Program and Policy Director
Ana Luisa Ahern visited El Salvador in September to meet with our partners and participate in the 3rd Mangrove Forum on Inclusive Mangrove Restoration in San Salvador. Here she reflects on her trip and the nature of EcoViva’s conservation work.

As I sat near the front of the crowded conference room, my thoughts drifted to a few days earlier, when I was floating in a canoe through thick mangrove forests along the edge of the Bay of Jiquilisco, watching an egret silently stalk its prey. Across the channel, a fisherman cast his net into the shallow water and pulled up a wriggling mass of shiny silver baitfish.

So this is what it’s all about, I thought. This is what we’re trying to protect. It’s not a place, exactly. It’s a harmony. A delicate balance between humans and their environment, each sustaining themselves by taking only what they need, and ensuring this way of life for future generations. Conservation and development can and must go hand in hand.

The sound of excited chatter over coffee brings me back to the present, to a room full of people dedicated to protecting the places where land and water meet. I’m attending the 3rd Mangrove Forum on Inclusive Mangrove Restoration: Governance, Restoration Techniques and Climate Change in San Salvador. The forum, convened by EcoViva, our partner the Mangrove Association, and the Ministry of the Environment, brought together nearly 130 participants representing a wide range of community organizations, government institutions, and civil society groups to share experiences and knowledge around mangrove restoration and coastal conservation initiatives.

The event began with powerful words by Carmen Argueta, President of the Mangrove Association, about the importance of community leadership and grassroots involvement in conservation work. She emphasized that access to natural resources is an inherent right and environmental conservation is everyone’s responsibility. Following Carmen’s remarks, three community organizations representing the west, central and eastern coastal zones of El Salvador announced a groundbreaking grassroots alliance to advocate for mangrove...
Our Commitment to Hope and Action

Here at EcoViva, we are concerned about Donald Trump’s presidency and what it could mean for the United States, our partners in Central America, and the world.

We are worried for members of vulnerable communities in the U.S. and abroad. We are perturbed that a person who has used xenophobic language, repeatedly displayed misogynistic behavior, and openly mocked people with disabilities will be the face of our diverse country. We are critical of the anti-immigrant policies he plans to pursue, from “building a wall” to threatening mass deportations, and the message of isolationism this sends to the world. There are between 700,000 and 1 million undocumented Salvadorans currently residing in the US; the remittances they send to El Salvador make up one-sixth of the country’s GDP. If carried out, such a deportation would not only impact families that have made this country their home, but would also have serious economic implications for communities across Central America.

We are also concerned about the character and intent of U.S. foreign aid to Central America. As of the writing of this newsletter, the incoming administration has yet to articulate a Latin America policy. We are especially worried about the presidency of someone who has publicly stated that he believes global warming to be a “scam” and has appointed a climate change skeptic to lead his team on environmental issues.

On the campaign trail Donald Trump promised to abandon the Paris Climate Agreement; according to a recent Reuters article, a member of his transition team said he is “considering ways to bypass a theoretical four-year procedure for leaving the accord.” We are disappointed that the United States would abandon its duty to lead the fight against man-made climate change and leave behind communities like the ones we work with in the Bay of Jiquilisco, El Salvador. These are people who contribute the least to global emissions but are the most vulnerable to climate change as they face stronger and more frequent extreme weather events, altered ecosystems, and sea level rise.

And yet there is still hope and it lives in each of us.

Activist and intellectual Rebecca Solnit reminds us in her book *Hope in the Dark*, “To hope is to gamble. It’s to bet on your futures, on your desires, on the possibility that an open heart and uncertainty is better than gloom and safety. To hope is dangerous, and yet it is the opposite of fear, for to live is to risk.”

Let’s take that risk and hope, organize, and resist policies that threaten people and the planet.

Each of us must play our part according to our strengths and support our friends and members of vulnerable groups. Let’s stand as allies with our partners who serve immigrant communities. Let’s collaborate with our sister organizations that advocate for just and effective foreign aid. Let’s continue to fight climate change and build a more sustainable world. And we as EcoViva will redouble our efforts to support grassroots community initiatives to study, protect, and restore mangrove forests in El Salvador. As you know, healthy mangrove forests are an important factor in the global and local response to climate change. Mangroves provide communities with a buffer against increasingly powerful storms and acre for acre trap more greenhouse gases than even tropical rainforest. We cannot afford to lose them.

The world can’t wait for the incoming administration to have a change of heart or for a change in leadership four years from now. Now, more than ever, we need to come together to come together and support one another in this long fight for our planet and its people.

Thank you for your unwavering support,

EcoViva
Since 1996, EcoViva has worked alongside partners in Central America to improve quality of life for rural communities and protect important ecosystems like the mangrove forest of the Bay of Jiquilisco, El Salvador — all thanks to the unwavering solidarity of supporters like you. We hope you will join us in celebrating our twentieth anniversary and enjoy this timeline of our history:

**1986**
Salvadoran priest Chencho Alas, exiled in Nicaragua, starts the Fundación Centroamericana.

**1992**
Peace Accords signed in El Salvador. Chencho and his supporters accompany the returning refugees who later form La Coordinadora.

**1994**
Chencho Alas, Hal Baron, Juancho Donahue and other key supporters launch the Foundation for Self-Sufficiency (FSS).

Foundation for Self-Sufficiency in Central America receives tax-exempt status. La Coordinadora forms its own nonprofit in El Salvador, Asociación Mangle (Mangrove Association).

**1996**
Diversified farming, potable water, housing and sanitation projects launched.

**1997**
In response to ongoing violence afflicting the region, La Coordinadora declares a Local Zone of Peace.

**1998**
A gang truce is declared in the Lower Lempa region, mediated by local conflict transformation committees.

**2001**
Romero Trees campaign supported by FSSCA. Over 700,000 mangrove trees are planted by La Coordinadora over the next 5 years.

**2005**
Salvadoran government defines the Bay of Jiquilisco as a National Protected Area, and announces that former refugees now living in the area will be displaced.

**2008**
After a two-year advocacy campaign, La Coordinadora wins the right for communities to stay in the protected area and co-manage its biodiversity.
FMLN wins presidency of El Salvador. Many grassroots leaders elected to political office, including Aristides Valencia and later Estela Hernández in 2012, both leaders of La Coordinadora.

FSSCA changes its name to EcoViva to reflect our partners’ strong environmental focus.

Salvadoran legislature creates commission to address climate change and the environment, as proposed by legislator Aristides Valencia.

Coastal communities implement Ecological Mangrove Restoration (EMR) and adopt Local Plan for Sustainable Use (PLAS) to protect shared natural resources. These community-led conservation models are later adopted nationally.

Thanks to disaster preparedness efforts, there is no loss of life in the Lower Lempa following Tropical Depression 12-E, which caused flooding and destruction across El Salvador.

Estimated 1 million sea turtle hatchlings released since the start of locally-run conservation programs in the early 2000s.

EcoViva works with local and international actors in the face of U.S. pressure to advocate for small-scale farmers who provide corn and bean seed to the Salvadoran government’s Family Agriculture Program (PAF).

Dozens of fishers join the Pesca Limpia initiative, pledging to employ sustainable fishing methods that protect fisheries and sea turtles.

Essential water infrastructure built with assistance from technical groups provides clean and reliable drinking water to 400 families.

EcoViva forges an alliance of community members, government officials, scientists and donors united to protect coastal ecosystems like the mangrove forests of the Bay of Jiquilisco and advocate for the communities they sustain.

As we celebrate 20 years of solidarity with our partners in Central America, we continue to support innovative grassroots initiatives, strengthen climate-resilient communities, and build a sustainable future.
conservation and the sustainable and equitable co-management of coastal resources. This coalition, known as the Popular Alliance to Defend Coastal Resources, includes the community organizations Istatén from San Francisco Menéndez, the Watershed Rescue Committee of La Libertad (CORCULL), and Cincahuite from the Bay of Jiquilisco.

These three concerned coastal organizations have banded together to defend the environment through community participation in conservation and advocate for all levels of government and civil society to engage in a responsible approach to natural resources management. The Popular Alliance marks the beginning of a unique and visionary dialogue between civil society actors and government agencies. It will foster the engagement, information-sharing, and strategic, concrete actions needed to successfully co-manage mangrove ecosystems and surrounding coastal areas. The Popular Alliance invited other actors involved in coastal conservation to join forces, broadening its reach and strengthening its influence. The members of the new alliance plan to become official co-managers of the ecosystems they steward, ushering in a new era of inclusive, community-led conservation based on the needs expressed by resource users and founded in dialogue between scientists, policy makers, local and national government, community leaders, and grassroots organizations.

This alliance surges from years of community mobilization on the part of many organizations including the Mangrove Association and EcoViva.

It is a logical next step in our efforts to strengthen community initiatives to conserve the environment and maintain rural livelihoods, as well as advocate for meaningful local participation in decision-making processes. The Popular Alliance builds on the successful implementation of the PLAS, or Local Sustainable Resource Use Plan, a tool that since 2011 has empowered communities to steward their natural resources. The Popular Alliance aims to take this concept a step further and cement co-management into national coastal zone policy. Vice Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources, Dr. Ángel Ibarra, declared in his remarks that “El Salvador will no longer live with its back to the ocean” and vowed to create a national ocean policy that hinges on local participation and a shared responsibility between the community and the government to protect the country’s coastal resources.

As the forum came to a close, I thought back to the scene on the bay, to the fisherman and the egret living and hunting side by side. They both depend on a healthy environment to sustain them - healthy trees, healthy air, healthy water. I felt a surge of hope that through this new collaboration we can ensure both the survival of the environment and the livelihoods of the people who rely on it, that conservation and development can and must go hand in hand.
WHAT WILL YOUR LEGACY BE?
Including EcoViva in your will or other legacy giving plan will help restore crucial ecosystems and build thriving rural economies for years to come. Contact Executive Director Karolo Aparicio at (510) 835-1334 or karolo@ecoviva.org for more information on how you can make a lasting impact.

MAKE A YEAR-END GIFT
The end of the year is a busy time for everybody. We hope you can take a little time to make a contribution to EcoViva before 2016 comes to a close and support locally-led initiatives in Central America. You gift will go a long way in strengthening our partners’ efforts to build a sustainable future.