



Food security steps for hundreds of families in Burkina

By Judy Gray, WNC Director

In these unusual times, we want to let you know about the extraordinary work that our partner organization APDC continues to do to support people in remote villages in eastern Burkina Faso. In the past six months alone, hundreds of farm families have taken steps to improve their food security.

One effective technology is placing rows of stones across fields to enhance water infiltration into the soil. This has led to increases in the yield of corn, sorghum and millet. Also, farmers have prepared lowland areas for the cultivation of rice, created market gardens during the dry season and started producing sweet potatoes. The vitamin A-rich sweet potatoes diversify children's diet and provide a source of income. Most of these activities are undertaken by women.

A small glimmer of hope for animal-fattening (another source of income) – the price of animals at the Fada market rose last fall after two years of very depressed prices which means that many of these women have been able to not only purchase another animal to continue the activity, but also have a little extra revenue for household expenses.

APDC has continued to offer educational sessions on the importance of spacing births to allow for healthier babies and mothers, and about water-related diseases and hygiene. Also thousands of parents have participated in cooking demonstrations to increase their knowledge of nutritious meals for children. This learning seems to be helping - according to the latest malnutrition screening of 6000 children carried out in December 2019, 2% were found to suffer from malnutrition, down from 7% in 2016.

These achievements are amazing in light of the fact that all the activities are being led by only four staff: two field workers and two coordinators. Furthermore, the program

is being implemented in an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, from the fear of insurgents who randomly enter villages and threaten people. In five villages, the educational sessions are no longer being held as people fear the jihadists will attack them. No longer are men and women working together, as the jihadists prohibit work carried out in any male-female group.

We cross our fingers and hope that, as very few outsiders visited Fada and the surrounding villages in peaceful times, perhaps this virus will not find its way to our project area.



Village women tending a community market garden.

COVID update: WNC partners

In Honduras, the government has implemented a strict curfew for the entire country and Vecinos Honduras staff are working from home to the extent possible.

They are not allowed to go to their office, and definitely not to rural areas. As of April 11, there were 392 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country and 24 deaths.

In Nepal, a lockdown is in place and people are largely confined to their homes. Travel between towns is restricted to essential services. Tamakoshi Sewa Samiti staff are doing what office work they can in light of the restrictions. As of April 11, there were 9 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country and no deaths.

In Burkina Faso, the government has implemented a two-week quarantine in all cities where there have been confirmed cases of COVID-19. This does not directly affect the World Neighbours Canada program area.

However, APDC had previously changed its approach due to attacks by terrorists. Large gatherings and night-time travel are avoided. As of April 11, there were 448 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country and 26 deaths.

Edwin Escoto tours BC then faces lockdown in Honduras

by Gabriel Newman, WNC Director

For nearly two weeks Vecinos Honduras's Executive Director, Edwin Escoto, toured British Columbia speaking to groups large and small about Honduras and the work Vecinos Honduras is doing. It was an inspiring visit! Edwin is a dynamic speaker, and despite doing every one of his twenty presentations in his second language, he...

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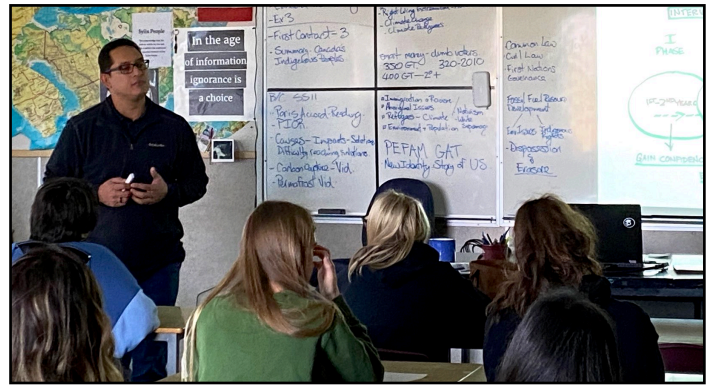
Honduras, continued

...was clear passionate and inspiring. His visit was made possible through funding from Global Affairs Canada.

During Edwin's stay in Canada, he did presentations in Vancouver, Kamloops, Vernon, Kelowna, Cranbrook, and Oliver. He presented to over 500 Canadians; including talks to elementary, secondary and university students as well as several presentations to the public.

Edwin was deeply honoured to be invited to come to Canada and share the activities of his organization and the situation in his country. Response from participants was very positive. To be able to put a face and details to a complex situation opened the eyes of many Canadians to international development and Canada's role in assisting these countries.

His return to Honduras coincided with the implementation of a strict government curfew due to COVID-19, enforced by the military. Edwin found that life in Honduras had changed. Staff of Vecinos Honduras are forced to work from home (not easy in a country where even the capital city has rolling



Edwin Escoto at Oliver's South Okanagan Secondary School.

blackouts). Because of technical limitations in Honduras, they are unable to communicate with their community volunteers.

The reality is that Honduras simply does not have the capacity to deal with a pandemic. The medical system has been chronically underfunded. In the villages that Vecinos Honduras supports, malnutrition, rampant corruption, and limited clean water cause people to be incredibly at risk. We are awaiting word to find out how we can support Vecinos Honduras, as well as our other partners, as best we can.

First Gender Training in Ramechhap deemed a success

by Dale Dodge, WNC Director

Like most parts of the world, society in Ramechhap District tends to be male dominated. When WNC's partner Tamakoshi Sewa Samiti (TSS) begins to talk to villagers about equal human rights for women, equal distribution of assets, and Gender Equality, eyes begin to roll, and heads begin to wag.

It has long been a policy of TSS that the committees established to plan, organize, construct and maintain water systems must have at least three women as part of the nine-member committee. The hope had been that as these women members had more and more say in questions of water supply - something that affects them more than any other community members - they might gradually begin to get involved in other aspects of community life such as politics, business and health. But the reality was that once the water system was operating, traditional roles of both men and women reverted to what they had always been. Men did the farming and women did almost everything else. Men controlled the assets, ran the

community and made the rules.

Women worked.

The Water User Committee was the best entry point into the community to try to develop concepts of Gender Equality. To this end, WNC and TSS began working on a Gender Equality strategy two years ago.

One of our board members with appropriate expertise, Nav Gill, spent weeks in Ramechhap with a team of gender specialists from Kathmandu. They taught the TSS (all male) team the Gender Equality approach to village development. They talked with and surveyed many local women in various villages. They talked to many men in the same villages, knowing that the support of the men was needed if



Forty-five people attend the first ever, and very successful, Water User Committee 2 day training session in Bamti Bhandar, Ramechhap.

power structures and traditional roles were ever to change. Over a couple of years, Nav and her team developed a two-day training program for the Water User Committees that covered water system governance, micro credit and financing, community sanitation and health, human rights and Nepalese gender laws. Throughout all of the training was the theme of Gender Equality - teaching both the women and the men that women could and should be full partners in all aspects of village life.

The first training course was intended for the 18 people comprising the two Water User Committees of Khahare Paga and Thapratol. But in total, 40 people from the two villages attended - 21 men and 19 women. Interest in all of the issues was high, questions were many, participation was enthusiastic, and team building exercises were productive. The seeds of Gender Equality were planted and the villagers returned to their newly completed water systems to, hopefully, make those seeds grow.