

Story of survival – DON JUAN (Nicaragua)



Photo: Gonzalo Bell

At a glance

Problem caused by climate change: Drought.

SCIAF partner: FEDICAMP.

Solution:

- Training provided on cultivating a variety of plants that can survive with little water
- Training provided on producing organic fertiliser
- A system set up to harvest rain water.

Outcome:

Don Juan now has enough food for his whole family and sells what is left over at market to earn a living.

Introduction

In Don Juan's community, water is a big problem. In winter there is often too much water resulting in landslides which destroy homes and flood fields.

At other times of the year there is not enough water and the community is affected by drought, causing crops to wither and die. People also lack clean water for bathing, leading to an increase in skin diseases and infections.

How SCIAF has helped Don Juan's community

- Training provided on creating garden nurseries – people have learned how to cultivate a variety of plants that can even survive when water is scarce. Don Juan now grows a whole range of different produce for his family including carrots, onions, peppers, mint, radishes, cucumbers and corn.
- Training provided on producing organic fertiliser – so farmers no longer need to buy expensive chemical fertilisers.
- Domestic ovens have been reconstructed. The new smaller ovens use less wood and therefore cause less harm to the environment. The new ovens are also less of a health hazard as the chimney draws all the smoke away from the kitchen area.

Quotes

“Every time we cut down a tree it’s like cutting our own life. We need to protect the forest to survive.”

“We are very grateful – through FEDICAMP we now have an improved diet. We don’t have to spend money on buying food any more.”

“To the more developed countries where there is abundance of oil, food, vehicles, companies... I would like to make an appeal. Stop investing money in activities that will not give us an answer to our problems. I would invite them to see what is happening to poor countries.”

“We have the same ideals as Jesus, when he was preaching to love one another. We need to administer our resources; to make good use of them for people who need them – those with bad housing, bad schools, no medicine and those who have no refuge in the event of a disaster. That is when we need a helping hand from those with good hearts.”

Transcript of interview with Don Juan

[On Peasants rights]

We as peasants have seen that the Government has abandoned us; has no concern for us.

Politicians have always used peasants as a ladder to climb to the top. At that time, there are always hugs and compliments for the peasant because they need us in order to get votes, but actually, once the politicians are installed comfortably they don't try to consult us or talk to us any more.

That is why I say that if we as peasants don't combine our efforts, our claims will go unheard. We must go together as peasants for our claims to be heard: we have the right to decent housing; we have the right to a road; we have the right to education.

The moment the politicians look for a new seat they promise everything to us, but when they get power – the presidency, that is – they abandon the peasant.

We say, as peasants, that we need to claim our rights but with freedom and justice and with honesty and patriotism, because the best we can offer is honesty, love and humility.

That's why, when people want to visit us we are full of happiness; especially when they come from far away, making sacrifices to find us, while the big men close to the presidency, who are actually from Nicaragua, are nowhere to be seen.

And that is what causes our resentment: not really anger, but resentment in our hearts. When we give our trust and commitment to someone we do it with love, because that person is representing us. But if we can't find that person at that moment, we really feel abandoned.

We don't have anybody to turn to: our home is falling to pieces, we have no access to education and we don't have roads.

Then, I consider you my brothers, you could be messengers of my words to people that live around you to make them look to us because there are peasants sleeping in the fields. I, however, have this small house made of mud; but it's mine and there are others who suffer much more than me.

I wish I could help them but unfortunately I have a family to support and have lots of grandchildren. And myself, I have to fight against the hardships of life. But I'd like to tell you that I feel the strength to work and to chat with you a bit more and keep telling you that you are welcome in my house any time you want to come. If I'm not there, my wife or children will be, because we are a family chain that will never end. That's what I wanted to tell you.

[On the environment]

I was born and brought up here, but now we are feeling the ravages of climate change because there are no trees and no fertile soil. With the sun so strong, water streams have dried up and this is the effect of the indiscriminate acts of men.

That's why we, as peasants, are striving for re-forestation. We see it as our future, our life. Trees are our life. We see the way men act: we come with our big knives and trees are now naked and dried up to their roots. That tree will not appear again. Forest areas are decreasing.

Many species have disappeared, such as *garrobo*, (a type of iguana), *ardilla*, (a local bird) and deer. So now it is such a big disaster that we need to be careful, it is the peasant who suffers most from this desolation in the countryside. Cities are much worse when the heat comes: pavements are boiling; you cannot walk barefoot and need to look for the shade all the time.

Many people suffer cardiac failures due to the immense heat and besides there is nowhere to shelter. We need to look after the environment, to fight against forest fires and against logging because we can't keep harming nature.

This is what I can tell you now, as a peasant, we have lived through difficult moments, and happy moments, and when we see our brothers visiting us we forget about our dried and empty land.

For a moment we believe we will find a magic wand to make everything better, but that is not true. We all need to work hand in hand: peasants, organisations, government and NGOs, to get our Nicaragua back.

We must value the few resources we have left; if we don't, we won't be able to survive. The most dangerous being that has ever existed is the human being: we have destroyed everything. Our Lord Jesus Christ made the lands so the peasants would not lack faith, wood or anything. But we are guilty of not taking care of our palm trees and mountains.

We welcome you with open arms because we know how to give affection. We don't have much to offer you, just what is in our hearts – sincere love, pure and without conditions. We need to love each other like Christ loves all of us. I have no words to make you understand. My heart is full of happiness, like a glass spilling over water. That is the way I feel when you visit us.

This is my message to you: to the more developed countries where there is abundance of oil, food, vehicles, companies and big capitalists that have not paid attention to the poor countries. I would like to appeal that they stop investing money in activities that will not give us an answer to our problems. I would invite them to see what is happening to poor countries.

When we form a strong arm all together, we will build a strong wall and then we will achieve what Christ promised us: that He would take us to a place where milk and honey emanate. This is the land he promised to us.

Men also need to think that those promised lands are not only for Nicaraguans, but all human beings. But that Earth is now on fire because it is overheated. And those countries that have more resources than ours might be more helpful and support us somehow and we could compensate them with love because this is the only thing we have to offer.

But we are very grateful with the little we are given. We grab it with joy because we live in an isolated place. But we understand that we need to be clever to cope with these difficulties. We need to fight.

We have the same ideals as Jesus, when he was preaching to love one another. We need to administer our resources; to make good use of them for people who need them – those with bad housing, bad schools, no medicines and those who have no refuge in the event of a disaster. That is when we need a helping hand from those with good hearts. I want to thank you all, as my heart is filled with friendship and sincere love for you.