VISIT TO PROJECTS IN NICARAGUA AND DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

MARCH 08 TO 14, 2009

Joan Mac Donald

OBJECTIVES OF THIS MISSION

In Nicaragua

a. Evaluate on the field the results of 2007 and 2008 projects
b. Analyze with local partners the context and eventual problems to start this year´s projects, and eventually adjust them to new conditions in order to be more effective. .
c. Identify main achievements and problems of the experience started last year to open a realistic alternative to shelter the poor, which implied a coordinated work of 3 NGOs and a foundation that builds prefabricated houses.
d. Share at academic level the experience gathered by SELAVIP in other countries.

In Dominican Republic

a. Re-establish contact with groups and entities who had worked with SELAVIP some years ago.
b. Revise results and impact of projects 2-01 and 2-02 implemented in 2002 and 2003 (US$ 120.000). .
c. Analyze with Ciudad Alternativa the start of project 20/08 and check on site its eventual impact.
d. Share and discuss with relevant actors the experience of SELAVIP.

CONTENT

1 NICARAGUA 2
1.1 FOLLOW UP ON PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED IN 2007 AND 2008 2
1.1.1 Projects 15/07 (FUNDESONIC) and 16 /07 (MASINFA) 2
1.1.2 Projects 17/06 y 14 /07 (HABITAR) 2
1.2 PROJECTS TO BE INITIATED 2
1.2.1 HABITAR (Project 14 /08) 2
1.2.2 MASINFA (Project 15 /08) 3
1.2.3 FUNDESONIC (Proyecto 16/08) 3
1.2.4 Meeting COLMENA 3
1.2.5 Projections of our work in Nicaragua 3
2 DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 4
2.1 PROJECTS FINISHED SOME YEARS AGO 4
2.1.1 "Centro de Estudios Sociales Padre Juan Montalvo" (Projects 2/01 y 2/02) 4
2.2 NEW PROJECT 4
2.2.1 Ciudad Alternativa (Project 20/08) 4
3 SOCIALIZATION 5
3.1 NICARAGUA 5
3.1.1 Open lecture at UCA University 5
3.1.2 Meeting with academics 5
3.2 DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 5
3.2.1 Contribution to the discussion of a future Law on Housing 5
3.2.2 New initiatives with the Jesuit community 5

1 NICARAGUA

From Monday 8 to Wednesday 12 we held several meetings with our counterparts in Managua and Masaya, visited informal settlements and worked with the University to cover all items of this mission.

1.1 Follow up on projects implemented in 2007 and 2008

1.1.1 Projects 15/07 (FUNDESONIC) and 16 /07 (MASINFA)

VISIT TO HOUSES IN MASAYA BUILT WITH "COLMENA" TECHNOLOGY

During a meeting held in MASINFA headquarters in Masaya the Chairperson informed about all activities developed and described the development of project 16/07 in *Barrio Héroes y Mártires*. Problems to initiate this year´s project were also discussed. FUNDESONIC, who also had worked in that city, also attended this meeting. The group of 70 families who had accessed housing in both projects organized a lively celebration with dances and local music. During our visit to numerous families in their new homes we could notice that their new homes substantially improved their quality of life. They are very poor but they manage to extend and complete this basic shelter. Projects really reached the poor and families continue in touch with the NGOs and their CBOs. MASINFA will continue working in Masaya in 2009, while FUNDESONIC moved to a "barrio" in Managua, the capital city.

1.1.2 Projects 17/06 y 14 /07 (HABITAR)

Visits included several settlements in Managua where houses were built in the past. The walls of houses built by the first project were covered with metal sheets and are in very good shape (A). The second project was implemented using 2 different prefabricated concrete walls (B and C).

1.2 Projects to be initiated

NGOs follow different paths to implement each project during 2009. .

1.2.1 HABITAR (Project 14 /08)

A very positive achievement of former projects is that HABITAR managed to set up savings groups as suggested by SELAVIP, so they now have their own resources and partial sustainability. They are now facing problems to raise additional funds to the resources provided by SELAVIP. Therefore they are considering the following alternatives: i) a lower cost technology/standard as used in 2007; ii) apply to a public subsidy of US$ 600 for housing improvement and look for additional funds to build a better quality unit similar to 2008. As getting the subsidies and complementary funds is uncertain, a deadline was set on May 15 to decide if this last alternative should be discarded.

1.2.2 MASINFA (Project 15 /08)

Results obtained last year with the prefabricated units are highly valued by MASINFA so they will continue working in Masaya with smaller units provided by COLMENA at a cost of US$ 950. The effective collaboration established during 2008 with the local government lead to street pavements and other improvements in the neighbourhoods, so they will continue building on a solid relation with the Municipality.

1.2.3 FUNDESONIC (Proyecto 16/08)

SHACK OF FAMILY WHO WILL PARTICIPATE IN PROJECT 16/08

FUNDESONIC will apply a self-building strategy. This is a challenge for the NGO for it is the first time they will use that alternative. For families with problems to build their homes they will promote community work. They are working together with another NGO specialized on social work and capacity building to complement their skills. Families have their own sites in *Barrio Los Laureles Sur (Sector Israel Galeano)* which is located in the outskirts of Managua. The participating families were chosen by the community and ready to start building their homes. Results will strongly depend on the ability of FUNDESONIC to facilitate and support this process with the help of CAPRI.

1.2.4 Meeting COLMENA

COLMENA produces prefabricated housing components and then assembles them on the field. The participation of the family or community is also possible during the work on site. This entity could help to open an alternative way of addressing the problem of the poorest of poor in this country where public programs are weak and low income sectors rarely can access social housing. As an industry, COLMENA needs NGOs to develop skills and speed to manage complex procedures required to qualify for tax exemption to purchase building materials for social housing. This tax exemption makes possible to substantially reduce the cost of a housing unit, reaching costs below US$ 1.000 for an incremental unit.

1.2.5 Projections of our work in Nicaragua

During our final meeting all 3 NGOs mentioned that their experience with the projects could be considered successful. They could learn and explore different approaches than those that prevail among governmental sectors and conventional donors. They will try to improve their skills to obtain tax exemption. MASINFA wants to make relations with COLMENA and the Municipality work even better than before. FUNDESONIC is aware of problems faced in the past but will now use experience to be more effective to reach the poor. HABITAR also expressed that this was an opportunity to work with the very poor, open their minds to new alternatives and start savings processes of great potential. They are cautious about the possibility to reduce size and standards of the houses in case they do not have resources to build 18 sq.m. units.

SELAVIP informs that the visit made possible to assess the fine work done by each project team. They all benefited very poor families, a fact that is rare in Nicaragua. But there still are at least three challenges ahead. Real affordability needs to be secured in the near future so the poorest of poor can access these units. One step in that direction is the success HABITAR had in promoting local resources by putting in place savings systems among the poor. But the cost of housing units is still beyond possibilities of most families (around US$ 2.500). Until now there have been substantial matching funds to cover the gap, but now that these funds are no longer available the initiatives lost sustainability. It is necessary to look for realistic alternatives considering high poverty levels that prevail in this country, the growing housing deficit and the discrete amount of public resources that are geared towards social housing. Another challenge is to consolidate coordination of SELAVIP funded projects to create synergy and visibility. Finally, the NGOs should not turn away from prefabrication of components if they want to scale up into a strategy that impacts many households and is recognized at a national level. There are still many tasks to be completed to build a new approach to shelter the

poor in Nicaragua, and to put in place effective, realistic and sustainable programs like the ones SELAVIP furthers in other countries.

2 DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

We had an active agenda in Santo Domingo. We discussed and visited the project that had been funded by SELAVIP some years ago and also worked with our collaborators from *Ciudad Alternativa* to initiate a new project and visited 2 out of 3 settlements where the project will be implemented. New possibilities to work with the Jesuit community were also explored. We could assess the extreme precariousness of shelter of the poor in urban sectors, and some good possibilities to extend our support in the future.

2.1 Projects finished some years ago

2.1.1 *"Centro de Estudios Sociales Padre Juan Montalvo"* (Projects 2/01 y 2/02)

INCREMENTAL UNITS IN BARRIO TAMARINDO

We visited the project named "Housing against eviction" implemented in 2002 and 2003 with SELAVIP funds. Incremental units were provided to families originally living in risk areas of the centrally located *La Ciénaga* settlement. We assume that the original purpose of avoiding eviction could not be accomplished, for the new houses were built far away from there. But still, families were able to improve and extend their houses and live in an adequate environment. The project also failed to consolidate a working area on housing and urban issues for the Centre now focuses on other issues. This visit made clear the importance of setting in place regular follow up procedures as we have now, for we were not informed about these changes in time. We hope that some initiatives discussed with Fr. Mario Serrano s.j. - Director of CES- can create a new space for housing projects in the future.

2.2 New project

2.2.1 Ciudad Alternativa (Project 20/08)

PRECARIOUS SHELTER TO BE IMPROVED IN *LOS PLATANITOS*

33 houses will be improved for very poor families in three settlements. Floors, roofs or walls will be repaired. The persons in charge were motivated and have technical skills to start the project. The main problem could be the critical state of existing houses, as they could collapse when improvements are built in. The families we visited live in extremely poor conditions. Permanent communication with *Ciudad Alternativa* will show how they deal with these challenges. Preliminary activities are completed so the project can star when funds arrive.

3 SOCIALIZATION

3.1 Nicaragua

3.1.1 Open lecture at UCA University

A lecture was organized to share the experience of SELAVIP with students, academics and professionals working with social housing. The purposes of sharing lessons learned and to promote the idea of working for the poor among young students was fully accomplished.

3.1.2 Meeting with academics

Another meeting was held with the academic staff of the Departments of Social Sciences and Architecture of the University, to explore their interest in organizing a post graduate course on strategies to alleviate urban poverty with the Chilean *Universidad Alberto Hurtado* and ASUJAL - network of Jesuit universities. Communication will go on and coordination with ASUJAL (Venezuela) will be furthered by both organizations.

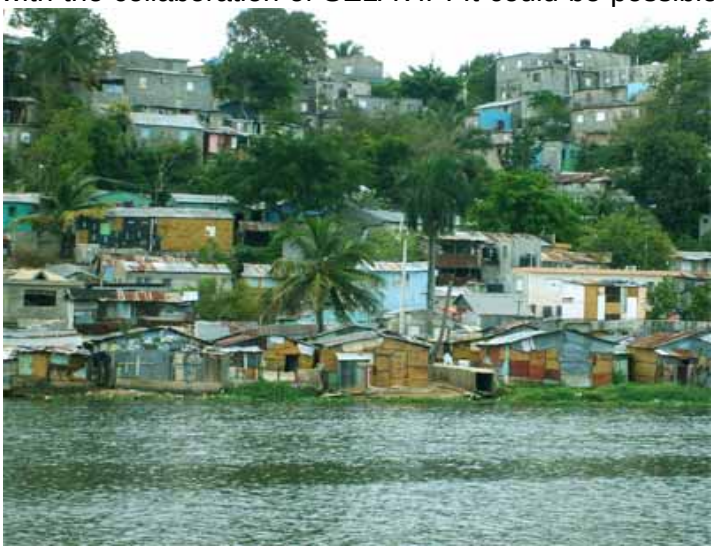
3.2 Dominican Republic

3.2.1 Contribution to the discussion of a future Law on Housing

SELAVIP exchanged ideas about the housing situation that prevails in this country with public and private entities in a Seminar organized by *Ciudad Alternativa*. A new legislation about housing, habitat and informal settlements is being discussed, and the experience of SELAVIP contributed to show how the issue is addressed in other countries and regions.

3.2.2 New initiatives with the Jesuit community

A group of Jesuit priests who live in *La Ciénaga* (the most extended slum in Santo Domingo) came up with interesting proposals to improve the slum with the collaboration of SELAVIP. It could be possible to install a workshop and prefabricate housing components similar to COLMENA in Nicaragua. As the Diocese of *San Juan de la Maguana* (near the border with Haiti) has this equipment, the first step would be to find out if they still use it or maybe can send it to Santo Domingo. Fr. José Núñez from JRS offered to contact the Diocese and maybe ask for some houses to be sent over to see if they work in *La Ciénaga*.



Our conclusion is that it is possible and urgent for SELAVIP to support groups in this country with acute problems of poverty and homelessness.

Santiago, Chile, March 2009