

**Excerpt from community research report:**

**“Santa Rosa-Cartagena: Women’s Opportunities in Leadership and Solidarity”**

By Jenny Crakes

Part C: Recommendations

The two most significant women’s needs made clear to me through interviews were employment and access to education.

It is certainly important for Santa Rosa and Cartagena to continue supporting their youth who are attending high school and university. But an informal community school, aimed at a mutual sharing of knowledge and skills, would be an excellent way to share unofficial education within Santa Rosa; it requires no new infrastructure or funding and could begin right away. Don Julio brought up the idea of having a community school as part of CUNA<sup>1</sup>’s Finca Integral, where community members could share their skills and capacities (J. Quirós, personal communication, June 11, 2013).

At a general meeting in the salon, interested people could describe the skills and sets of knowledge they possess, as well as things they would like to learn. Then pairs could be matched between someone wanting to learn a skill and someone willing to act as a teacher. A shared skill could be something as essential as literacy; making sure everyone who wants to can learn to read and write. Other skills to share could be organic agricultural methods, sewing and craftsmanship, computer technology, spoken English, cooking and household skills, or knowledge of academic subjects by those who have attended higher education; these people could tutor elementary or high school students to help them succeed. If a group from the community school were interested in taking a course or attending a meeting located in another town, they could arrange

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<sup>1</sup> Asociación Pro-mujeres Cultivando la Naturaleza (a new agricultural co-operative)

transportation together or share rides. The school could also share books, periodicals, and Internet access. A community school would be an opportunity for inter-generational solidarity, and would empower community members by valuing the different skills they possess, similar to the ideas of asset mapping and of identifying human and social capital (Emery, Fey and Flora).

The issue of creating employment is difficult to address directly. I think the community should continue to be supportive of CUNA as it works to become more established and to develop markets for its products, because it appears to have the potential to be a sustainable source of employment in the future. Another idea, for which support was raised in interviews with three women in the community (A. Quirós, G. Mora and E. Sanchez, personal communication, June 2013), is the development of a women's artisan cooperative. Don Julio agreed this would be a good idea to develop along with CUNA in order to provide a diversity of industries, so productivity is not dependent on agriculture alone (J. Quirós, personal communication, June 24, 2013). Crafts could include clothing and accessories, paintings or fabric paintings, jewelry, or herbal soaps and shampoos. Adriana mentioned that seven or eight other women in Santa Rosa already know how to sew, including baby clothes, aprons, and underclothing. Besides being a skilled seamstress, she herself knows how to do several types of crafts, including fabric painting, foam murals for walls, and *el jarron*, a craft similar to papier-maché that can be used to make vases. She mentioned that one difficulty in setting up such a cooperative would be marketing, since Santa Rosa is a small place and opportunities would be needed to sell things in other places (A. Quirós, personal communication, June 24, 2013). Interviewees suggested that the governmental Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje (INA) could come to the community to help train women in artisan skills, but a building may be required in order for INA to do so. Because of the interest and skills already present in the community, I

think the development of a women's artisan cooperative is a worthwhile idea, notwithstanding difficulties, and it would be useful to start by finding out INA's requirements to come and give training.

A possible model to look at in building this type of project is the Cooperativa de Artesanas de Santa Elena y Monteverde, or CASEM COOP, located in Monteverde and consisting of a store, gallery and workshop space. It was established in 1982 by eight women artists, "with the goal of using their creative skills to improve the lives of their families," and currently has almost 100 members. Listed objectives of CASEM are "...to offer employment opportunities to local women and to provide training in production and diversification of arts and crafts techniques," as well as to "promote the understanding of business operations in order to help generate extra family income and, more importantly, build self-esteem and encourage community participation" (MonteverdeInfo, 2002-2011). Members receive 65% of the sales price of all products, while the rest is invested back into the co-op, including the financing of "artistic and business management training, as well as workshops in confidence building, problem solving and conflict resolution". Its crafts include clothing, cards, jewelry, wall hangings and woodwork. Each year it works with visiting volunteer groups from Europe and the United States (MonteverdeInfo, 2002-2011).

Santa Rosa, because of its rural location and smaller-scale tourism, would need to put additional effort into finding markets for its artisan products, and in transporting products to market. A simple way to begin this marketing would be for members to work with friends and family who are originally from Santa Rosa but have moved to other places, and can seek out people they know who are interested in buying sewing or handmade crafts. This could be done through online networking, with a website and Facebook page (bilingual in Spanish and English

would be ideal; a high school or university student could help translate and set up such a page), as well as seeking out partnerships with cooperatives that are currently operating in larger cities and perhaps could include crafts from Santa Rosa in their stores.

In order to establish a women's artisan cooperative, as well as to continue to sustain the Eco-Finca<sup>2</sup> and CUNA, community members will need to be proactive in seeking outside grants and other aid. When combined with community members' energy and innovation, outside aid can be a great help. Interviewees mentioned two governmental institutions from which aid can be sought: IMAS (Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social, which just granted local homestay households aid to construct a separate tourist habitation for each house, and invited Adriana to sell her sewing at a fair in Guápiles in August), and INA (Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje, which could train women in craftsmanship for an artisan cooperative). Continuing to network nationally and internationally (for example, through the Eco-Finca's partnership with MSU) to build connections may help open doors, as well as making Santa Rosa and its associations more widely known. Networking can also be done online through the creation of a website, Facebook page or LinkedIn profile. This networking relates to Bernardo Trejos' finding that "...external alliances may help community-based projects strengthen skills and political influences, as well as develop internationally accepted standards and effective marketing" (Trejos 16).

If the Eco-Finca is to be sustained, I believe it needs to accomplish two things: first, to turn its leadership and decision-making primarily over to a board of local residents, for greater community control and authentic community connection. Community members raised the issue of Lidiethe's being an outsider and often absent (J. Quirós and G. Mora, personal communication, June 23, 2013). However, she and ANDAR can still act as important resources

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<sup>2</sup> A local organic farm run by Asociación ANDAR.

for networking, capacity building, advice and support. Secondly, because tourists are not always present, the Eco-Finca must develop the ability to sustain itself without relying entirely on income from tourism. It could possibly achieve this by planting a greater variety of crops and developing markets for additional products; also, using a tractor or plow would be much more efficient than digging by hand as is currently done.

CUNA and the Eco-Finca are poised to offer a unique kind of tourism to educate people who are very interested in organic agriculture; this audience could include farmers, students and scientists. Because of this opportunity for agricultural education, I think both CUNA and the Eco-Finca could seek out partnerships with Costa Rica's EARTH University to bring in students. EARTH is a private, nonprofit, international university located in Guácimo, and offers an undergraduate program in agricultural sciences and natural resource management. EARTH has a Community Development Program that "includes a service-learning course where all students work with small-scale, local producers on their farms and with organized groups to promote sustainable community development" ("Community Development Program"), and is aimed at connecting the university with surrounding communities. Its second campus EARTH-LaFlor, a research hub in Guanacaste, "offers seminars and training programs open to the public in areas such as renewable energies, entrepreneurship and sustainable agriculture" ("EARTH Facts").

One interesting community need mentioned was a union, or unity, between all the various committees, in order to work well together (O. Aguero, personal communication, June 23, 2013). In my home community, there is a monthly women's gathering, a potluck meal which members take turns hosting at their homes. It's an excellent chance to have dialogue, meet new people, and enjoy companionship. If Santa Rosa were to organize such gatherings, perhaps in the communal salon, it might help build connections among women from the different associations

and build a greater awareness of everything going on in the community. As well, it would be an opportunity simply to visit and talk with friends, providing camaraderie and support for women who may find it difficult living alone. And if domestic violence is indeed prevalent in Santa Rosa<sup>3</sup>, such support networks could be crucial in order for friends to recognize the situation and help intervene.

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<sup>3</sup> An issue brought up in previous interviews.