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CONTACT US: LACEIBAMFI@GMAIL.COM

We know that when you give, you're not giving to us, but through us...

We're excited you have decided to take a closer look at La Ceiba. We're sending you this newsletter to give you a brief overview of La Ceiba's progress over the past few months but, please always feel free to contact us if you have any questions or comments!

I have visited the village of Siete de Abril, a village outside of the city of El Progreso, Honduras, three times since my first involvement with the Human Rights Club as a freshman at Mary Washington. Since then, I have seen the creation of Students Helping Honduras and become a member of the IAP Initiative partnership with the Economic Department (see Christine Exley's article). The poverty in the village is devastating and many of the efforts previously put forth did not necessarily appear to be sustainable. There

have been some amazing efforts and vast improvements, but without looking towards long-term economic development, the unofficial residents of this village will remain mired in poverty.

This is where the idea for a microfinance institution came into being. What better way of helping people than by giving them the resources to help themselves? The women we know in Siete de Abril, such as Natalia and Carmen, are strong, capable women burdened with the many responsibilities and obligations of running a household, providing for their families and attempting to combat and surmount the obstacles poverty places in their way. Yet, they still find time to create their own business plans, attend business training and start their own businesses in the hope that doing so will improve

the lives of their children.

They may need medicine, food, transportation, money, but more than that they need the ability to provide for their families and to be encouraged that they are capable of doing so.

La Ceiba is in the unique position of having deep connections within an impoverished community, partnerships to support us and our clients and the will and passion of undergraduates to transform the lives of individuals. We are excited for you to join us in discovering what we and those we invest in are capable of! Here at La Ceiba, theory meets practice and you make a concrete difference in the lives of people affected by poverty.

Thanks!

Katie MacEwen, Editor



OUR MISSION

La Ceiba envisions a world in which every individual can realize their potential through hard work. As a microfinance program that provides financial, social and educational support, La Ceiba empowers struggling Hondurans to overcome the inequalities that have denied them this right.



Abby with one of the first eco-bags.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: ESFUERZA DE AMOR

BY RACHAEL MASON—Snack chip bags are all over the ground in Siete de Abril. With nowhere to put trash, they are burned in families' front yards. Hazardous trash burning seemed like the only way to clean up, until I was inspired by the D.C. Green Festival (www.greenfestivals.org). I found these creative bags that were being made throughout Latin America by small, groups of women in poor communities—a perfect project for Siete de Abril.

The project not only has started to reduce the hazardous burning of trash but has managed to provide women with an income. As a result, Carmen could buy food and medicine for her young children. Reina got off to a fresh

start when she repaid a small debt. Keyla could afford more clothes, medicine, and food for her sick father and newborn baby. Our hope is that one day the bag profits will go beyond funding basic needs, and towards things like education.

Since the project began, the group has grown from four to nine women, as women teach their sisters and mothers. *Esfuerzo de Amor* products support the women's commitment to improve the health and well-being of the Siete de Abril community.

For more information on the project or to order a bag, contact La Ceiba at siete-bags@gmail.com. Stock is limited, so order soon!!



The IAP team last January.



Conducting surveys at Siete de Abril.



Explaining health surveys.

FIELDWORK: PLANS FOR JANUARY

BY DAN MARSH—Between January 3rd and 10th, La Ceiba’s board of directors will travel to El Progreso, Honduras to distribute microcredit loans of \$150, approximately 3,000 lempiras (Honduran currency) to each woman involved in the first round of loans. Microloans give women the start-up capital necessary to fund small businesses. These loans will be repaid over a period of six months as women bring in revenue from their businesses. Women have already created business plans and engaged in other forms of group planning over the summer months with the help of La

Ceiba’s long-term volunteers, Rachel and Megan (see page 4). The participants self-selected solidarity groups which will assist us in ensuring that the loans are repaid. They also provide assistance and encouragement to our clients while the La Ceiba board members are not in Honduras. There will be a ceremony during the week we are in Honduras at which La Ceiba will present the loans to the women, formalizing our partnership.

The IAP initiative will also be working to implement phase III of its program during the week we are on the

ground (see article below). We will monitor and evaluate the amount of households which are still using the improved cookstoves from the intervention. We are now engineering a survey which will be used to evaluate uptake and determine appropriate means of encouraging uptake of stoves in homes. While undertaking two projects during a week long period is indeed ambitious, both projects are being conducted by the same community of people and extensive planning and organization has prepared the group to maximize its resources and complete all essential tasks within the time allotted.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: IMPROVING HEALTH

BY CHRISTINE EXLEY
Indoor air pollution (IAP) “turns the kitchens in the world’s poorest countries into death traps,” killing over 1.6 million people annually, according to the Intermediate Technology Development Group (Warwick and Doig 2004). IAP kills quietly, causing acute lower respiratory infections which are one of the leading causes of death among children under the age of five. Yet, little has been done to combat this hazard. The Indoor Air Pollution (IAP) initiative, made up of some of the same students as La Ceiba, worked to combat IAP by replacing inefficient, polluting cook stoves with improved cook stoves (ICS).

The project was divided into three phases of implementation. Phase I was completed during the January 2008 trip to Honduras through a barrage of health surveys and carbon dioxide/particulate matter monitoring. In Spring 2008, the team completed Phase II, the results of which are pending. While they controlled the projects’ logistics and coordination, outside experts in the field and in academia assisted them in measuring the IAP emissions and implementing the improved stoves (i.e. IAP experts from the University of California Berkley, Sebastian Africano from ENASA as well as AHDESA—Honduran Association for

Development). They also received a nationally competitive grant.

The team is currently working to complete Phase III in January 2009 via a self-rated health survey of the women who receive new stoves. Furthermore, they are evaluating ways in which the improved stove initiative can be fostered and expanded through partnership with La Ceiba.

Keep track!

La Ceiba students blog about their experiences at www.laceibamfi.org. Find ideas about getting involved, more information, detail and links to our partners.



One of the first families to get a new stove.



PROFILE: CARMEN HERNANDEZ

BY MEGAN COOLIDGE Carmen, a 25-year old mother of four, is a homemaker who spends her days caring for her husband and children. She is looking to re-establish her business selling the popular Honduran food, *baleadas*. Carmen is also a member of the eco-friendly

bag cooperative, *Esfuerzo de Amor*. Her family is planning to move to Students Helping Honduras' project village of Villa Soleada this spring.

Although Carmen has a strong, take-no-guff personality, she has also been lovingly named the "jokester" in her solidarity group. On occasion, she has

been known to playfully offer her children up for sale, and is never afraid to gossip about the good-looking men in the neighborhood. La Ceiba's business training and the women in her solidarity group will provide Carmen the education and support she needs in order to pursue her business.

PROFILE: NATALIA MENDEZ

BY MEGAN COOLIDGE Natalia is a fifty-year old mother of two children who are currently living in the United States. Due to the high cost of phone calls, she rarely hears from them. Natalia is planning on moving to Villa Soleada with her husband, and is interested in getting back into her food catering business. After working for several years with FINCA, a regional microfinance institution, Natalia

was forced to leave her old community and was unable to continue working with FINCA when she moved to Siete de Abril.

By getting a loan from La Ceiba, Natalia can expand her business and earn enough money to provide for her, her family and her grandchildren. She plans to sell tamales to the other community members of Siete de Abril. We look forward to watching Natalia become a

leader amongst the women in our MFI program.

Natalia has more experience with microfinance than any of our other clients. Her inquisitive personality helped us this summer, as she forced us to consider the details of our own program. Her warm smile and bear-like hug was always a welcome offer of support at the end of a hard day's work.

WHAT IS MICROFINANCE?
Microfinance is giving poor individuals small loans to allow them to start businesses. More broadly, it envisions a world in which the poor have access to resources that enable them to overcome poverty.

LEARNING HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES...

BY ERIN KELLY—The Two Dollar Challenge (TDC) is an experiential learning exercise designed to simulate poverty by having participants live on \$2 a day for five days. Challenge participants must adhere to several rules that replicate the daily challenges faced by the destitute worldwide. Through moments of physical and emotional discomfort, participants begin the transformation from passive observers of poverty into engaged, empowered and effective actors in its eradication.

The Two Dollar Challenge is an ambitious undergraduate initiative that proved its capacity to empower in Spring 2008. Through the TDC, La Ceiba raised the money required for its first round of microloans. The Challenge took La Ceiba from a few undergraduate students' idealistic dream to a legitimate organization with the means to make an impact. The Two Dollar Challenge is going national this year.

The Challenge seeks to assist groups raising money

for a wide range of development organizations and to raise awareness about global poverty. Additionally, the Challenge and Poverty Awareness Program facilitates networking. Participants meet others interested in taking action to eliminate poverty, and gain access to experts within the field. These opportunities allow students to take a more active approach to economic development and the theories they are taught in the classroom each day.

For more information please visit:
www.twodollarchallenge.org
or contact
twodollarchallenge@gmail.com.



Our partners:

Americans for Informed Democracy
SEED
Students Helping Honduras
Two Dollar Challenge
UMW Department of Economics
Women's Microfinance Initiative



PARTNER PROFILE: SEED

Student Entrepreneurs for Economic Development (SEED) is a passionate group of college students committed to fostering sustainable development in communities around the world.

We do this by giving free consulting services to NGOs and social entrepreneurs wherever they need us, with an emphasis on effective microfinance. By forging long-term relationships, we are able to increase the efficacy and efficiency of our partners, and deepen the positive social change in their communities.

SEED is working with La Ceiba to discover the best

methods of repayment and the smartest choices to make as a new microfinance institution.

We also seek educational and personal development among our own students. Through working in teams to solve problems for our partners, students are able to broaden their knowledge horizons while actively practicing the skills they learn in class.

Currently SEED has 9 projects functioning across three continents. Please don't hesitate to email Yi-Xian Ng at yn5u@virginia.edu if you have any questions about SEED.

LONG TERM VOLUNTEERS FOR LONG TERM SUCCESS

While most of the Board of La Ceiba have not been to Honduras yet this year, we haven't been without a presence there! Since La Ceiba is such a small organization and so deeply vested in the success of its clients, we have made sure to keep points of contact on the ground at all times.

This summer we had the benefit of two long-term SHH volunteers, Rachael Mason and Megan Coolidge, who are now on the Board of Directors of La Ceiba. For several months, they worked with the women in creating their individual

business plans and bylaws for their solidarity groups. More than this, they established deep relationships with these women and the community.

Now we have the benefit of Laurie Paguio, a UVA graduate who is a long term volunteer for SHH; she has been responsible for obtaining a reliable bank in Honduras for us to partner with as well as keeping in touch with our clients while we are here.

We are currently looking for a volunteer for January until

June to continue the work our amazing long-term volunteers have done. Please contact us for more information.

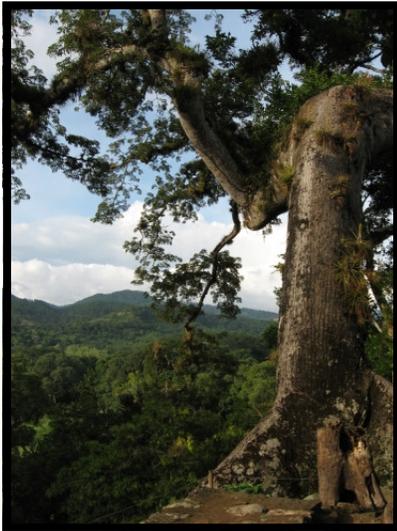


Book Recommendations:

- The White Man's Burden by William Easterly
- Banker for the Poor by Muhammad Yunus
- The Irresistible Revolution by Shane Claiborne
- Leaving Microsoft to Change the World by John Wood
- Blink by Malcolm Gladwell

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WHY LA CEIBA?

BY MELANIE WALTER—The Ceiba tree towers above the forest landscape. Its buttress roots support its immense trunk and expansive canopy as it reaches toward the sky, growing to a magnificent 70 meters in height. Its seed material, known as Kapoc, and its trunk, covered with dense protective spines, have been utilized for centuries. Due to its immense size and strength, Ceiba trees provide a home to countless species of animals and are often valued for their resilience and ability to provide shelter during hurricanes. Its reputation for strength and size led many of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, particularly the Mayans, to incorporate the Ceiba tree into their religions and mythologies. The Maya called the Ceiba the Central World Tree and the Sacred Tree of Life. Its roots were said to reach from the terrestrial world of men to the underworld, and the thick vines that frequently drape its heavy limbs assisted souls ascending from the human realm to the heavens. The Ceiba tree was the only way that all three realms were united.

The Ceiba unites the spirit realms to which ancient Mayans aspired and endures in the face of challenges and hardship, protecting the people of Latin America from natural disasters. La Ceiba strives to provide a strong foundation for its clients, helping them to overcome the challenges they face each day. La Ceiba offers a diversity of services and support, growing and evolving to meet the needs of struggling Hondurans who seek to achieve success in business and move beyond their societal and economic constraints. By facilitating access to valuable opportunities and offering entrepreneurs a means to achieve their goals, La Ceiba will enable its clients to climb higher into the canopy, achieving their personal goals and making economic development a reality. As such, the Ceiba tree's strength, versatility, and cultural heritage reflect our goals and values as a microfinance institution. It is a powerful symbol of the force for good that La Ceiba seeks to become for the people of Honduras.

**“THE FUTURE WILL BE DIFFERENT IF WE MAKE
 THE PRESENT DIFFERENT.”—PETER MAURIN**

BECOMING A NON-PROFIT

BY HART WOOD

As far as the progress of La Ceiba as an independent non-profit corporation goes, we're right on track. We have recently filed the Virginia Articles of Incorporation to become La Ceiba Microfinance Inc. and are now going ahead with filing to become a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. 501(c)(3) status exempts non-profit organizations from federal income tax and legitimizes an organization's charitable purposes. It is a long

process, but worthwhile.

We are continuing to seek out pro bono legal counsel to advise us on this next step, given its sensitive nature and involvement with the IRS, but are overall very confident that this will happen as soon as possible. 501(c)(3) recognition not only exempts us from income tax, but makes your contributions to La Ceiba tax-deductible. We are currently functioning as a 501 (c) (3) organizations under the umbrella of SHH—

making your donations tax-deductible even as we move towards incorporation ourselves.

La Ceiba prides itself on being entirely transparent to clients, contributors, and other non-profit organizations. Our 990 and other tax information won't be publicly posted for several months, but all information is available upon request. If you'd like to be involved in this process, please let us know!

La Ceiba

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WE ARE...

BY DR SHAWN HUMPHREY

Here at La Ceiba, we are fond of calling ourselves scrappy. Are we "full of fighting spirit"? Well, let's see. Our customers live 1,800 miles away in a squatter community on the outskirts of El Progreso, Honduras. We are starting at a small university. We are not being funded by a well-endowed foundation. We are staffed and governed by students. Students raised our initial capital, recruited our customers, and decided upon the terms and conditions of our loans. Every aspect of our operations in Honduras will be conducted by students – from the extension of loans to the running of our business training courses. For these reasons, there is no other undergraduate course like La Ceiba. For these reasons, there is no other micro-financial institution (MFI) like La Ceiba. For these reasons, La Ceiba is much more than an MFI. It is a demonstration of what is possible when young people band together to make a difference in the lives of others, recognize their limitations, and then proceed to obliterate them. Scrappy....yeah, it fits.

La Ceiba



www.laceibamfi.org