

# Empowering Women One Community at a Time



## EDUCATIONAL TOYS FROM FALLEN TIMBER NICARAGUA



### Project Description

La Esperanza Cooperative, whose members consist of the Miskito indigenous women's group, implemented the project, which focuses on the production of educational toys such as puzzles, accessories and related crafts from timber felled by Hurricane Felix. In addition to raising awareness about the impact and importance of forests, the project promotes good forest harvesting practices. The project encourages women to explore their creativity and innovative capabilities with the incentive of additional income, regardless of the disaster experienced by the community.



### Background

Traditionally, the role of women in the community has been limited to running the household, minding the family, planting, weeding, etc. In recent years, though, some local organizations in the development arena have started promoting the value of women in society at large and an appreciation of their work.

Prior to Hurricane Felix, the Butku community had vast areas of forest that they exploited under a management plan. In 2007, Hurricane Felix devastated most of Central America, including Nicaragua. This badly damaged the forest, yet afforded the community the opportunity to learn to use the forest without cutting it down. La Esperanza Cooperative seized upon this. Consequently, the community has learned that, instead of selling wood only as raw material, it can use less wood and earn more if the wood is worked and presented as a finished product – in this case, toys and other products. In addition, the community is learning how to reforest, an urgent task in view of the current deterioration of the forest.



### Implementation

The initial grant for this project was used to build a carpentry shop serving as the cooperative's work area. The second phase revolved around the expansion of this workshop into a tri-level work, storage, and stockpiling area. The workshop also serves as a venue for local community meetings and training sessions.

The key activities in implementing the project were:



**Implementing Organization:** La Esperanza Cooperative

**Location:** Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua

**SGP Contribution:** US\$ 13,800

**In-cash Co-financing:** US\$ 2,300

HIVOS (Dutch Corporation): \$13,800

UNDP Contribution: US\$ 15,000 (first phase)

**In-kind Co-financing:**

**Number of Beneficiaries:** 24 people directly, 168 people indirectly

**Duration:** November 2008 – January 2010

1. Technical training for making toys and other wooden products
2. Training in financial and project management and in management of the cooperative
3. Construction of a carpentry shop
4. Training and raising of awareness about the value of the forest
5. Development and implementation of a business plan

Cooperative members use wood from the trees felled by Hurricane Felix to produce accessories and toys, thereby increasing the use of leftover wood, which is normally left to rot.

Although income generated from this project is small, the women of the community produced the toys. This has provided the community with educational toys, school desks and chairs that the community otherwise would not be able to afford. In addition, efforts to raise awareness have helped the community to understand the value of the forest and thus the harm of unchecked deforestation. As a result, the community is helping to restore the forest rather than using it for agriculture.

The project developed women's capacity for implementation as well as their creative skills. It also taught them to be organized as a group, elevating their prominence in the community.

## Environmental Impact

This project sensitized the community to the wider value of the forest. The Cooperative also established a Pine Forest Protection Programme, which consisted of reforestation activities and fire prevention.

## Socio-Economic Impact

The project generated jobs and income sufficient to motivate women to find and use wood that otherwise would have been left to rot.

## Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

La Esperanza Cooperative consists of both men and women. The project gave the community a sense of ownership. Particularly, it afforded women the opportunity to assume leadership roles and to bear responsibility for implementation, which increased the women's self-esteem. The community as a whole saw these women go beyond their traditional role as homemakers.

## Sustainability

The project's sustainability consists in fostering the community's capacity for self-organization, promoting greater participation and commitment, and strengthening project management and technical skills.

## Replication and Upscaling

The community was able to convert a disaster into an income-generating opportunity. This project can be replicated in post-disaster areas, thereby providing motivation and greater optimism within communities, especially among women.

## Lessons Learned

The project would have been more successful if the community had been better organized and if the commitment and participation of all members had been ensured. Local authorities should also be consulted so that they will support the marketing of the finished products. Thus, basic structures and capacity must be in place already at the inception of the project to ensure the project's success. Such success includes activities to build capacity for project management and small-scale entrepreneurship.

## Contribution to the MDGs

MDG 1	■ Provided alternative sources of income for women in the community
MDG 2	■ Provided children with an innovative way of learning through access to educational toys
MDG 3	■ Enabled women not only to express creativity through the production of educational toys, but also to generate additional income
MDG 7	■ Increased awareness about the impact and value of forests for sustainability and livelihood ■ Promoted good forest harvesting practices in the community