely impact health, livelihood assets, and food production and availability.



Climate change is already affecting those around the world, including farmers in Goyena, Nicaragua, who have been displaced by hurricane Mitch, and others whose livelihoods are threatened by shorter growing seasons.

**Transportation is key.**

Transportation is the fastest growing source of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, and the largest end-use source of CO<sub>2</sub> (EPA 2010). Our transportation sector alone emits more CO<sub>2</sub> per capita than the entire economy of any other country.

Choosing alternative transportation like walking, biking, or taking public transportation is both cheaper and healthier than driving your car, and will help limit our contribution to climate change and food insecurity.



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commute. The high school was moved a mile away, and the students needed to find a way to commute to school. For many of the students, this commute (and the schedule change from afternoon hours to morning hours) was not feasible, and thus their access to education was denied. After watching the play, audience members were once again asked to enter into the scene. This time, a community member suggested that the residents of Goyena initiate a petition to be sent to the city government of León.

The interactions between the actors and the audience achieved the intention of Augusto Boal: empowerment of the individual and the community. Workshop participants and audience members had little background in theater, yet they were able to create influential and meaningful pieces. After the plays ended, the community and workshop participants shared a sentiment of comradeship and hope.

This delegation captured the political and labor strife in Nicaragua, while showing that through persistence and organization, individuals have the ability to gain power. The theater workshop and plays demonstrated the effects of strong individual and community voice. Although the workshop was comprised of people from many different backgrounds, all had the opportunity to learn and grow as individuals. •

*Bethany De Gant is a junior at Cornell University and Liz McLean is a junior at Vassar College.*