MAKING CHANGE IS A collaborative enterprise. Even those who count themselves among the world’s wealthiest and most powerful need support from a broad array of actors. The majority of important change we have seen in our lifetimes happened because diverse actors — experts, politicians, entrepreneurs, consumers, communities — came together to right an injustice or overcome a challenge.

Of course, for those of us who aren’t wealthy or powerful, collaboration becomes all the more essential. It’s especially necessary when, instead of money or influence, the only power we have is each other. Such was the driving principle that brought together the communities that make up La Coordinadora in the wake of El Salvador’s brutal civil war. No matter their differences, or the side from which they viewed the conflict, Mother Nature didn’t care. In the Lower Lempa River basin, El Salvador’s most vulnerable coastal area, flood and drought affected everyone equally. No one community would ever truly prosper if other communities around it didn’t prosper as well.

The collaborative nature of La Coordinadora transferred into a capacity to engage with outside voices to improve a legitimate model for self-organization and rural development. That vision by cultivating a growing number of voices to support its claims. Over the years, a number of engineers, scientists, and other development experts have helped contribute to La Coordinadora’s evolving plans, analyzing what works and identifying what doesn’t.

In a sense, the collaborative nature of La Coordinadora to grow its grassroots base transferred into a capacity to engage with outside voices to improve a legitimate model for self-organization and rural development. And when looking at La Coordinadora’s many successes, collaboration is not just a characteristic of good movement politics; it is also a source of its power.

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Dear Fellow EcoViva Supporters,

Building and supporting EcoViva has been an important and rewarding part of my life for the last 18 years. I have learned so much about organizing and building community from our partners and friends in La Coordinadora. I believe they are truly a model for community-based development that can and should be followed in other countries.

Seeing what our partners have built from the ashes of the devastating civil war has inspired me to believe that there are solutions to even the most challenging problems of poverty and ecological destruction. That these solutions can come from the communities most affected by the increasingly drastic climate shifts resulting from global warming, including increased droughts and floods, is all the more impressive.

I have had the honor of serving as Chair of the EcoViva Board of Directors for the last eight years, which has provided me regular reports and site visits to see the accomplishments of our partners. They began by banding together to protest and then stop the unannounced release of waters from a dam upstream on the Lempa River which flooded their communities, and went on to declare their communities a Zone of Peace. From this beginning they have expanded to include 100 communities with over 20,000 inhabitants while maintaining a democratic structure based on local community councils.

Their programs include mangrove restoration and other forms of environmental protection while developing sustainable agriculture. They have made significant strides to diversify their crops, develop native seeds, and reduce the use of harmful chemicals. Their leaders have become important national figures in the Salvadoran legislature and cabinet. They have maintained a youth-led radio station both as an alert network for floods and hurricanes and to educate and entertain the communities they serve. With EcoViva’s assistance, our partners are now developing an alliance between government, scientists, and communities that will inform national coastal policy, the Mangrove Resource Collaborative.

I believe that under the framework of our partnership supporting local initiatives, we have provided invaluable financial, technical, and political support to the efforts of our partners. I want that legacy to continue and that is why I am including EcoViva in my will. Knowing that legacy gift will support EcoViva when I am gone is a great source of peace, pride, and comfort for me.

As you think about your personal philanthropy, I invite you to join me and consider including EcoViva in your plans.

Jeff Haas
EcoViva Board Chair
Youth Redefining Themselves through Leadership

It's a balmy evening and the atmosphere is electric in the small town of San Marcos Lempa. San Marcos is normally bustling; the unassuming cluster of buildings along the two-lane coastal highway is the gateway to the Lower Lempa and a point of convergence for people going to the market, looking to catch a bus, or meeting with friends. Tonight is special, though, because the fourth round of San Marcos Baila is about to start.

San Marcos Baila, or “San Marcos Dances,” is a twice-monthly dance competition that has been drawing crowds and causing a stir on social media over the last couple months. The show brings together eight pairs of dancers representing different communities in a multi-genre dance-off that attracts hundreds of spectators. It’s Dancing with the Stars rural Salvadoran style — and it’s entirely organized by local youth.

TWENTY YEARS AGO, El Salvador was still recovering from a twelve-year civil war that killed tens of thousands of people and displaced many more. The conflict and its aftermath marked the newly-arrived residents of the Lower Lempa, who struggled to pick up the pieces and rebuild their lives and communities. Today, their children and grandchildren face different but equally daunting challenges: poverty and gang violence that have pushed countless Salvadorans to seek greener pastures elsewhere. For outside observers, it would seem that poverty, violence, and migration are all that have distinguished El Salvador over the last three decades.

Young people in the Lower Lempa, however, refuse to be defined by suffering and violence. In fact, as they take the reins of community organization and development through involvement in local youth groups, they are actively challenging stereotypes and redefining roles for rural youth. Guillermo, a youth leader from San Marcos, echoed the sentiments of many of his peers when he said “I want the community to see that we’re not a danger to society. I want people to see [us] as useful to the community. I want them to see that young people can be agents of change.”

With guidance and support from the Mangrove Association’s youth program coordinators young people are developing innovative initiatives to address the most salient issues affecting them. To address poverty, they’re forming businesses to bring value to their communities and support themselves and their families. Youth are building micro-enterprises around farming tilapia, raising egg-laying chickens, and reselling clothes. To counter the spread of violence, they’re promoting arts and culture to enrich community life for all residents. The one-room library in San Hilario is run by the local youth group,

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who host regular reading circles with young kids, and is a part of a network of community libraries connected to the National Library of El Salvador. is another one of these initiatives.

San Marcos Baila isn’t just entertainment. It’s the product of the hard work of youth organizers who are securing sponsorships from community institutions, inviting local musicians to perform, marketing the event through word of mouth, radio, and social media, setting up stages and sound equipment, filming and photographing the festivities, and MCing the event, as well as that of the talented dancers who choreograph and perfect their own performances. Young people are flexing their organizing skills and contributing to the cultural life of the rural communities of the Lower Lempa — all while reaching out to their peers in the dynamic social sphere that is defining the next generation of organizing.

The popularity of the dance show is evident on Facebook, where San Marcos Baila’s page has garnered over 1600 “likes” in the two months since its creation. The page is also a testament to the organizers’ commitment to their communities. They recently posted:

In only 19 days we’ve had 46,870 visits to our page. That’s 46,870 people who know that in El Salvador there’s a little place filled with talented young people, enterprising people, simple people, but more than anything, hardworking people. That’s San Marcos Lempa, that’s our beautiful home!

Young people in the Lower Lempa are proud to be serving their communities. Through their ingenuity and effort, this new crop of inspiring local leaders is countering the prevailing narrative of poverty and violence and building a better future for themselves and their families.

This summer we will launch our 6th Annual Viva Fund campaign to support empowered youth leaders in El Salvador. If this story has inspired you, please consider donating to the campaign or helping raise funds by becoming a Viva Fund Ambassador this summer.

WORDS FROM A PAST VIVA FUND AMBASSADOR

“In March 2015, I had just traveled to El Salvador with EcoViva for the second time. My experience opened my eyes to many social justice and environmental issues in El Salvador that rural communities - including young people - are working to address, and it taught me the importance and power of solidarity. Wanting to support EcoViva’s work beyond my one short week in El Salvador, I became a Viva Fund Ambassador to raise money for youth initiatives in the Lower Lempa. Although I was hesitant to take it on, I was amazed at the generosity of my friends and family, and happy to be able continue supporting the local leaders I met on my trips to El Salvador!”

Helen Quinn-Pasin is a rising junior and member of the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority at Santa Clara University in California. She raised $1,000 to support critical youth programs in El Salvador during our 2015 Viva Fund campaign.

You can become a Viva Fund Ambassador, too! Contact us at info@ecoviva.org if you’d like to join our team of online fundraisers and leverage your social networks for a good cause this summer.
WATER TANK NEARING COMPLETION

The communities of Tierra Blanca will soon be celebrating a major milestone: the completion of a second water tank that will provide clean water to over 400 families in the area, approximately 1,850 residents.

The first water tank was constructed in 2012. Prior to the construction of the tanks, residents of Tierra Blanca paid higher costs for less reliable access to clean water. Thanks to this increased capacity — the two tanks can store 260 cubic meters of water — the locally-managed water system will now be able to expand hours of service, reduce energy costs, and serve families more efficiently.

This accomplishment would not have been possible without the support of the students, experts, and donors of Engineers Without Borders of Clemson University and Iowa City, the University of Oklahoma WaTER Center, Episcopal Relief and Development, and Rotary International who put in countless hours of work to make the project a success.

As we’ve witnessed at EcoViva, collaboration can lead to big changes for the rural residents of communities organized around sustainability and economic justice. When it is sought after by communities, expertise and new perspectives offered in a collaborative way can initiate a dialogue toward real change, empowering community leaders to be conveners and problem-solvers.

This year marks two decades of our partnership with La Coordinadora and the Mangrove Association in advancing local, community-led initiatives in Central America. We invite you to stay engaged as we chronicle stories of partnerships that have brought about real change, and how we at EcoViva are rising to the challenge of promoting new and diverse collaborations toward people-centered coastal management.

Why Collaboration is Key to Change, continued from page 1

Take El Salvador and its environmental laws for instance. In 2005, the National Assembly approved legislation to establish the country’s protected areas — a win for the environment, but a serious threat to communities that had resettled in places like the Bay of Jiquilisco within the confines of the Lower Lempa. As written, this legislation would have forced human settlements to vacate areas of critical environmental importance, like coastal areas in the Bay of Jiquilisco where thousands of farmers and fishers reside and struggle to make a living.

In response, communities of La Coordinadora reached out to the scientific and professional community to forge a compromise. They knew that protecting important areas like the Bay of Jiquilisco meant including communities as active stewards, not excluding them. Together with university scientists, students, and government officials, La Coordinadora and its communities pioneered El Salvador’s first community-backed natural resource management scheme, which has since been adopted and instituted by the Ministry of the Environment in other regions of the country. This initiative also provided the backbone for the Bay of Jiquilisco’s admission to the United Nation’s Man and Biosphere Program in 2007, which highlights the balance of sustainable development and environmental management. It’s a far cry from the exclusionary 2005 law, and to this day, La Coordinadora continues to lead the country in coastal preservation and restoration of internationally-recognized mangrove forests.
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 in Central America. Contact Executive Director Karolo Aparicio at (510) 835-1334 or karolo@ecoviva.org for more information on how you can make a lasting impact.

SIGN UP FOR A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE
We have trips coming up in June and November 2016! Join us in El Salvador to witness community resilience, sustainable agriculture, and environmental conservation. Email us at info@ecoviva.org to sign up for our next Community Empowerment Tour.