

Village Update

Nuevo San Miguel Mitontic, México



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Hope for the future shines through the enthusiasm and wisdom of 20-year old María Ordóñez Méndez. She is the daughter of Mariano Ordóñez and Rosalina Mendez, who are two enthusiastic participants of the Agros program. Speaking Spanish well and an active participant in the women's handicraft project, María surpasses the stereotypes placed on indigenous women of rural Mexico and serves as a transforming example for other women, her sisters and her parents. During the last visit from the Sammamish Presbyterian service team, she and her sister directed a Tsotsil class to teach the visitors basic words and phrases in the region's native language. María's motivation and collaboration with others is the key to her success and are sure to bring powerful change in San Miguel in the generations to come.

Community Organization

In February the families received a visit from the fourth Sammamish Presbyterian service team. During their five days in the community, the team visited the fields, participated in activities with the youth, painted the bases of fruit trees to protect against insects, built stoves, helped build a worm farm, vaccinated animals, participated in Tsotsil classes and attended church services in the community. They also visited the ill in the community to pray for and accompany them through this difficult time before the passing of beloved community member Elena Mendez.

The community leadership is helping to keep the list of program participants updated and is also monitoring monthly the progression of the yearly Village Plan, to ensure the activities are being carried out as scheduled.

Leadership development is an important theme emphasized throughout the goals outlined in the Village Plan. The families have identified other values as well, including conflict resolution. In March fifteen women and three members of the community leadership participated in a conflict resolution workshop led by Agros Mexico board member, Eduardo Rodriguez.

Water is a vital resource for the community. Agros is collaborating and forming alliances with other organizations dedicated to projects that will secure a clean, healthy water supply for the families of San Miguel.

Land Ownership

The Agros staff continues to collaborate with governmental health institutions to ensure proper nutrition in the community. In February and March two workshops as part of the Better Life program were held to encourage families, especially those with young children, to plant vegetable gardens. Twenty-five women participated and as a result, the families have planted 8 garden beds with various vegetables, including radishes, squash, cabbage, onions and cilantro.

Housing and Infrastructure

Three families recently finished building efficient cookstoves for their homes. To date, 24 stoves have been built, with a final goal of thirty. The remaining six will be built throughout the course of the year. Because the demand for the cookstoves is so high, ten additional stoves are planned for 2008.

The families and community leadership of San Miguel have begun to build a community center where they will hold meetings and other various events. Last March, Agros supported them with construction materials to build the center's walls. Further contributions are expected and once built, the families will coordinate with the local government to establish a library in the new center.

Sustainable Economic Growth

The twelve women continue with the artisan textile project embroidering linen blouses with indigenous designs and fashions typical of the Tuxtla region. They hope to increase production in the coming months in order to sell their work in the Tuxtla market through three volunteer vendors who monitor the product sales and promote project innovation. The majority of the women participating in the project were able to achieve their repayment goals for the months of January and March.

Animal husbandry is an important value to the farmers of San Miguel who recently vaccinated 72 cows, 12 horses, 10 lambs, 11 pigs and 120 birds. The families have developed a calendar to track the animals' vaccinations in a timely manner.

In January and February, several families applied for and received loans for irrigation materials, fruit trees, fences and various other products for crop diversification. The loans total to \$1,213, and will be repaid over the course of the next 8 to 12 months. The families would like to build their production portfolio through increased participation and diversification of projects and small businesses.

Nutritional security, crop diversity and the sustainable management of resources is important to San Miguel. By growing more fruit and vegetables, reforesting cleared areas, engaging in animal husbandry, utilizing micro-credit in a responsible manner, and emphasizing training and organization, the families are following the programmed activities in their yearly Village Plan as well as ensuring the sustained development of their community.

Community Education and Training

Agros understands that education is a priority for the community. Together, Agros and San Miguel support their children by acquiring and providing the preschool and elementary school with additional school supplies. However, due to the harvest season, more and more students in elementary school are missing class as families leave the community to find work. In response, the teachers and leadership of San Miguel are hoping to discuss with the families the importance of education and how to express these values to their children.

The women participating in the textile project recently received training that will help expand their abilities and improve the quality of their projects, two important aspects to integrate in the small textile business planned for the near future.

The health and educational institutions present in the community are continuing to dialogue and collaborate with the families of San Miguel. They foresee an increase in the families' involvement and are working with the youth of the community to provide field trips, workshops and audiovisual materials that provoke reflection and critical thought of their current circumstances.