



New Haven/León Sister City Project

Summer 2012 Newsletter

A New Goyena

By Isabel Beshar and Joshua Ackerman

Coated in layers of sweat, our group of eight stood in the stagnant air of 103°F heat. In a 5' by 8' dirt floor room, we watched, in silence, original footage on a Panasonic television set. The insignificant chugging of a nearby fan was occasionally subdued by the bark of a dog, but for the most part, the chugging was all we heard. Yet the heat, the stagnant air, and the slightly uneven sound of the fan were not what made a lasting impression on our eight pairs of eyes. Instead, as we walked out of the tin-roof home and back into the beaming Goyena sun, we treasured the decade-old footage describing the old Goyena: a Goyena rich with life -- every inch of land was filled with lush, dense, green vegetation. There was a clean, flowing river. There was sunshine, and there was peace.

But the Goyena that we found just outside of Leon, Nicaragua was far from the Goyena sanctuary previously documented by the digital images. The lush vegetation had been replaced with the ashes of long-gone shrubbery. The once-flowing river had been partially blockaded by a gravel road that permitted the passage of industrial-sized trucks. The drinking water was contaminated with the pesticides used to protect endless fields of sugar cane. In a short period of time, Goyena had changed.

It was odd. Broad, sweeping changes to a community in rural Nicaragua. When we first got to Goyena we found what we thought was a peaceful community. But as we dug deeper into the roots of Goyena, we found that real peace was

very hard to come by. With time, it became clear that these transformations had introduced small tremors in Goyena's infrastructure of peace and stability.

The major sources of these changes that the video documented? *Ingenio* San Antonio, Nicaragua's largest producer of sugarcane, ethanol, and electric energy. Founded in 1890 by the most powerful family in Nicaragua, Las Pellas, San Antonio is the largest employer of the Goyena community.

Yet along with economic opportunities, San Antonio has brought a deadly series of by-products. Chemical pesticides contaminate drinking water and destroy the valuable diversity of crops. Sugar-carrying trucks pollute the air. Newly constructed roads and bridges destroy natural vegetation and essential rivers. Most concerning, members of the Goyena community suffer from chronic kidney disease (CKD), a condition affecting 30% of coastal Nicaraguan laborers and rendering victims dependent on expensive dialysis treatment and medications. Although most ex-sugarcane workers blame the *químicos*, or the pesticides sprayed by the sugar companies, Boston University epidemiologist David Brooks, who has been investigating the causes of CKD in

In this Issue:

- A New Goyena: Yale Public Health Delegation.... P. 1
- Food Security Efforts Expand ... P. 2
- U.S. Military Aid Fuels a Human Rights Crisis in Honduras P. 3
- Theater Update... P. 3
- WalkBikeTransit on the Streets... p 5
- Volunteers - Behind the Scenes... p. 5

León mural above left depicts attack on protesting students in 1956 by the National Guard during the Somoza dictatorship.



Yale delegates with members of the Youth Brigade outside preschool.

Nicaragua since 2010, suspects that the grueling conditions of sugarcane farming - 9 ½ hour shifts in 90-100 degree weather - may aggravate an unknown susceptibility to CKD. Despite this, the *Ingenio* denies the employability of sick workers, ignores their pleas for financial compensation and medical treatment, and refuses to shorten workday hours.

Our research didn't end with these stories. We dug further.

In a meeting with USAID Nicaragua at the U.S. Embassy in Managua, we learned about the status of public health in Nicaragua.

Continued on p. 2

Food Security Efforts Expand

When Hurricane Mitch hit Goyena in 1998, the resulting flood forced the community to leave their lands and move further from the river nearby. They moved to a smaller piece of land donated by a farming coop. The new community built more solid housing, but families now live much closer together and have little land for gardening, fruit trees or small livestock.

In late 2010 the NH/LSCP Board decided to focus on quality primary education and food security as two areas that needed attention, are priorities for the community, and where NH/LSCP's role could help the community create a greater degree of self sufficiency.



First grade teacher Sonia Matute snacking with some of her first grade flock participating in the afterschool program.

In 2011 we created a Food Security Committee in New Haven (with people with food policy, international development, and farming experience) to give technical support to León staff on this issue, and to look for resources as needed. One of the first efforts of the Committee was to work with León staff to develop a food security survey which was initially administered in early 2012.

The survey polled 27 families with preschool age children in Goyena. More than a third of the families participating in this study reported indicators of extreme food insecurity during the three previous months before the survey. Specific responses included:

- Food you bought did not last and you did not have money to buy more: 40.74%

- Your children were not eating because you lacked money for food: 37.04%
- You or another adult stopped eating because there was not enough food: 33.33%
- You lost weight because you had no money to buy food: 40.74%

This survey also revealed a lack of consumption of fruits and vegetables, but it's not clear if this is caused by a lack of access or the preferences of the inhabitants. Nearly 52% of respondents think they are not fed properly and of those, 86.7%, believe they are not fed properly because they do not choose nutritious options (73.3%) or specifically because they are not eating fruits and vegetables (13.3%).

More analysis is needed to better understand the food security challenges in Goyena, community resources available, and the Committee is working to expand the survey to try to answer these questions.

Also, the first significant step in Goyena to address food insecurity will be to form a committee of students, teachers and parents to look at using school

lunch programs and a school demonstration garden as vehicles for improving nutrition. The preschool already has a kitchen and lunch program with parents cooking food provided by the government and NH/LSCP. The new demonstration garden will allow students to be involved in growing and tasting vegetables, some of which can also be used in the cooked lunches. We also want to involve parents in looking at including more vegetables and fruit in the family's diets' at home.

There is also an effort to put a kitchen in the primary school. This new meal program will be coordinated by the teachers and the cooking will be done by volunteer parents. The New Haven Food Security Committee began a Kitchen Sink Sale here - through which

donors can "buy" pots, plates, utensils, stove, etc - to raise the \$900 needed for the new kitchen ("Purchases"/donations still welcome...).

Finally, NH/LSCP recently received a fourth year of a grant from the New England Biolabs Foundation which supports the work of the Goyena Environmental Youth Brigade. The 12 member Brigade has been taking an active lead on sustainability and food security projects. The grant will help to continue and expand this work in 2012-13. ♦

A New Goyena

continued from p.1 ...

Particularly in urban areas, USAID has helped advance maternal and prenatal health: newly constructed "halfway homes" for pregnant mothers, expansive centers for healthcare training, and extensive vaccination campaigns for children under the "FamiSalud Project" have improved the lives of many Nicaraguans.

But what about the former sugar cane workers with CKD? Unfortunately, care for occupational hazards falls low on the USAID list of priorities. And, for the most part, the *Ingenio* has avoided international backlash to the environmental impact of their work. In 2006, the private-sector division of the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), awarded San Antonio with almost \$55 million in loans, helping the *Ingenio* expand their factories and produce more sugar and ethanol. In the process, they have unsurprisingly also produced even higher rates of of CKD.

Where do we go from here? What can we, a delegation of eight students, do about this? As we begin to grapple with the overwhelming reality for these Nicaraguan sugar cane workers, we invite you to be part of our discussion. Let's bring this discussion here to New Haven. Let's work together to make our sister city in Nicaragua a safe place to call home. ♦

Isabel Beshar and Josh Ackerman led a Yale public health delegation to Nicaragua in May.



U.S. Military Aid Fuels a Human Rights Crisis in Honduras

Article excerpted from *Witness for Peace Solidaridad* May 2012 E-Newsletter.

We approach three young Honduran soldiers who stand outside a military post in Guadalupe Carney, a rural community in Honduras' Aguan Valley. Two are 19 and one is 20. Dressed in military garb the oldest wears an automatic weapon on his chest. Sporting vests and name-tags and armed only with cameras and notebooks, we cautiously ask for an interview. After exchanging looks, they nod.

"Have you received training from the United States?" "Yes," the oldest soldier replies.

"What kind of training?"

"Close combat, counter narcotics... We learn how to combat drug-trafficking. We spend six months in practical training and three months on theory."

When asked who trained him he hesitates briefly, averts his gaze and timidly lists names of U.S. Captains and Generals.

The United States gave over \$9.8 million to the Honduran military and police in 2011 and has budgeted over \$8 million for 2012. This aid is part of the Central America Regional Security Initiative, a program designed to stop the flow of drugs to the United States via Central America. Almost half of the illicit drugs that enter the United States pass through Honduras.

We ask the soldier if there is much drug trafficking in Guadalupe Carney. His look implies the obvious. "No."

"What do you do here if there is no narco-trafficking?" we ask. "Sometimes the community causes problems. We call the base if they take to the streets or if they invade Miguel Facussé's land." The picture is becoming clearer.

Just moments before, we met with community members of Guadalupe

Carney. Beneath a grass-roofed gazebo they told us about death threats, intimidation and assassinations. "We brought our friends and co-workers to this very floor after they were murdered," they told us.

In 2010, five community members were killed. A mother of five told us she lost her husband only ten days after her last child was born. The men were killed when campesino groups occupied El Tumbador, farm land that borders Guadalupe Carney. Although the land is legally theirs, they explained, it is occupied by a businessman, Miguel Facussé, one of the richest people in Honduras. His private guards shot the five men.

This tragic story is all too common in the Aguan Valley. Conflicts between campesinos and this large landowner end brutally. Forty-five campesinos have been killed in Aguan since the coup d'état in 2009. In response to these conflicts the Honduran government militarized the zone with aid from the U.S.



The young soldiers' answers to our questions reveal whose side the military is on. Their instructions are to call base when the community "causes problems." In other parts of the valley, the police have been called in. Families have been evicted from their homes and whole communities have been burned to the ground by the police. U.S. funds for the "War on Drugs" in Central America are supporting a different sinister agenda.

In the 1980s the CIA built military bases in Honduras to arm and train the Nicaraguan Contras to fight against the Sandinista government. One of the U.S. military bases used in the 80s was the Regional Center for Military Training. After the facility ended its

Theater Project Update

The NH/LSCP Theater Committee continues to organize community-based trainings in New Haven and Goyena, Nicaragua. In the top two photos above, some of the 23 participants at the Forum Theater training in New Haven in April.

In June, Katy Rubin, Aaron Jafferis and Megan Fountain traveled to Goyena for the second year to continue Forum training (including working with Goyena women to produce a Forum piece on domestic violence - bottom photo) and to create documentary theater on the history of the land of the nearby community of Troilo.

The Committee is organizing a public presentation on these efforts for the Fall, and also just received a Mayor's Community Arts Grant to continue and expand Forum training in New Haven. ♦



Honduras...continued from p. 3

operations the land was transferred to the Honduran government's agriculture institution for distribution to campesinos.

Some of these lands reached rural farmers. A portion of it is the community named Guadalupe Carney: the very community where we stood and interviewed the three young soldiers. Other large plots were illegally sold to large business owners. One is Miguel Facussé. He bought land like El Tumbador across the Aguan Valley to expand his palm oil empire. This land produces palm oil for export rather than supporting the livelihood of rural farmers like those in Guadalupe Carney.

Campesinos risking their lives occupy land for survival. Meanwhile, young soldiers receive orders to protect the land-holdings of businessmen like Miguel Facussé. And they do so after receiving military training from the U.S.

The land situation has gotten worse since the military coup in 2009 when democratically-elected President, Manuel Zelaya, was overthrown. To appease mounting criticism, the coup regime held what many consider illegitimate elections and Porfirio Lobo Sosa was elected president. The United States led the way to international recognition of the Lobo administration.

Since the coup the human rights crisis has mushroomed: Eighteen journalists have been killed, violence against women and hate crimes against the LGBTI community have risen, Afrodescendent and indigenous populations are under-threat as they

struggle to maintain their land and the culture it sustains.

While the human rights crisis rages the Lobo administration pushes neoliberal policy that benefits multi-national corporations and the U.S. continues to support militarization: \$17.8 million for the war on drugs and \$50 million for the Soto Cano Air Base (Palmerola Air Base).

As we stood and listened to these timid young soldiers the cycles of U.S. military and economic violence became clear. Our conversation revealed a common-thread that weaves militarization, neoliberalism and rampant human rights violations: The U.S. supports an administration that is favorable to multi-national corporations and a military force that protects corporate interest. The result? The abuse of human rights and loss of safety and security for the Hondurans who suffer from these policies and who dare to speak or act against them.

There is a wave of nonviolent resistance in Honduras led by those whose rights are under constant threat. Witness for Peace has heard the call from our partners for a long-term presence to accompany them as they seek justice. We will be in Honduras to document the impact of military aid and to pressure our government to stop backing a military that abuses the rights of its citizens. ♦

Consider Making a Monthly Donation. Your

steady support will allow NH/LSCP to maximize our impact on the lives of people living in poverty – and to help them change their circumstances for the better. Go to newhavenleon.org/



Parents, teachers, and students clean the primary school before classes start in February.

November Teachers Delegation

The November 18-24 delegation will be composed of educators and other interested individuals, and will:

- Learn about economic, cultural, and political realities in Nicaragua, and the history of US intervention there.
- Investigate education in Nicaragua, its challenges and its strengths.
- Explore natural beauty of Nicaragua.
- Spend time the rural community of Goyena meeting with students, community leaders and educators
- Participate in activities/workshops to support NH/LSCP Education projects in Goyena, and explore with community ways North Americans can support education in Nicaragua once delegates return.

The cost of the trip is \$1200 plus airfare. **Some partial scholarships are available.** For more information go to www.newhavenleon.org, write to Chris at nh@newhavenleon.org or call 203.562.1607.

The delegation will be led by Jen Goldberg, Director of Early Childhood Education at Fairfield University (jgoldberg@fairfield.edu).



Primary students gather at well outside Goyena school buildings.

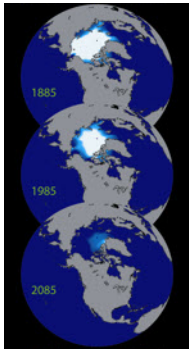
NHLSCP's WalkBikeTransit Campaign on the Streets

You may have seen us out in New Haven talking about concerns about



climate change, food insecurity and transportation choices. News of d extreme weather has been continuous, giving new urgency to this effort. Of particular concern with regards to NH/LSCP's food security work is the present drought in the US.

"Time is running out. The world may be much closer to an unmanageable food shortage – replete with soaring food prices, spreading food unrest, and ultimately political instability– than most people realize," says Lester Brown, Earth Policy Institute.



NOAA arctic sea ice simulation 1885-2085.

"The drought isn't merely bad because the crops are parched. Climate change has nudged the temperature more than a degree higher than the previous record-breaking US drought in the 1950s," says author, economist and food policy expert Raj Patel. "We don't yet know what the final reckoning will be for food prices," Patel said. "The price is driven by a demand for animal feed, high-fructose corn syrup, and an

incredibly stupid US biofuels policy that mandates the transformation of food into ethanol. With the US producing over half of world corn exports, and with the price of those exports set by domestic uses of corn, the US drought will have a profound impact on [global food] prices."

"2011 will be remembered as a year of extreme events, both in the United States and around the world," said Deputy NOAA Administrator Kathryn D. Sullivan, Ph.D. "Every weather event that happens now takes place in the context of a changing global environment." Researchers found the 2011 crop-destroying drought and heat wave in Texas was "roughly 20 times more likely" the result of man-made climate change -- warming due to greenhouse gasses -- than of natural climate variation.



In 2010, transportation contributed approximately 27 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Choosing to drive less, walk more, bike, or take public transit (and supporting policies to help make these choices more attractive) will help limit greenhouse gas production, clear the air locally, and make us all healthier. ♦ *Support for WBT outreach comes from Greater New Haven Green Fund.*

Behind the Scenes in New Haven

New Haven/León SCP is blessed with a corps of friends who help us get our work done. Below are volunteers who have been with us for many years, and some for decades. They are dependable, loyal and wonderful to be around.

VICTORYA MC EVOY. Victorya has done it all. From our earliest days she has raised funds; worked Give Peace A Dance; set up before and packed up after too many sales to count; loaded material aid containers; run and organized tag sales... and I may be missing other ways she has been helpful. It's hard to remember a time when I've turned to ask for help and Victorya has said no.....**SUSAN LANDON.** Our skilled volunteer bookkeeper for almost two

decades. Her efficiency at the Project's holiday sales, is matched by her good humor and energy. Susan is also a no-nonsense masterful events' planner.....

SHELLY ALTMAN.

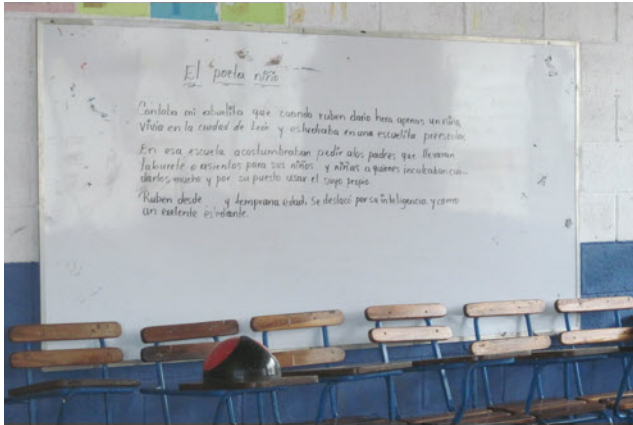
Saltman is our go-to person for all things related to the



Hopkins delegates at the preschool with a keyboard they used to teach different concepts - numbers, letters/spelling, and body movement to the students.

Project's computers. When to replace them, tech support, the database and all of its possibilities, and also our webmaster.....**ROGER PAHL.** For over fifteen years has come twice a month to our office to make deposits and pay the bills for the Project. Here on the third floor in the heat of the summer and the cold of the winter, Roger arrives ready to work. Always on time and ever pleasant, his dependability and carefulness are much appreciated.....**SUSAN BENNITT.** For years Susan, a faculty member at Hopkins School, has recruited students from Hopkins for an annual delegation. She does not stop with recruitment, though. Susan does orientations, helps plan the delegation's itinerary along with New Haven and Leon staff and is indefatigable on the ground in Goyena and Leon. Her imaginative leadership has helped make the Hopkins delegations one of the longest running annual delegations to date....**MARIE MILLIARD** and **BARBARA KAPUSTA.** These East Haveners are on call for getting mailings ready, pricing crafts for our annual sales, set up for our annual Fiesta, sending out pledge reminders, and other clerical tasks. My one complaint is that we don't go out for pizza often enough.....**JEN GOLDBERG.** Jen, a professor of education at Fairfield University, is leading the Project in our education program in Goyena. Starting with the three levels of preschool, teacher trainings are being offered to the current faculty. Eager to learn, they are very receptive to the creative and simple approaches Jen shares with them.....

WHAT A CREW! Many thanks. It's an honor to work with you. Patty Nuelsen ♦



On a school marker board in Goyena: "My grandmother said that when (poet) Ruben Darío was just a child he lived in the city of León and studied in a preschool.

In that school it was the custom to ask parents to bring stools or seats for their children who were encouraged to take care of them and of course use your own.

Ruben, at an early age, stood out for his intelligence and as an excellent student."

Mark your calendar.
December 1,
Annual Holiday and
Gift Bazaar.

NH/LSCP supports education and sustainable development in Nicaragua and New Haven.



Tired of Horsing Around?



Try Some New Games.

Volunteer with NHLSCP in New Haven... Help with food security, fundraising, education, theater, outreach.

Contact Chris at
 nh@newhavenleon.org or
 303.562.1607.

Kitchen Sink Sale

Help Create a School Kitchen in the Primary School in Goyena.



"Buy" Pots, Pans, Utensils, Stove, etc. Donations can be sent to NH/LSCP or go to newhavenleon.org/donate_online.

Aim High!!

Intern in Nicaragua

Seeking bright committed people with good Spanish ...

to work in rural community ...In education,



environment, development, public health, theater, etc...

