

Defending María's Right to Protect the Forest

The EcoLogic Development Fund advances conservation of critical natural resources in rural areas of Latin America by promoting sustainable livelihoods that affirm local cultures and by strengthening community participation in natural resource management.

María, since you like these trees so much, how would you like it if we tied you to one?" is just one of the many verbal assaults María Hernández Gómez has endured in order to continue her work protecting San Mateo Ixtatán's municipal forest. Tension between logging pressures and conservation efforts is made worse by the lack of economic alternatives in the area. In order to avoid these run-ins with loggers, María and her fellow forest guards leave their village at 4 a.m. each Wednesday to begin their trek to the mountain. Their day's labor involves thinning the forest, pruning young trees, and creating fire breaks to strengthen the forest's natural re-growth. Disturbingly, in so doing, they also expose themselves to threats of violence by illegal loggers who scorn the forest management these women undertake. When María first formed her group four years ago, 36 women signed up to work. Today, only 10 remain. Persistent intimidation is largely to blame.

The women began this work for economic reasons. Survival in San Mateo is based almost entirely on subsistence farming. Engaging in forest management entitles the women to receive a quarterly stipend from the Guatemalan National Forestry Institute. Over a six-year period, each participant will receive a total of 7,430 quetzales (roughly \$978). For families, these modest earnings help put food on the table and fund school uniforms and supplies so their children can stay in school.

As group leader, María hopes that some of the women will return to the program. She knows that all of the women need the income and most enjoyed the work; however, fear for their safety holds them back. When asked why she and the other women continue, she responds, "Because I want there to be a forest for my children, and because I want to sign up for another six years to do this work." Fortunately, threats against the women have decreased lately, partly due to the advocacy efforts of EcoLogic's partner, the Northern Border Municipalities Alliance.

The Alliance was responsible for coordinating efforts to bring the program to San Mateo as well as providing technical training to the women. The Alliance's forestry officer, Nery Camposeco, remarks, "When we first started with the women, they only knew the forest as a resource to be exploited for fuel wood. Now they understand how it grows, how it affects the water

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María Hernández Gómez, leader of San Mateo's forest management women's group in Huehuetenango, Guatemala.



San Mateo's municipal forest, home to critical water sources for the entire region.

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Aligning Conservation with Prosperity



Dear friends and colleagues,

As we begin EcoLogic's 15th year of work, I am filled with gratitude for the impact our community of support has made possible. The generous financial contributions and encouragement from champions like you has made a positive difference in the landscapes and livelihoods of more than 1 million rural and indigenous poor people in Latin America. Together, we have helped ensure sustainable management for more than 6 million acres; we have helped create 5,000 jobs; and we have protected 2,000 sources of water. None of this would have been possible without your support.

However, the challenges on the ground are considerable. In communities like San Mateo Ixtatán in Guatemala, a lack of economic alternatives pits forest management efforts by women's groups against the designs of illegal loggers. With your help, EcoLogic is working to protect and strengthen the promising conservation initiatives developing in San Mateo. In Honduras, access to clean water is changing lives. The tremendous sense of empowerment and enterprise nurtured by community water boards is spilling over into other eco-opportunities. Your financial contributions make it possible for us to increase opportunities that promote environmental stewardship.

I thank you for your commitment to the precious places and people our work serves.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Shaun Paul'.

Shaun Paul

P.S. EcoLogic maximizes the impact of your contributions. Charity Navigator (www.charitynavigator.org) has awarded us Four Stars—its highest rating for organizational effectiveness and efficiency!

Defending Maria's Right to Protect the Forest *continued from page 1*

supply, and the care it needs. Most are mothers; they understand what this means." Indeed, the water sources the municipal forest protects are covered by surrounding municipalities whose own water sources have dwindled due to widespread deforestation.

Nery also notes the effect that the women's group is having on the whole community. Their refusal to be browbeaten has made people take notice. The mayor recently agreed to allow the municipality's agricultural extension officer to accompany the women, further decreasing the risk of violence. Although threats from loggers continue, the women no longer feel alone. EcoLogic's

partner will continue to advocate for their safety, and, we will continue to work through the Alliance to find ways to support the women as they continue their work.

In the next six months, EcoLogic will bring in added support in the form of clean-burning stoves. These stoves transform the air quality in the women's homes and reduce by 60% the amount of fuel wood needed. This new initiative demonstrates to the larger community that the organization and determination of the women's groups is there to stay, and that, like their work in the forest, the gains from the women's efforts stand to benefit them all.

Extreme Makeover EcoLogic Style

Daria Maribel Lopez has always been house proud, but never more than now. A year ago, her home experienced a radical makeover. No walls were torn down; no professional designers were involved. Just two additions were made: a new stove and a faucet with clean running water.

Before these home improvements, the smoke from the open pit Daria cooked over coated her kitchen with a sooty film. Keeping her children out of the kitchen while she prepared meals so they wouldn't inhale the smoke was a challenge, especially on cold days when they craved the warmth of the fire. The family used water sparingly because transporting it entailed frequent and tiring walks to the river. In spite of her best efforts to keep home and family clean and healthy, Daria could not stay ahead of the pervasive and toxic effects of the smoke. Persistent coughs and severe eye irritations were facts of life.

Enter Melissa Nuñez, outreach worker for the Pico Bonito National Park Foundation, EcoLogic's partner in Honduras. As part of our work to help families in the park's buffer zone find alternatives to activities that degrade the fragile areas around the park, Melissa helps villages organize water boards and coordinate the construction of clean-burning stoves that use 60% less fuel wood. When a family signs up for these home improvements, they enter into a cooperative agreement. Families provide volunteer labor to build the stoves, maintain the water system, and dig trenches when an upgrade to the system is needed. In addition, before the improvements occur, each family is required to build a composting pit for food waste and a simple drainage channel to direct runoff.

A year later the difference in Daria's home and life is dramatic. Walls formerly darkened with soot have been scrubbed

clean and are now decorated with family memorabilia. A small table has been moved into the kitchen; her children can play or do homework there while Daria cooks. The children run in and out of the kitchen, cough-



Daria and her children benefit from home improvements in Chorrera, Honduras.

free for the first time in years. The time and energy she previously used collecting water and fuel wood she now dedicates to her children and other activities. Recently, she and other women who previously worked together building stoves spent a day reforesting degraded areas around the spring that feeds their water tank. For the past three months, Daria has been baking cheese biscuits to sell on market day, providing extra income to her family.

Daria is as busy as ever, but her energy and outlook are radically different. It's not just her home that was transformed: "Before my energy went to doing the same things over and over with no change. Now, I have time to do work that changes how we live. I know that, with my community, we can build other things." There is talk about forming a committee to collect the compost produced in various villages to sell as organic

Ways to Give

Our work is made possible by your contributions. Here's how you can help:

- Become an EcoLogic Ambassador and pledge to raise \$1,000 or more. You can fulfill your pledge by making a personal contribution and reaching out to your networks.
- Have your employer match your contribution.
- Honor a birthday, wedding, or anniversary with a donation to EcoLogic.
- Make a gift of stock or other securities.
- Share your talents by donating professional services.
- Participate in workplace giving. Federal or Massachusetts state employees can give to EcoLogic through Earth Share's yearly Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) by designating our code number (11432) on the payroll pledge form.
- Donate via our website. We welcome online credit card contributions. Simply go to www.ecologic.org and click on Donate Now to give through our secure online donation form. You can also sign up on this page to make recurring monthly donations.

To find out more about these options, please call Barbara Vallarino, Program Officer, at 617.441.6300 ext. 109.

Thank you!



fertilizer to large farms. Daria has already volunteered to coordinate collection for her village.

With your help, EcoLogic's support will continue to expand and guide the entrepreneurial efforts of Daria and her community.

You Helped Us Exceed the Challenge!

Thank you, thank you, thank you! Ninety-three of you rose to the challenge of our Fall Appeal and gave \$23,047—doubling the amount raised in fall 2006 and making it possible for us to receive the \$20,000 generously matched by an anonymous donor. These funds are vital to our ability to protect threatened habitats and promote conservation-led development in rural Latin America.

VOICES FROM OUR COMMUNITY

A Common Sense Approach to Making a Difference

Funds raised by our Ambassador Campaign provide crucial core operating support that strengthens EcoLogic's effectiveness and allows us to direct resources to areas where they are needed most. Ambassadors also help us build awareness in the broader community.

Jim McDonald became an EcoLogic Ambassador in 2005. He originally found us through a colleague and briefly flirted with joining our staff. Although he ultimately accepted a position with the Art Connection as executive director, the exposure motivated him to become an active supporter for EcoLogic. Jim kindly agreed to be interviewed about his experience as an Ambassador.

What about EcoLogic's work spoke to you?

I was most impressed by how you do so much for such a small organization, just how sound each program is because each leverages the talents and passions of so many, mainly those living in the areas where you work. I also liked EcoLogic's fundamental approach of not fencing in areas to protect them or saying "stay out," but instead working with communities to improve their situations in order to help save habitats.



Jim McDonald, EcoLogic Ambassador since 2005.

What made you decide to become an Ambassador?

After becoming steeped in things EcoLogic during the interview process, I knew I wanted to stay involved. Ian Todreas, himself an early Ambassador, approached me to ask if I wanted to join. He was passionate, eloquent, and convincing, and though I didn't need to be sold, I did need to be asked. In terms of my contribution, I know from working for nonprofits that I would need to write a check, and I was happy to do so at the Ambassador level. But I don't have deep pockets. What I do have is a great space for fun events. I know how valuable that can be. My wife Joni and I have been fortunate to be able to host EcoLogic fundraisers where we live,

at the Harvard Musical Association. Hosting these events, recruiting and sponsoring some of my favorite musician friends to perform, has allowed me to merge three passions: music, art, and the environment.

Any advice to would-be Ambassadors?

We are all looking for ways to lessen our impact on the environment. We recycle, walk to work, eat locally. For Joni and me, this is an extension of our commitment to that. EcoLogic's emphasis on people-centered ways to deal with difficult environmental problems is a good model for all of us. We can and all should do many things each day to lessen our impact and educate others to do the same, but supporting EcoLogic is really a no-brainer. Helping local communities in the most diverse areas of the planet to survive, and sustain: that benefits us all.

Like Jim, many of us have diverse talents and treasure to offer. What is yours? Are you willing to place it at the service of the precious landscapes and livelihoods EcoLogic supports? If so, please visit www.ecologic.org and click on "Get Involved," or contact Barbara Vallarino at 617.441.6300 ext. 109 or via e-mail at bvallarino@ecologic.org.



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