



Fall 2005 Newsletter

The Chajul Family Garden Project

Guatemala, C.A.



Building on Results

By: Diana Coumantarakis

The ability to grow what you need, in order to feed yourself and your family is a tremendous gift; something many of us do not often think about. Alongside ADIM CPR-Sierra, Sombrilla works with many people who live in an oasis where many things can grow. However, gardening is largely not being practiced. There are many illnesses and weaknesses that community members are suffering from, which are directly linked to poor nutrition. Largely these are preventable illnesses, poor dental health and general malaise, which can be rectified with a better vitamin intake. So, we are excited to begin preparing a new project that focuses on nutrition through the creation of family gardens! This project will work in partnership with our programs of dental and general health to improve the wellbeing of community members of the CPRs (Comunidades de Poblaciones en Resistencia) in the municipality of Chajul.

Through a series of consultations that took place throughout this year, it was established that there is a need, in the CPRs, for something to address the issues of nutrition.

The idea of family gardens was received well and the planning has begun to start the project early in the New Year.

Each family, which participates in the project, will construct a small raised bed garden, and plant a variety of seeds. They will receive workshops in soil management, soil preparation, composting, seeding, weeding, water collection, and seed collection as well as workshops on how to prepare different foods with the vegetables that will be available, to best utilise the vitamins in these plants. There is a hope that the project will be able to continue to grow and eventually include the introduction of fruit bearing trees.

Rural Guatemala is quite agricultural. Most families grow *milpa* (corn) for their family's consumption on small parcels of land, at times right within the limits of towns or villages. Corn is a crucial part of food intake in Guatemala. It is a part of every meal, from tortillas and tamales, to warm drinks like atol. The production of *milpa* is largely the role of the men and boys in the family. One of the hopes of this new project will be the inclusion of women into the process of food production, as to not only confine their role to the preparation of the food into meals. As the gardens become established, each family will have the option to expand it, presenting the opportunity of the sale of the extra food. However this is not a primary goal – as the communities are not near to markets. The focus lies more in self-sufficiency, and wellness building. Another component of the project will be the creation of seed banks in each of the communities. The banks will be run and maintained by the legalised women's committees, which are already established in each of the communities. This process will allow for more autonomy for the committees and should build capital for them, allowing for participation in future activities they wish to pursue.

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About Us

Sombrilla Refugee Support Society is an Alberta-based, Non-Governmental Organization. It was founded in 1985. Today, Sombrilla continues to develop partnerships with Latin American NGO's that share its values in order to assist them in their development.

Sombrilla's Mission:
To empower the marginalized communities and people of Latin America so that they may assert their economic, political, environmental, cultural, and social rights; which enables them to improve the conditions and quality of their life in a just and sustainable manner.

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Recently the situation in Guatemala has become more difficult for many people. Hurricane Stan has left much devastation. Many people have lost their homes, friends and family, access to health services and clean water. There is much fear about the coming months as great quantities of food crops were destroyed. Heavy rain brought down a lot of corn – leaving people to wonder if there will be enough this year, and how communities will recover. While the major effects of the storm were not felt directly in the Ixil region, its secondary effects will have an effect on the region. As communities band together to share what they have with those who need help in other parts of the country – it becomes very visible how important it is to have many food sources around the country – not isolated to large farms in the lowlands. As well, it illustrates the importance of having a diversity of plants, which can cope with extreme weather situations differently.

Guatemala is a beautiful country. The work of the people in the Ixil region is helping to build a stronger and healthier Guatemala. As with any region, there are of course challenges and problems, but over all it is an inspirational place to be. Recently Dr. Rigoberta Menchú Tum visited Nebaj. During her presentation she made a point that I think is quite important to remember. While Guatemala may be considered a poor country, it is rich. Rich in dreams, rich in hope and rich in opportunity. She pointed out that Guatemaltecos are also surrounded by richness - trees, water and the opportunity to make things grow.

So, in taking up the challenge we too will begin to grow! Expanding our dreams and opportunities and helping to create healthier people.

Diana Coumantarakis, is Sombrilla's Guatemala Field Volunteer. She has been working with the local association ADIM – CPR Sierra since February 2005. Diana is from Edmonton.

The Chajul Family Garden Project:

Help Support this Important Initiative

Project Summary:

Sombrilla intends to continue working with its long-time partner ADIM-CPR Sierra to build on the results of previous primary health care projects. After an extensive consultation earlier this year, a need for family (household) gardens was identified within the rural communities that represent the constituency of the local association ADIM-CPR Sierra. As a result, this proposal focuses on the building of family gardens within rural communities to combat malnutrition and support the empowerment of women's organizations. The project will assist families with planting and caring for their own gardens. It will also encourage these families to support a community seed bank system in which seed deposited by participating families will be stored and lent to new families starting their own gardens. Deposited seed will also support those families that encounter difficulties with their gardens. The main objectives of this project are to improve the level of food security within the communities in a sustainable manner and enhance the role of Women's Committee's within the benefited communities.

The Developmental Problems to be addressed:

Malnutrition amongst rural poor: The membership of ADIM is composed of rural communities in which families depend on subsistence agriculture for their own survival. The land at their disposal is difficult to access and is even more difficult to develop for commercial use. As a result, high indices of malnutrition are common amongst community members as food supply is limited in variety and in nutrients.

The limited role of women in the process of community decision-making: ADIM has made important advances with respect to promoting women's rights and facilitating the legalization of women's community organizations within rural communities. However, a need still exists for women's community organizations to become more involved in the decision-making processes as they relate to community development.

General Scope of the Project:

Location: County of Chajul, Department of Quiché, Guatemala
Approximate Beneficiaries: Direct: 325 families (approx. 1800 people)

With this project we plan to provide family gardens to at least 325 families. Each garden will include the following vegetables:

- tomato
- onion
- cauliflower
- carrot
- radish
- potato
- cilantro
- cucumber
- beets
- chard
- *guicoy*
- chilli pepper
- garlic
- *guisquil*
- bell peppers
- peas
- beans
- cabbage

The price of materials for setting up a garden along with the seeds necessary for planting totals approximately \$60 CAD. **For only \$60, you can help one family set up a full garden that will improve the nutrition of their entire family.**

Get more information from our website: www.sombrilla.ca

2005 Sombrilla AGM : The New Board of Directors

On October 22nd, 2005, Sombrilla Celebrated its 19th Annual Annual General Meeting. It was held at the International Centre at the University of Alberta. At this meeting the Board of Directors was elected.

The New Board of Director's is composed of the following members:

1. Vladimir Gómez – President
2. Ros McCue – Vice – president
3. Richard Heikkila – Treasurer
4. Sarah Cashmore – Secretary
5. Mark Wells – Chair Public Education Committee
6. Álvaro Loyola – Chair Projects Committee
7. Rick Berube – General Board Member
8. Swamy De León – General Board Member
9. Julio García – General Board Member
10. Giri Puligandla – General Board Member
11. Jacob Shelley – General Board Member
12. Richard Stadlweiser – General Board Member

Currently...

Policy Development Committee: The Board of Directors has recently formed an ad-hoc committee that will commit itself to policy development over the coming year. The Chair for the Policy Development Committee will be Jacob Shelley, a law student currently studying at the University of Alberta.

Liaison Committee with CPI: This committee, which acts as the link between Christian Peacemakers International (CPI) and Sombrilla, will include Rick Berube, Richard Heikkila and Giri Puligandla as representatives of Sombrilla. This committee will work to continue the important project in Honduras.

***** ATTENTION *****
SOMBRILLA MEMBERSHIP

SPECIAL MEETING

TO BE HELD: DECEMBER 06, 2005

TIME: 7:00 PM

LOCATION: Catholic Social Services
10709-105 Street
Edmonton, Alberta

Invitations for this meeting have been sent by mail to all Sombrilla members

Equitable Distribution or Economic Growth? By Rodrigo Loyola

It has been five years since the Canadian government decided to sign on to the Millennium Development Declaration and with this action committed itself to the Millennium Development Goals established by the United Nations. The first MDG is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: a very admirable goal. However, as we critically analyze the MDGs and the approach of the North-Western world to these aims one begins to uncover a stunning truth. The MDGs are but another vehicle to further the neo-liberal economic agenda.

As we assess the MDGs it is important to understand that every social policy speaks to how to meet the social needs of the people through society's institutions. As do institutions, so do policies express the concepts and values of those who are in power. Thus, the corporations and financial institutions dictate social policy throughout the Americas. The vehicles through which they do this are the Structural Adjustment Programs of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

As idealistic as the leaders of the United Nations may be one cannot negate the fact that they must function within the scope of interests of powerful corporations and financial institutions. This being the case the answer that the North-Western world has to extreme poverty is: Economic Growth.

When referring to the underdeveloped nations of the south people tend to refer to them as poor countries, but there is a difference between poor countries and countries with extensive poverty. The difference being, poor countries cannot provide for all the basic needs of the people, while countries with extensive poverty do not distribute their resources equitably. Most Latin American countries have extensive poverty, they are not poor by any means. This being the case, the important issue is not economic growth or fortifying the neo-liberal economic agenda, but instead focusing on how the poor in these countries may gain access to the resources they need. This can only happen through the equitable distribution of resources. Economic growth, in my opinion, will only fortify the structure of injustice that makes the rich, richer and the poor, poorer.

It is through projects and programs of true sustainable development that people may gain access to the much needed resources they need. This is so because as practitioners of sustainable development we always stop to consider the real life experience of those who are marginalized. That being our starting point, we develop programs and projects with our partners to address the needs of the people they represent and work with on a daily basis. My opinion is that the only way towards true equitable distribution is to aid our partners and the people of the south to gain access to the political process and through it achieve real representation.

1,400 dead in one Guatemala village as Stan blasts Central America

Sat, 08 Oct 2005

Source: CBC News

Hurricane Stan has had a devastating impact on the Central American country of Guatemala. A mudslide from torrential rains from Stan killed 1,400 people in the highland village of Panabaj.

Search and rescue workers said there were no survivors. The landslide engulfed the village on Wednesday, burying 1,400 people in the mud, in places more than 12 metres thick.

The landslide that buried several communities near the popular tourist destination of Lake Atitlan was believed to be the worst single disaster in several days of flooding that has hit Central America and Mexico.

Rafael Estrada, 63, was working as a custodian on the second floor of a school in Panabaj, one of eight Mayan towns that ring the lake, when the mudslide began. "There was a noise that would scare anyone, a roar," said Estrada, who lost his sister, two nephews and at least two other relatives. "I thought the volcano had erupted. I thought 'it's already taken my family' and I could only wait for it to take me too."

Ramon Noj, a 31 year old farmer, spent Friday digging for his niece, 4-year-old Ana Castro. "We can't allow her to remain here," he said in halting Spanish. "No one must be left behind. Everyone should be together in the cemetery."

Domingo Ramirez, 31, was among a small army of volunteers who grabbed poles, picks or anything else they could get their hands on and joined the search. "These are our brothers, our friends," he said. "And they're dead."

More than 270 Guatemalan communities have been affected by the floods and landslides and at least 30,000 people have moved to shelters.

Many of the poorest communities are carved into coffee-growing regions on the sides of steep volcanos.

Contact Sombrilla for information on how you can help those affected by Hurricane Stan.

Many thanks to our long time partners:



Canadian International
Development Agency



The community of Santa Clara, in the county of Chajul, Guatemala

SOMBRILLA MEMBERSHIPS AND DONATIONS

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Memberships: \$10 for one year

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