



PROJECT

Exchange Of Knowledge and Experience
Among Women From The South



APRODER´s experience in replicating
organic gardens with woman in
Chontales, Nicaragua.

Case of study

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What is the PICEMS Project?

The project for exchange of knowledge and experience working with women from the South will be abbreviated in this document as PICEMS and in this instance “women from the South” refers to women in Nicaragua, although this is a model project that could be expanded throughout Latin America. It is an initiative being implemented by FUPROSOMUNIC (the Spanish acronym for The Solar Women Foundation of Nicaragua), with the aim of expanding and reproducing knowledge about the use of solar energy and other sustainable alternatives to women who are part of other organizations in Nicaragua and other countries in the region of Central America.



The main objective of the PICEMS Project is to mitigate the effects of climate change and increase food security for women in the region, thereby contributing to the empowerment of women and to the practice of sustainable alternatives that will generate positive impacts on the economy, health, the environment and which will improve gender equity.

This project is not something new, but is supported by 16 years of community work on the part of FUPROSOMUNIC. Working with this organization, over **1,000 women** have built at least that many solar ovens, **370 solar dehydrators** for fruits, leaves, species and seeds. They have also learned about other sustainable practices to improve nutrition by way of **organic vegetable gardens and beekeeping**. These practices have been recognized nationally and internationally as effective ways to improve the quality of life for low-income women and their families in Nicaragua

Introduction

This document is an outline of the achievements of the first year of the PICEMS project, which was financed by the **Focus on Women Foundation**. Although **FUPROSOMUNIC** has been working in Nicaragua for 16 years, the current effort has been to combine various projects into an overall training for women beneficiaries. The pilot phase began in 2019 and was based on FUPROSOMUNIC's vision of sharing and multiplying knowledge in regards to the use of solar energy and other sustainable alternatives.

As part of this work, several organizations with similar objectives were selected so that, once trained, the leaders of the target communities could replicate what they learned. From the workshops and trainings which were conducted, important lessons were learned and this led to better implementation of the project, with adjustments to its objectives and indicators. Follow-up with the organizations that have received training and evaluating the outcome for initial goals has been key to adapting and improving the project.

From Theory to Practice



From the beginning of the project in May 2019, FUPROSOMUNIC has worked with a **"Theory of Change"** methodology, based on experience with other projects implemented in other parts of Nicaragua and the impact achieved by those for women beneficiaries.

The first step in implementing the pilot phase was to select social organizations and groups of women that would work together on issues related to the objectives of the PICEMS Project. In order to participate in the workshops, each organization had to select women leaders with a multiplier capacity, meaning they could learn and teach the same techniques to other women.

Once the women participants had been selected, the following rules were established:

1. Leaders of organizations interested in acquiring this knowledge (solar cookers, dryers, vegetable gardens and beekeeping) were able to participate in an intensive two to four week training; with three or four topics covered of sustainable alternatives.
2. After training, these leaders would be able to return to their communities to replicate this knowledge with other beneficiaries, relying on follow-up the support from FUPROSOMUNIC (mentoring).



3. Once the follow-up work was completed, the organizations would have the capacity to continue the practice without further support from FUPROSOMUNIC.

In practice, the results were that six of the eight organizations participating in the pilot phase were unable to send their beneficiaries for more than a week and not all were able to replicate the knowledge and skills that they acquired. The reasons were varied. Although all participants were interested in learning, not all had the resources to implement what they learned once back home.

One of the organizations that showed the most interest during this process was the *Association for Progress and Rural Development (APRODER)*, an organization located in the Chontales region of Nicaragua. Participants had a high level of interest in implementing organic techniques (bio-intensive gardens) for the production of vegetables and thus contributing to the food security of the women and families working with the organization. APRODER also demonstrated

CASE STUDY PICEMS

As a practical example of how the PICEMS project works and the lessons learned to date, the *Association for Progress and Rural Development (APRODER)* was selected as one of the first organizations trained by *FUPROSOMUNIC*. It was also one of the first organizations to replicate the knowledge acquired in these trainings.

APRODER has an impact on rural communities in Boaco, Chontales, Rio San Juan and the Southern Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. Working together with the families it serves, the organization promotes the creation of family gardens, the production of pita crafts, the commercialization of food products, reforestation, as well as offering training in gender equality issues.

This study details the work carried out with APRODER working together with FUPROSOMUNIC, the results of the experience, the lessons learned in the process, as well as the conclusions reached.

1. Training development



a) Bio-intensive organic agriculture

In September 2019, APRODER selected 25 women leaders from the various communities they serve to attend the first theoretical and practical training on the principles of bio-intensive organic agriculture.

This training was held in the community of El Juste in the municipality of San Pedro de Lóvago, located in the department of Chontales.

The focus was the introduction of the bio-intensive method and its principles. As a result of the workshops, three excavated double beds were built as examples of the techniques being taught, three organic compost piles were made, qualitative soil analysis was carried out, and organic pest controls were explained.

b) Use of solar energy

In November 2019, a workshop on solar energy was held at a different location, with the participation of eight organizations. Three of the women coordinators from APRODER took part in this training. They learned both in theory and practice about the construction of solar ovens and solar dehydrators, as well as techniques for processing and dehydration of various food products, both for their own consumption and for sale.

This training ended with a fair at the EcoSolar Centre demonstration farm in Nicaragua, and the women from the El Juste Cooperative of APRODER also participated in this. The experience was also useful for women who had not participated in the prior workshop since it gave them an opportunity to learn more about the socio-environmental projects being implemented by FUPROSOMUNIC, such as solar ovens, bio-intensive gardens and the SODIS method of water purification, among other topics. The enthusiasm was impressive and very motivating for the instructors.



2. Follow-up

FUPROSOMUNIC, as part of the monitoring and follow-up for its beneficiaries, always makes house-to-house visits to assess difficulties, evaluate needs and receive feedback from participants. This method has allowed us to make adjustments in our work, based on the needs of the women we serve.

As part of this follow-up for this particular project, *in January 2020* a visit was made to communities in San Pedro de Lóvago and Muelle de los Bueye. This was in order to monitor progress in the replication of what people learned during the workshops. During this visit, it was found that the women leaders of APRODER were already replicating the bio-intensive organic techniques with at least 10 groups of women, organized and made up of between 5 and 10 women from different communities.



In the El Juste Community, it was observed that of the three bio-intensive beds and three composting beds built during the workshop held in September, so far two cultivation cycles had been carried out, and that the three beds were now planted with a variety of vegetables that includes, chilli, onions, garlic, cherry tomatoes, large tomatoes, aubergines, coriander and carrots.

During the same visit, the women leaders expressed the need to learn more about soil improvement and types of pest control that won't contaminate the soil.

3. Reinforcement training

In February 2020, leaders from various communities assisted by APRODER requested and received training in the preparation of organic fertilizers for soil improvement and organic pest prevention for growing vegetables.

The leaders took the opportunity to share with FUPROSOMUNIC their experience in working with young people and in the marketing of their products at local farmers' markets.

4. Follow-up by virtual mentoring



As a direct effect of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, virtual monitoring has been provided to this group of women who continue to work in their bio-intensive gardens.

The PICEMS Project Coordinator from FUPROSOMUNIC maintains personal contact with each beneficiary. Telephone consultations have been used to set up a mentoring system (someone who helps and advises beneficiaries over a period of time) so as to facilitate the work and multiplication of these gardens.

Results of the experience with APRODER

One of the tangible results of the experience has been that the products grown in the bio-intensive gardens, based on training received, have been sold in the local farmers' market.

Two of the participants in the project, Rafaela Espinoza and Humberto Espinoza, offer clear testimony of this. They have received all the training provided by FUPROSOMUNIC and now share their knowledge and products with their neighbors.

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It is very important for us to have received the bio-intensive agriculture workshop, because now we are growing organically and production is much better. In the first planting we grew cucumbers in a bed and got 100 cucumbers which we sold for 5 cordobas each.

Also, when we were invited to the fair, Rafaela and I had the opportunity to see the crops at the CEN demonstration farm. This motivated us to do our work better and as you can see, we have production of chilli peppers, onions, carrots, tomatoes and sunflowers. The sunflower flowers attracted attention in our whole neighborhood. Now we have seeds that we are going to share with all the beneficiaries.

We are also ready to return to the demonstration farm because we want to learn more about the work of the organization.

Many thanks to FUPROSOMUNIC for their support.

The Espinoza family.

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In June 2020, the director and the technical team of APRODER began the construction of a new demonstration bio-intensive organic garden so that the women who participated in the training provided by FUPROSOMUNIC could continue to learn about bio-intensive organic techniques and how to cultivate without use of chemicals, thereby saving irrigation water and ensuring healthy nutrition.



Lessons learned:

It is important that prior to a general training involving several organizations, individual trainings are provided as an introduction. This strengthens the commitment of the participants and the link with FUPROSOMUNIC.

Individual trainings allow the beneficiary organization to arrange the topics according to their interests, and this makes it easier to encourage them to participate and to replicate the knowledge that is acquired. It is not necessary to hold extensive trainings of more than one week, but it is important that during the individual training, the participants feel topics are important to their lives.

The minimum participation in the workshops should be two leaders per organization. This facilitates mutual support for the development and replication of what is learned. During the follow-up phase, FUPROSOMUNIC must make at least two face-to-face visits to the area where the beneficiaries are working. This means an increase in the project's budget.

Once the leaders put into practice what they have learned in the first workshops, they almost always feel the need to continue with new learning that complements their knowledge. It is necessary to draw up a program of reinforcement that will allow their experiences to be successfully developed and made use of.

The telephone, as a traditional means of communication, is effective in maintaining a direct link with the local coordinators of the other organizations and in following up with the leaders indirectly.



Conclusions

We have seen that there is a lot of motivation on the part of the families who are served by APRODER. There is great interest in learning about other sustainable alternatives associated with solar energy and it is hoped that the gardens established to date can produce surpluses of vegetable that can be dehydrated for conservation, consumption or trade.

It has been of great importance that the women participants who are directly involved now also grow their own vegetables. This is why we need provide individual training to the organizations, so that the women can learn from us but apply what they learn in their own homes.

Community leaders and women who already have tangible results from their gardens are a motivating example for those just starting out with these project, but constant learning is required to obtain optimal crops.

Further training in bio-intensive organic techniques for the next stages of the project should last at least three days.

Continuous visits should be made to the beneficiaries of the projects and they should be encouraged to continue using the techniques taught in the trainings, so that they can see and obtain better results with their bio-intensive gardens.

*¿Do you feel inspired,
would you want to
participate in PICEMS?*

Visit our website for more information.



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