

# THE JEWISH COALITION FOR EL SALVADOR EARTHQUAKE ASSISTANCE

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## **FINAL REPORT: COALITION ACTIVITIES**

*April 2004*

### **I. BACKGROUND**

On January 13, 2001, an earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter Scale struck the Pacific coast of El Salvador. Exactly one month later, as Salvadorans were still digging out from the first disaster, a second earthquake measuring 6.6 hit the country. Over the next several months, over 4,000 aftershocks took place, further devastating a country that was still recovering from 1998's Hurricane Mitch.

The damage caused to El Salvador, a country of just over 6 million people, was enormous. Official U.S. and Salvadoran government sources reported that approximately 1,250 people were killed and 9,000 were injured, while 150,000 homes were destroyed and over 180,000 were damaged. The country's social infrastructure also sustained severe damage. Over 2,600 public schools, 24 hospitals, 28 health clinics, 2,300 kilometers of roads, and 75% of potable water systems were either damaged or completely destroyed. Overall, 1.5 million people, 25% of the population of El Salvador, were affected.

The quakes also brought economic activity in the affected areas to a standstill. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) reported that nationally, 1 in 10 micro and small businesses suffered severe damage. In total, economic losses were estimated to be \$2 billion, over 15% of the country's Gross Domestic Product.

As noted in previous Coalition updates, the international community responded quickly. USAID provided immediate assistance and emergency supplies for tens of thousands of people, and launched a comprehensive Earthquake Recovery Program (ERP). ERP focused on restoration of community infrastructure (housing, schools, child care centers, sanitation systems, health clinics), reactivation of economic activity, the mitigation of adverse effects of future natural disasters, and the restoration of municipal government infrastructure. These efforts mirrored similar activities conducted by Salvadoran governmental agencies, other international governments, and many local and international NGOs.

While the majority of emergency programs initiated in the aftermath of the quakes have been completed, longer-term rehabilitation and development activities continue to address the environmental, economic and socio-cultural problems that still exist in El Salvador today.

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For instance, El Salvador is still suffering the effects of the 2002 “coffee crisis,” which led to the lowest coffee prices in 100 years. The prolonged drought of 2002, which affected over 1.5 million people in Central America, further added to critical food shortages. The government has taken measures to ease this food shortage, and the World Food Programme (WFP) continues to closely monitor the nutritional situation and in coordination with USAID, is providing food rations to thousands, with a focus on children, who are most affected.

In addition, natural disasters continue to plague El Salvador. At the end of September 2002, Hurricane Isidore brought heavy rains to the southern coast, affecting nearly 3,000 families. In October 2003, the River Lempa Delta in the coffee-producing Pacific Coast, and the capital of San Salvador suffered from heavy rains, landslides, and localized flooding. According to the Latin American Red Cross, every year, hundreds of Latin Americans are killed in scattered incidents of floods and landslides such as those that occur in El Salvador. In response, agencies such as the Red Cross are working with local governments to minimize the risk posed to vulnerable communities that too often reside in precarious housing and have little access to health services. Other entities, such as the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) are working on regional strategies to strengthen prevention and control programs to fight health risks, such as dengue fever and pneumonia.

On March 21, 2004, after several months of a bitter campaign that was marred by sporadic violence, Antonio Saca of the right-wing ARENA party was elected El Salvador’s President. ARENA has ruled the country for the past 14 years. Saca defeated a former rebel commander of the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front). According to officials, these elections were the most intensely contested since the signing of the peace accords in 1992, which ended the 12-year civil war. President Saca has vowed to continue the policies of his pro-American predecessor, Francisco Flores.

## **II. PROGRAMMING OF MAILBOX FUNDS**

The Jewish Coalition raised a total of \$87,560, which was fully programmed through two local partner organizations with whom the Jewish Coalition for Hurricane Mitch Relief had worked: The Foundation for Self Sufficiency/La Coordinadora (FFSS) and the SHARE Foundation. In March 2001, each organization received \$31,430 to provide immediate housing reconstruction and emergency shelter. Two additional disbursements of \$16,046 and \$12,336 were provided to FFSS and SHARE respectively for continuing earthquake relief efforts (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) contributed the outstanding balance of \$3,682 to provide for the full requests of each partner).

## **III. PROJECT SUMMARIES**

### **A. Marketing Center for Sustainable Agricultural Crops—The Foundation for Self Sufficiency in Central America (La Coordinadora)**

La Coordinadora planned to build a marketing center in San Nicolas Lempa in the Bajo Lempa region of El Salvador, which would provide a fair and efficient venue through which community members could sell their locally produced items. Jewish Coalition support was used to cover the cost of designing the market, obtaining the necessary permits for construction, clearing and preparing the site, and purchasing the materials and equipment needed for construction.

Originally, the site was being built to provide a site for La Coordinadora's local farmers and fishermen to sell their products. As noted in previous reports, this initial plan had to be revised as several challenges arose as the site was being constructed. Two main obstacles were the town's decision to build a municipal market and a local foundation's plans to open a restaurant very close to the site of La Coordinadora's site, both of which would create overwhelming competition for the smaller market. While the basic design of the structure has remained the same as originally proposed, the purpose of the market has changed.

The site now hosts a plant nursery that is managed by La Coordinadora, and staffed by local farmers and other salespeople. The profits generated from the sale of the plants are put back into La Coordinadora and used to support the organization's agricultural and other activities. For instance, recent profits have been used to support the work of two agricultural experts after grants for their salaries had been fully utilized. Having worked with La Coordinadora for several years and being very familiar with regional practices, it would have been a huge loss for both the organization and the local projects to have had to hire and train new consultants. In addition, seedlings from the nursery are also sold to La Coordinadora's farmers at a reduced cost. In this way, the Coalition-supported market is contributing to La Coordinadora's self sufficiency, directly benefiting the organization's members, and providing jobs for local people.

The Coalition-supported market is being operated in a larger compound that La Coordinadora is being more fully developed. The full site is expected to include a restaurant, hotel, several small businesses and a recreational park to attract families and additional customers. With support from Coalition member AJWS, the San Nicolas site will also contain the equipment needed to transmit a community-based radio broadcast. La Coordinadora has moved the bulk of its administrative activities to this site, in an effort to cut down on costs such as rent and be closer to project activities. A parking area will also be built, as will a concrete wall to surround the site and ensure the center's security. La Coordinadora has applied for a loan from a private bank to realize this plan, which it estimates will cost a total of \$300,000, and is also awaiting approval from the local municipality.

It is hoped that once the activities of the full center have begun, the Coalition-supported site will also be used to sell local arts and crafts, as well as local produce.

According to the Foundation for Self Sufficiency, this center will be the cornerstone of La Coordinadora's income generating activities, and will assist more than any other activity in the economic sustainability of the organization.

#### B. Psychosocial Rehabilitation of Women and Children—SHARE Foundation

*Jewish Coalition support was given to SHARE and their local partners to conduct four psychosocial rehabilitation and outreach programs to help women and their families who had been affected by the earthquakes. Workshop activities in all communities included training in teaching relaxation techniques, trauma counseling and massage, meditation and art therapy. Training was also conducted in outreach and advocacy for domestic violence education and prevention, as reports indicate that following natural disasters, the rates of domestic violence increase.*

*Brief summaries of the projects follow. For further details, please refer back to the Activities Update of September 20, 2002.*

- Mental Health Project in Zacatecoluca, La Paz

*Jewish Coalition support enabled SHARE and the Melida Anaya Women's Movement (MAM) to provide workshops in which mental health promoters were trained to provide counseling for women and children.*

MAM formed seven support groups in six communities of Zacatecoluca, involving a total of 168 women and their children who had lost their homes during the earthquakes. Community mental health promoters, trained by a Nicaraguan professional and a British expert who had developed a therapy program for post-traumatic stress syndrome in Nicaragua after Hurricane Mitch, led the therapy sessions. Themes discussed were stress management, managing intrusive memories, emotional numbness and self-esteem. Alternative therapies included deep breathing exercises, relaxation, visualization, massage, meditation and concentration, Tai Chi and expressive art.

Participants reported experiencing a reduction in physical symptoms such as constant anxiety, nervousness, anguish, fear, chest pain, muscle tension, headaches, depression and insomnia. During the workshops, participants' attitudes shifted as the women learned to appreciate the benefits of companionship and sharing. They learned to control intrusive thoughts in relation to the earthquakes, as well as the country's civil war, and developed new coping mechanisms for everyday stress that helped improve relations with their husbands and children. Finally, participants reported that the workshops helped to improve their self-esteem, a benefit they recognized helps them in all aspects of life.

- Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Prevention of Gender-Related Violence in Zacatecoluca, La Paz

*Jewish Coalition support helped to provide training workshops facilitated by the Multi-Sector Association for Economic Development and Social Progress (CIDEP).*

With Coalition support, SHARE trained 33 promoters to work with CIDEP's network of anti-violence committees in 15 communities in La Paz. To improve community response to disasters, promoters were trained in preparing at-risk populations for emergencies, including damage and needs assessments and post-disaster community organization. As part of this effort, CIDEP trained local officials and professionals such as mayors and teachers in how to assist their communities in the event of a disaster. SHARE has reported that disaster "action plans" now exist in many communities.

Promoters also received training in mental health and women's rights, with an emphasis on the prevention of domestic violence. They then developed programs for adults and children to help them cope with the fear and insecurity brought on by the earthquakes, as well as the stresses of every day life. In total, project activities benefited over 790 women, 285 men and 957 children, helping many to regain their self-confidence and improve family relations.

In 2002, CIDEP focused on building the capacity of these committees to advocate for a government response to domestic violence and to continue efforts to build a "culture of non-violence." Results include the promulgation of municipal gender equity policy by the Zacatecoluca Mayor; an extensive radio, leaflet, and banner campaign; and the November 25, 2002, "Day Against Violence Against Women," in which over 75 people participated.

In addition to these campaigns, the CIDEP committees created a manual containing basic information about how to combat domestic violence. The manuals will assist existing committees as they continue their work, and will serve as tools for educating new committee members, teachers and other activists.

- Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Prevention of Gender-Related Violence in Jiquilisco and Berlin, Usulután

*The Association of Women for Dignity and Life (Las DIGNAS) conducted psychosocial rehabilitation programs in the villages of Jiquilisco and Berlin, Usulután Department. In August 2003, a JDC representative visited El Salvador and met with Las Dignas and several project participants, as noted below.*

The post-earthquake psychosocial rehabilitation program conducted by Las Dignas was a key element in the organization's 10-year campaign to eradicate gender and domestic violence. The model that was used improved the quality of women's personal lives and social networks, and assisted them in community organizing efforts.

With Coalition support, Las DIGNAS organized eight workshops for 180 mental health promoters, 111 of whom fully completed the training. The main goal was to provide the women with a basic understanding of the psychosocial impact of natural disasters, with a special focus on gender-related violence. Each workshop introduced new skills through drawing, discussion, songs, poems, stories, and puzzles, and these skills were then practiced on the participants' peers. The trainings also addressed legal issues, such as the national laws regarding gender related violence. Participants also reflected on their own experiences with trauma and gender-related violence, and the impact these situations had on their lives. During a meeting with the JDC representative, one participant explained that she had eight grandchildren in her care at the time of the earthquake. When she lost her house, she stated that she was "anguished." She said she felt comfortable talking about her losses with a group of women who were participating in the trainings.

During the trainings, it was reported that communication between husbands, wives, and families improved. A husband of a project participant explained that, when his wife began the trainings, he was nervous. Little by little, however, as she spoke to him about what she was learning, communication between them improved. Another participant added that there were men who were initially uncomfortable with the trainings. As the women became more and more vocal, however, men began to see that the purpose of the trainings was not to divide families, but to unite and strengthen them.

An additional component of Las DIGNAS' program was housing reconstruction, and as women were educated about health promotion, they were also trained in the basics of construction. In total, participants in the Coalition-supported psychosocial training rebuilt 88 homes. This program further enhanced women's rights as assistance for reconstruction required that deeds for the homes be in either the name of the woman or in the names of both the woman and her husband, something that is not common in El Salvador. One participant explained to the JDC representative that like many people, she had few financial resources when she lost her home in the earthquake. With Las DIGNAS assistance, she was able to reconstruct her home in a supportive, morale-boosting environment with a group of women with whom she had grown

emotionally in the psychosocial training sessions. She expressed to the JDC representative that she had learned important skills, and was now more empowered to help herself.

Many participants stated that the Coalition-supported psychosocial rehabilitation project helped to increase their confidence and feelings of self-worth, and also helped encourage their realization that women's rights should be defended. As a result, many of the participants have gone on to establish social action networks that focus on earthquake reconstruction, disaster preparedness, and the prevention of violence.

Las DIGNAS is continuing its efforts with support from, among others, JDC, which has agreed to fund a "Potable Water and Disaster Preparedness" project. Activities will include the installment of potable water into 88 homes that were constructed after the earthquakes, as well as the training of 25 women leaders in disaster preparedness.

- Strengthening Leadership and Rehabilitation for Women in Concepcion Barres and Armenia, Cuscatlan

*The Organization of Salvadoran Women (ORMUSA) provided trainings, therapy sessions, and creative arts therapy for women, children, and adolescents affected by the earthquakes. In total, Coalition supported activities benefited 172 women, 30 men, and 1,389 children.*

ORMUSA brought together 30 women leaders and 45 adolescents of Concepcion Barres and Armenia, Cuscatlan, in a unique project that addressed the community's post-earthquake psychosocial needs, and introduced the basic themes of community development and gender.

In four training sessions, the younger participants learned about safe sex, reproductive health issues and gender sensitivity, and used theater and puppet shows to educate their peers. These young participants conducted six performances that focused on intra-familial violence, drug addiction and violence against women.

Professional facilitators conducted 11 training sessions for women leaders in issues relating to community assessment and planning, community "risk mapping," gender and family violence, and self-esteem. These leaders then conducted a 5-session forum on similar topics, from which 171 people were referred for individual psychological support, 80 home visits were conducted to at-risk families, and 20 children were re-enrolled in school.

ORMUSA also held 30 family group therapy sessions with 12-15 participants in each group. Themes of post-traumatic stress disorder, self-esteem, violence, and disaster prevention were discussed. A municipal forum on gender and reconstruction was also held, providing for a municipality-wide discussion regarding concerns about reconstruction.

Finally, a Community Council was organized that, for the first time, is being headed by a woman. The Council advocates for an increase in both the quality and quantity of homes in El Salvador, particularly in the area affected by the 2001 earthquakes. One of the Council's initial successes was to secure funding from the international NGO Caritas to rebuild 50 homes that had been destroyed in the quakes. ORMUSA is continuing to advise the Council on development and gender issues.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

On behalf of the Jewish Coalition for El Salvador Earthquake Relief, we would like to extend our sincere appreciation for the continued efforts and support of the Coalition members.