



Honduras / Nicaragua—December 2007 with the UN World Food Program

INTRODUCTION

In December 2007 Cat Cora, president and founder of Chefs for Humanity, and I had the profound experience of traveling through Honduras and Nicaragua with the United Nations World Food Program (WFP). The World Food Program is the largest international food aid organization combating hunger in under-developed nations with severe food shortages. This was an amazing opportunity for us to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing hunger relief and see first hand the breath and scope of hunger that results from poverty, climate change and emergency situations such as hurricane Felix.

HONDURAS

Our first road trip took us through what is known as the DRY CORRIDOR in the southern region of Honduras. As a result of drought in the area – over 100,000 people are need of food, 20,000 children and more than 5,000 pregnant and nursing women are suffering from various degrees of acute under-nutrition. As we drove we noticed dried out fields of sorghum (ground and used in place of wheat) and maize – the major crops locals depend on for food and for income, we saw river beds completely devoid of water and we stopped to visit a family living by the side of the road. This family was fairly prosperous compared to others in the region – they had a small store, were harvesting a weakened crop of Maize for the owner of some land nearby and their men were able to earn a small wage digging sand for concrete in the dried out river bed by their home. The sorghum crop in the back of their home was barely making it – although the women felt they would get a small crop of feeding the family. This family's kitchen was separate from their house, in an enclosed stick structure. The kitchen consisted of a clay hearth area cover with a piece of time for cooking and one table with all of the utensils and dishes owned by the entire family clan. This family was lucky to have water electrically pumped up from a nearby river bed – but there as some concern over the cost of the electricity to run the pump and the family's ability to continue to afford that luxury. Other than the pump there was no other electricity on the property. The family uses a dug latrine for sanitation.

As we continued south form Tegucigulpa we stopped in the village of Pespire. The quaint cobbled streets and tiled roofs hid well the poverty that has hit this village. The "Xiomara De Micheletti" Community Child Centre provides a refuge for boys and girls vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition. This centre is a testament to the value of "community"— the incredible value achieved by creating a cooperative venture. The mothers of these children are mostly single and unemployed — relying on jobs like laundry and tortilla selling to make any

income at all. Together they have created a haven for themselves and for their children. The World Food Programme provides feeding for the children 3 times a day, 5 days a week, allowing the mothers not only time to go out to try and earn a living – but a relief from the constant task of trying to feed and maintain the health of their children. The women were so appreciative of the “community” they have developed and were learning how they could work together, help each other and lessen their fear of the future by just being together. Each mother had an opportunity to rotate into a “paid” in the Centre – earning \$100 a month. The other available mothers came and volunteered their time and support. We were able to pay the salary of one of the mothers who had not gotten paid for one month – another mother is owed over a year’s worth of salary as the Centre struggles to make ends meet. Cat helped to grill tortilla pancakes made with the World Food Programme’s corn soya blend – while we talked with the children and mothers, watched the children get weighed, and learned about the difficulties faced by these parents. The school needs a TV, educational toys, a black board and erasers.

We next visited the Mal Paso Health Centre and the village of Mal Paso – a 45 minute drive on a very bumpy, dry dirt road. Mal Paso has a population of 1484 people, 7.7 % of the children under 5 are affected by moderate and severe acute malnutrition. 1,158 people, including 94 children under five and 13 pregnant and nursing mothers, are receiving food assistance from the WFP. Rations for the home include rice, maize, vegetable oil and beans. A Corn and Soy blend mixed with vegetable oil and sugar is distributed to households with children and pregnant or nursing mothers as well and the beneficiary mothers receive training on the preparation of the mix. Cat joined in the stirring of the blend!

This health center also provides training on the prevention of respiratory diseases, diarrhea, tuberculosis treatment, birth and pregnancy control.

We visited a single mother with 8 children who resides in this community. There is no electricity, no access to water and no latrine. She walks 10 to 15 minutes to gather water in the one gathering container she has. She relies 100% on the food rations provided by the WFP. She is frustrated and scared for her future. There is currently no male living on her property to help with repairs on her roof, there is a mud floor. A simple hearth covered with a sheet tin, two frayed hammocks for sleeping and one pile of clothes is all that exist for security for her and her family.

Diane Burstein, Acting Director
Chefs for Humanity