



**Heartland International Mission**  
*UCA and Community Project*

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When: May 2, 2009

They arrived about 8:30: two teachers (Mario and Ricardo) and 7 students. We left around 9 in two pickups... theirs and ours. We met in Cerna at the school. (And I must say that the school is a fabulous meeting place... lots of space in the shade and off the dirt but in the open air for beautiful ventilation.

The initial meeting was well attended. Lots of folks from both Cerna and Centro attended. Ricardo spoke first to the entire group: explaining who they were and the kinds of work they have done in other communities and briefly explaining the process of the diagnostic to figure out how best to accompany them. He explained REALLY well – using simple language and analogies... we are different groups (the school committee, women's group, youth etc) but all part of the whole (like a body – if the heart does not function well – the whole body suffers). So we all need to work together in this – and find a project not just for a product but for the benefit of the community as a society...

Ricardo explained that they have no political affiliation – they are not here to give money... but to help by accompanying – to find a manner to help economically and that they are looking for the opinions of everyone and to get ideas for potential projects.

He really relates well with the community.

And Mario emphasized the need for their opinions because those opinions are vital to the future work.

They divided the people into two groups: men and women. Explaining that they would begin this relationship with the diagnostic (and why the need for a diagnostic and exactly how they were going to go about it and how important it would be for the people to really talk and not be timid about speaking...so they can really figure out the needs and capabilities of the community).

There were over 40 women and over 30 men. (And lots of children). One teacher went with each group and several students led the questions. Some of the questions were simple – some required more thought and opinion:

How many children in the house?

Where do they go to school – up to what grade?

Where do you get your money for the things you need that you cannot grow?

Where do you buy those things?

What are your crops – what else can you grow here?

How long do your crops last your family –do you have enough to sell?

Do you have family in the States or other countries? (I raised my hand on this one coz no one else did - until I did... then several said that yes... they have) Do they send money?

Where is your water source?

Etc.

It took a little while for the women to open up. They seemed shy at first but as time passed and the students asked people directly (looking into their faces) they began to respond. They did a good job of asking a variety of people. And as the women were being listened to, they spoke a little more. And always – if asked directly – eyeball to eyeball – the women answered. If the question was thrown out generically – it took longer for someone to volunteer an answer



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(although ANY of them could have answered any of the questions – there is a great shyness at first – but I think this will get better with time as the community gets to know this group of young people)

Then they asked about La Geo: if they help the community with projects or funds for projects? This is where Milagro began talking. And talking. (About 10 minutes worth about how bad they are – the pollutants etc, who works, who benefits, who suffers etc ... she totally spoke the truth – but I didn't think this was the time nor place for quite that much detail – my personal 2 cents - sorry). And as more questions were asked about other things after this question, she jumped in to answer (too fast I thought) if no one spoke up immediately. I honestly was trying to think of a polite way to ask her to be an observer rather than a responder after she answered several more of the community questions ...

But then they continued with more questions – facing others to again ask specific people:

What are the worst health problems?

How is trash disposed of?

Does every family have a latrine?

Finally ending with 'what do you think the basic needs are? What kinds of projects do you think we need to come up with?

Medicines (preventive, natural medicines for symptoms)

Agricultural assistance (the need for fertilizer)

Electricity

They were hesitant to say more – Mario reiterated that it is important to come up with LOTS of suggestions so they can really talk about them and possibly integrate several of the needs into one big project.

For example: how about a chicken or egg project? A clothing project? Different crops?  
etc

When all was done – and the time was late (over 3 hours have passed)

The UCA folk brought refreshments for everyone... only problem was, they were expecting maybe 20... so what they brought (cookies, juice, frozen juices) people got one or the other instead of all 3. Sara – one of the students, who was also present at the Pastoral House meeting, said they would be better prepared next time!

I think the initial meeting with the communities went very well. I think as more are held, the people will become less hesitant to speak as they get to know the students.

My hope is that they will buy into this and realize that there will be work involved – and the process has to be very deliberate to be self sustaining. And that the community really needs to be involved in the discussions and throughout the entire process. I think the potential is great!

I think the level of maturity and commitment of the students is quite high. They came off as kind, earnest, caring and truly interested in what the people had to say.