



NEWSLETTER: JAN - MARCH 2018

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

With great satisfaction, we present to you our first quarterly report of 2018, we are proud to have started this year with important activities, such as those you'll read about in the following pages, despite the fact that we work in a very difficult context.

According to the latest Household Survey Multi-purpose, 34% of Salvadoran households are living in poverty, 21.4% in urban areas and 56.1% in rural areas. The average school grade reached is 7th in urban areas and 5th in the rural areas. A relevant fact is that 359.670 young people aged 15 to 24 neither study nor work, which in percentage terms represent 26.5% of the population in that age range.

Another of the country's major problems is the degradation of natural resources. The Ministry of Environment recognizes this serious problem, and expresses a set of specific challenges such as: the degradation of valuable ecosystems, unhealthy environmental conditions, critically low water resources, the disorderly use of land, poor culture of environmental responsibility and the growing climate threat.

Despite the seriousness of these problems, at the moment what most concerns the population is social violence. In 2017, the annual homicide rate was 60 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, far exceeding the rate of 10 murders established by World Health Organization to be considered an epidemic. Last year, a total of 3,954 people were killed, including 46 police officers and 23 soldiers, closing the year with an average of 11 murders per day.

In this reality, Voices on the Border focuses its work on strengthening the organizational capacities and self-management of impoverished communities; to improving access to pre-school, primary and secondary education; as well as investigation and advocacy surrounding State Institutions in order to achieve fair and equitable laws and policies.

To accomplish this work, Voices on the Border greatly values the trust and financial support of people and organizations of solidarity from the United States, and to you we express our sincere gratitude.

– JOSE ROBERTO ACOSTA

OUR CURRENT PROJECTS



EDUCATION

This year, we will continue to focus on improving access to education as we firmly believe this to be the answer to many of our communities' problems.

The preschools (CBIs) of our communities in the Bajo Lempa, as the rest of the country, continues to be ignored by the Ministry of Education. This year, we have recommitted to support the operation of these centers by providing food and teaching supplies, and by supplementing teacher's salaries. At the same time we have come to realize the importance of encouraging these educators to advocate for their own rights; otherwise nothing sustainable will come out of the support we have provided thus far. We plan to strengthen the CBI educators' advocacy efforts this year by providing strategy-building workshops as well as support for transportation to the workshops and to meetings and actions in Usulután and San Salvador.

The small island of Montecristo is extremely vulnerable in both economic and environmental terms and like the centers mentioned above, suffers from institutional neglect on the subject of education. In order for classes to be held, VOICES will help the community purchase a lancha or boat, for the transportation of its teachers who must travel to and from the island every week.

Voices will also continue to support the students of remote La Tirana community who have chosen to continue their education, by covering some of the costs to attend a distance learning program.

This year we were able to connect once more with our friends at Carlos Rosario International Charter School in Washington, D.C., an amazing adult education school that serves immigrants from all around the world. After CR staff and educators participated in their first delegation with Voices in 2013, they expressed a desire to maintain a close relationship with Voices and with the communities they had visited. This year we reached a milestone in solidifying an intentional partnership the Amando Lopez community and Carlos Rosario educators and administrators.

Projected peer-to-peer activities:

- Virtual pedagogical skills exchanges
- Case management development
- Annual delegation
- Resource support for the schools

ENVIRONMENT

El Salvador is environmentally overstrained and one of its most affected resources is water. In both the city and countryside many families lack safe drinking water, which drastically affects their well-being.

Voices has been actively involved in the efforts of civil society to improve the environment. In 2017 we participated in a campaign promoting a law against metallic mining that would eventually be passed in March and later we joined a campaign for the human right to water. During the first months of 2018, we have continued to participate in this campaign, supporting various mobilization events of communities and social organizations that proclaim the human right to water, especially for the most impoverished populations. **THE POWER of WATER**

In order to be as effective as possible in this important work, Voices participates in two coordinating groups with Salvadoran civil society organizations: the National Environment Board and the Movement of Victims Affected by Climate Change and Cooperations. Unfortunately, while these collaborative groups have promoted new laws and policies for the protection of natural resources, the recent elections resulting in a Legislative Assembly comprised largely of right wing parties make it even more difficult to achieve positive changes in environmental legislation.

In addition, as part of our research program we are planning two important works for 2018. First, we will update our report published in 2015 on the Impacts of the sugarcane mono-culture in El Salvador. We will also carry out a new investigation on food security and sovereignty in El Salvador.

YOUTH

The Youth Association for the Development of Morazán (AJUDEM) has brought a plethora of dynamic youth-led activities to the northern region of the department. Regular workshops cover healthy eating, taekwondo, chess, theatre, and music, among others. The Social Mission Youth Organization (OSMIJ) of Cacaopera is working this year on developing their organization's strategic plan, including creating a formal schedule for their own programming as well as other community meetings and events held in the youth center they manage in Cacaopera. The youth of the Open House Social Association (OSCA) were important catalysts last year in the struggle, fought and won alongside other community members, to obtain a satellite campus of the National University of El Salvador (UES) for Morazan. This year OSCA will continue engaging youth through activities including their very popular camping trips and their youth leadership school.



COO NUTRITION

We ran such a successful program last year with the Octavio Ortiz community's youth committee that we were asked to continue our work with them. This year we are focusing on food security and nutritious eating through an educational process on preventative health, to improve the quality of life of the population of the Octavio Ortiz community. We will promote healthy eating habits and basic sanitation thus improving nutrition and preventing common diseases in children, youth and adults. The adults of the community will also be involved, through the development of public talks and forums, facilitated by specialized organizations and state institution including the Ministry of Health.

WOMEN & GIRLS



Over the next two years, the Citizen Network of Morazán Women (RCMM) plans to develop a community response protocol and resource guide aimed at creating environments where everyone understands that gender and sexual violence is unacceptable, victims receive the services they need and perpetrators are held accountable. Once the protocol is developed, RCMM will convene all key community actors like the national civil police, the Morazán health system, judicial courts, among others to briefly train them on how to use the protocol and their roles and responsibilities as identified by RCMM. Each of these key actors will then be invited to communicate a commitment to take action, form a sexual violence rapid response team and assess and enhance current policies and procedures.

VOICES is also dedicated to assisting RCMM's public advocacy efforts to demand the human rights of women be respected, by covering travel and printing expenses for RCMM's visibility events. On March 8th Voices accompanied RCMM's inspiring International Women's Day protest; we will assist as well on November 25th for the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

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LEADERSHIP BUILDING



One of the tasks to which we devote our greatest amount of energy and resources is to the capacity building of our local partners. We are committed to developing the leadership of men and women so that they remain the protagonists in the fair and equitable development of their own communities. To accomplish this, with support from St John of God Church in San Francisco, we have organized a training course for Morazan's War wounded Association (ALGES) for the months of May and June. What will differ from last year's course is that we will work specifically with a group of disabled women.

Among the topics that we will develop are:

- Social organization and popular power
- Leadership for political advocacy
- Communication and the defense of human rights
- The human rights of disabled women of war

Along the same lines of promoting leadership in the Bajo Lempa region, in 2017 we began facilitating a training course for 30 leaders from 10 communities, which we will continue to conduct on a monthly basis.

Another important activity has been our support for community strategic planning processes. This is particularly important because in El Salvador, improvisation is a cultural norm. VOICES has made a difference by introducing strategic planning and the development of medium and long-term community outlook. In the first three months of 2018, we designed the methodological process to carry out strategic plans in Octavio Ortiz and Amando López. In both communities, this will include an evaluation of what has been achieved in the last 6 years, and the projection for the next 6 years.

EL SALVADOR NEWS

Elections were held in El Salvador on March 4, 2018 to choose 84 members of the Legislative Assembly and 262 mayors. The day marked a stunning upset for the country's left wing party, as myriads of their disenchanted supporters opted to not cast a vote.

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Civil society organizations worried about the political shift, held a press conference to demand that the incoming right-wing dominated legislature, uphold the previous decision to ban metallic mining in El Salvador. **READ MORE**

Though El Salvador still remains one of a handful of countries that prohibits abortion regardless of circumstance, human rights defenders celebrated the exoneration of women jailed over ten years due to suffering miscarriages. **READ MORE**

The Vatican released a statement on March 7, that Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero will be canonized as a Roman Catholic saint, possibly in October 2018.

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

This year, we invite our friends and supporters to attend the special events being hosted by our US partners and consider joining them on their delegations to El Salvador this upcoming summer.

WEST COAST:

South Bay Sanctuary Covenant
"Working for Justice in El Salvador and the U.S."
Sunday, April 22, @ 4:00PM
First Baptist Church
305 N. California (at Bryant) Palo Alto
\$20 adult and \$5 student (NTLF)
For info call (650) 600-8122 or elh109@sbcglobal.net
+
Delegation to El Salvador:
August 18 to August 26, 2018

EAST COAST:

Carlos Rosario International Charter School
"Drag Bingo Fundraiser for Salvadoran Education"
Tuesday May 8th, 6:30PM
Nellie's Sport's Bar
900 U St NW, Washington, D.C.
\$1 for every Nellie's Beer purchased
For info call (202) 332-6355
+
Delegation to El Salvador:
June 1 to June 1, 2018

CAMPAIGN FOR JOSEAL ADONAY CRUZ

DONATE NOW to fund the future of Joseal Adonay Cruz, an 18 year-old Accounting student from a small rural community in Usulután, currently in his first year of a three-year program at the National Technical Institute.

\$3,600

is the total amount needed to cover three years of Joseal's transportation, meals and basic supplies.

WWW.VOTB.ORG/YOUNGSCHOLARS

Adonay, as he likes to be called, lives simply in a humble home with his father, mother and younger brother. His older sister lives with her partner in a neighboring town. His father, though formally uneducated, is a formidable community leader, who makes a living tending to farms and harvesting clams. His mother mostly stays at home tending to household chores, but occasionally joins her husband on the farm.

This year we are profoundly excited to announce the inauguration of our Young Scholars program. The objective of this program is to transform the dream of higher education into a practical reality. Navigate to www.votb.org/youngscholars to learn how to make a donation to this important educational fund.



VOICES
— on the border —

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