WE EAT WHAT WE GROW

A Friends of the ATC Publication
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Introduction

Born in 1978 within the context of the Sandinista Popular Revolution that successfully overthrew the US installed Somoza dictatorship, the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC) is an organization of struggle that represents more than 50,000 workers in unions and cooperatives across Nicaragua. The community of Marlon Alvarado, located south of Managua in Santa Teresa municipality in the department of Carazo, is home to peasant families who are organized into a women’s group through the ATC. Producing nearly all of its own food, Marlon Alvarado is a fantastic example of the Sandinistas’ historic vision of collective, peasant agriculture and how food sovereignty is a tool of resistance against US imperialism.

First organized by the ATC in the 1980s, Marlon Alvarado named their community in honor of a young Sandinista combatant who was killed by Somoza’s National Guard during the insurrection, leading up to the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution. Following the triumph, the Sandinistas prioritized feeding Nicaragua and implemented a comprehensive agrarian reform; the ATC was part of this massive program that redistributed about half of the country’s arable land into the hands of 120,000 peasant families (a very significant number for a country that had a population of 3 million people at the time). Upon returning to state power in 2007, the Sandinistas took up again this historic mission through a series of programs, including the bono productivo, which gives peasants seeds and livestock. On land that they received from the agrarian reform and with this bono, the families of Marlon Alvarado grow crops, maintain fruit trees, and raise livestock for community consumption.

Since 2011, through collaboration with the ATC, the families of Marlon Alvarado have been reducing chemical use and are transitioning toward an agroecological model of cultivation. The ATC has led workshops on how to create organic fertilizers, use nitrogen fixing plants to improve soil, and build deep bed systems (“cama profunda”) for raising pigs. The ATC also facilitates exchanges with peasants from other parts of the country and sends students from La Via Campesina’s Latin American Agroecology Institute (IALA) to live and work in the community and share their agroecological knowledge. With the ATC, Marlon Alvarado has installed a community-managed demonstration parcel, which community members work and harvest collectively. Finally, the ATC has facilitated entrepreneurial trainings to foster leadership skills for the women’s group, as well as workshops in hammock, piñata, and jewelry making in order to help them improve their household economy.

In addition to these agricultural initiatives, present in Marlon Alvarado is the legacy of the Sandinista’s literacy campaign and their ongoing commitment to building schools, hospitals, community health centers, keeping education and health care free, and delivering electricity and roads to all parts of the country. Community members enjoy and defend these benefits. As many of the elders lived through the Somoza dictatorship and the neoliberal governments of 1990-2006, they do not take these rights for granted. They pass on their history of struggle to their children to create an intergenerational understanding of the Revolution.

In the following testimonies, seven women and one man from Marlon Alvarado express their pride in being campesinos and show how their model of food sovereignty frees them of overdependence on global markets and serves as a weapon against US imperialism. They describe how small scale, peasant production helped Marlon Alvarado survive both the US blockade in the 80s and the US-backed coup attempt in 2018. Trading and sharing food with their neighbors also creates solidarity and strengthens their community. Through their testimonies, we can see how they are teaching their children to love agriculture, to love the land, and to love the countryside.

Marlon Alvarado is dear to the hearts of many Friends of the ATC, as over the past few years the community has hosted delegations, interns, and other international visitors. By visiting communities like Marlon Alvarado, Friends of the ATC have been able to experience rural Nicaraguan life and see the tangible benefits in the countryside of the Sandinista Popular Revolution and the ATC. We wish that this publication captures the perspectives that so many of us have been lucky to gain first-hand thanks to our friends and comrades in Marlon Alvarado.
I was born September 22, 1948 in the community Marlon Alvarado, near the town of Santa Teresa, Carazo, Nicaragua. My childhood was very sad. I grew up in the period when Nicaragua was governed by the Somoza family. I was raised in extreme poverty, the same as all the poor people of that time here in Nicaragua. I am the second of ten children. I had no time to play because we had no water, and we had to go fill buckets five kilometers away. We had no electricity either, so we used a bottle with a rag soaked in diesel for a light. The roads were just trails where the horses could drown in the mudholes in the rainy season, and we all went barefoot. Our houses had straw or grass roofs, and the walls were sticks or sorghum stalks.

There wasn’t any school, so we were all illiterate. Later a school was provided but only to third grade, so I learned to read and write. At age twelve I had to go work in the city to help my parents to raise my younger brothers and sisters. I worked as a maid, and in those days there were no laws to protect us. We had no days off, no vacation time, no extra pay at Christmas; we were like slaves. That’s how I grew up, and when I was nineteen, my father died, so I continued working to support my younger siblings.

It wasn’t until July 19, 1979 with the triumph of the Sandinista Popular Revolution that we poor people saw a change in our lives. It was like waking up. It wasn’t until then that we had any rights, like the right to land. Through the agrarian reform we were given an area of land to plant. That land had always belonged to a rich landowner, where we were the badly paid laborers. Now, thanks to the Revolution we could work this land for our own benefit, which has helped a lot to change how we live. Now we have good roads all year round, electricity, and easy access to water.

All poor young people in this country have the right to go to university for free, thanks to the 6% that the state gives to universities. It is a constitutional law that establishes that...
6% of the ordinary and extraordinary income of the Republic is destined to higher education so that all Nicaraguans have access to a university education.

This era was also very hard due to the counterrevolutionary war that was imposed on us, where so many families lost their loved ones and there was a blockade that caused a shortage of products such as soap, medicines, and other products. As for food, we people in the countryside produced our own food and managed to survive.

The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) lost the elections in 1990 because people were tired of so much war, scarcity of necessary items, and the loss of our loved ones. The neoliberal propaganda promised that if Doña Violeta won, the war would end.

With Violeta Chamorro, Arnoldo Aleman and Enrique Bolaños, we regressed. They wanted to take away the 6% of the budget that is for university education, including scholarships for people who can’t afford it. Young people protested to claim their right, and some were killed and wounded. The roads weren’t maintained so they became unpassable again. The famous “blackouts” began, which were extended times when there was scarcely electricity six of every 24 hours. In the hospitals and health centers there were no medicines. In the schools, we had to pay to take tests. Everything went backwards and people got tired of it.

In 2007 Daniel Ortega returned to power through the elections which the FSLN won, and a new period began in which the government works with all sectors: private businesses, farmers, medium and small-sized businesses, and unions. Thus began many benefits for the people such as the “bono productivo” [production package of the Zero Hunger Program] which is given to poor people with land in the countryside. This consists of a pregnant cow, a pig, ten hens, two rolls of barbed wire, two bags of cement, and eight sheets of zinc roofing. I am one of many who received this bono.

Another bono is the ten sheets of zinc roofing and 2 pounds of nails for families whose roof is in bad shape. The school lunch program, free health care, a backpack and notebooks to start the school year, and the bono for those graduating from high school, housing for needy people, and scholarships for university students, both inside and outside the country.

Thanks to all this, all young people can study. In my family, all the young people are professionals. For example, my brother Antonio Vega, is a farmer. He has four children who have graduated from the university: one civil engineer, two doctors, and one psychologist. This would have been impossible if it weren’t for the 6% law which provides room and board as well as tuition for students from families who can’t afford it. It is with this Revolution and the FSLN under the direction of President Daniel Ortega that all this is possible.

The opposition parties know that through elections they won’t return to power, since the majority of the people are content with this government. That’s why the opposition have had to use tricks and lies to try to destabilize the country, using the internet to wage a media war. They may be able to fool people in other countries, but they can’t fool us because we can see what is really happening.
I am Reina Lucía Martinez...

I am from the the Marlon Alvarado community, Santa Teresa, Carazo, Nicaragua. We are organized as a group of women with the idea of forming a cooperative. Like the ATC, we are organized in the community.

I was trained to make hammocks in 2011 thanks to our good government of Comandante Daniel Ortega and the compañera Rosario and the ATC. We were trained with the idea of starting our own business, to help us improve our household economy. The course was offered in the community. They called it a mobile course because the school came to the community rather than have us go to the city, so we would not have to pay for transportation and spend the extra time traveling. The government (on behalf of INATEC, the National Technological Institute) contributed 50% and the ATC 50%: this included the instructor and the materials. All we had to do was be willing to learn.

The instructor was a blind man. There were 20 women from the four communities of El Cacao, Marlon Alvarado, La Unión, and San Francisco. The course trained us to work as a collective. One group made the arms, another made the fabric. It would be good to have another course to tune up our skills. We can organize a new training through Doña Emerita, who is the Political Secretary, together with the ATC or the municipal government.

The process is easy. When I make hammocks, I relax, I get so concentrated on the weaving. It is as if you forget your problems because you are absorbed in the weaving. If I get distracted, I make a mistake, so I have to stay focused. Once I start, I don’t want to stop. I try to do it at night when I have more time to concentrate.

THE WORK OF THE HOUSEHOLD

In the morning, I don’t have time because I have to make breakfast for my husband who goes to work. I have two kids who go to school. I have to have them shower, change their
clothes, and eat breakfast. I feed the pigs. Then we milk the cows, bring the bucket, make the cuajada, wash the dishes, wash clothes, feed the chickens. There are many things to do. In the afternoon or evening there is a little time to concentrate.

My child, José Daniel (like the Comandante) is 13 years old. Milagro de María is 8 years old. Milagro says, “My brother, Jose Daniel, like the President, and my grandmother, Rosario, like Rosario Murillo.”

When I got married seven years ago, I lived in Doña Rosario’s house. Six years ago we began our house. My husband has a degree in agricultural economics. He is working in a private company that collects fruits—dragonfruit, mango, banana—and dehydrates and exports them to the United States. He gives technical assistance to the producers because everything is organic.

That’s the secret—to put love into everything you do.

I have two male pigs, boars, for breeding: if someone else has a sow, they bring it to the boar and I get a piglet in return. For every sow they bring to the boar, I get a little pig. Or if someone says to me, “I have all the piglets sold; I'll give you the money. What do you say?” “Okay,” I say. We agree.

We also have a bull, two cows and three little calves. If I don’t sell all their milk, I make cuajada. There are days when we sell all of the milk, here in the community. Ana makes milk cajetas (traditional Nicaraguan candies), and I sell her the milk. She makes bread—which also uses milk—and comes to buy it here. She is my client. We buy from each other. There are more customers who come from other communities to buy cuajada, to buy milk. There is no need to go anywhere else. The milk is sold here in the house.

I have a few chickens: five chickens and their rooster, and about ten chicks.

EVERYTHING I DO I TRY TO DO WITH LOVE

Everything I do I try to do with love. Lots of love. That’s the secret—to put love into everything you do. When it’s my turn to prepare the school snack, all the kids are excited, “Milagro’s mom is coming, it’s her turn to cook! Her food is good!” and they wait in line, and they eat. I try to prepare a little extra for them. They eat once and ask for another little bit and get excited. For me the secret is to do things with love.

We have planted beans; my husband is a part of a cooperative with INTA (Nicaraguan Institute of Agricultural Technology). The cooperative is made up of nine people. INTA gives them technical assistance and supplies. The group provides the land where they are going to grow, and their work. When my husband has time, he works the land. If he has to go to his other job, he looks for a person to do the work. We have beans planted.

In the orchard I planted small pipián plants. I like having medicinal plants. I have basil, oregano, and garlic. I also have some ornamental plants because November 2 is the Day of the Dead and we usually take flowers to the cemetery to put them on the grave. I try to grow the flowers myself so that I don’t have to buy them. I also have mango, tangerine and guava.

Being a peasant is a source of pride because if the peasants did not exist, food would not reach the table of those who are not peasants, those who are there in the city. The food on the tables in the city comes from the countryside.

THE SANDINISTA GOVERNMENT

The government implements programs that are helpful for peasants. There’s a bono productivo program where the government offers sows, cows, chickens. There is a healthy patio program: you get citrus, fruit, mango, dragonfruit, tangerine, ayote, pipián, and they give you the materials, the hoe, the machete. In 2011 I received from the bono productivo a cow, five chickens and the rooster. These programs are created with the idea that one will reproduce. That’s how we do it, we continue reproducing. We already have two, three cows, we sell two, we have one left, keep reproducing. The same with the chickens.

We sell the animals and invest in something here in the house. This is how we have built this house. If we sell a cow
or a sow, we invest in improving the place. This chair is from when we sold pigs. I have a washing machine from when I sold a big pig in December. With the idea of improving our conditions. That’s how we do it.

I am Sandinista because it is the government of the poor and I consider myself poor. There are many benefits that we receive with this government—the school snack, students receiving their backpack, their notebook, pens, pencils. They are given shoes, they are given a uniform, they are given an opportunity. There are countless benefits that one receives. This is the only government that looks out for the most dispossessed.

In previous years, when I studied, we had neoliberal governments. I managed to study until the fifth grade. The conditions were different. Now, those who don’t study, it’s because they don’t want to. There are so many opportunities that you have to know how to take advantage of them. When I studied, we had to pay. The schools were autonomous, they were not public. When I went to take an exam, if I had not paid a monthly fee, I could not take the exam.

In the health centers, in the hospitals, medicine was scarce. Now at the health centers—there is a health center near here—you can get an ultrasound. Which they didn’t do before, unless you paid for it. At this health center, last year, I had an infection and they sent me for an ultrasound and there I realized I only have one kidney. If it wasn’t for this government, I might have died, and I wouldn’t have realized that I only have one kidney.

In health, in education, you look at the change, that everything is free. So many special tests in hospitals. And the specialists, the doctors, the care is all very good.

**TEACHING HER CHILDREN TO LOVE THE LAND**

My children, they are Sandinistas. Before the celebration of the anniversary of the Revolution in Managua, Jose Daniel tells me, “I want to leave a day early. If we go on the 19th, I want to be close to the President. I want to leave a day early to be close to the tirimba and see him up close.” We are Sandinista and the kids listen to us. If they have any doubts, they ask.
The idea is that they continue studying, have a professional career, but that we work the fields because you eat what you harvest. We want the two things combined: that they are professionals but that they also work the land.

My husband, when he studied at the university, he studied in the morning and worked the land in the afternoons and on weekends. He studied at night, and at that time there was no electrical power—there were candles. You put kerosene and a tuft of cloth on it and that’s how he studied at night. When we moved in together, he still studied and worked: he harvested rice, beans, sorghum and much more.

Many young people now do not want to cultivate the land, but I say that we parents must instill in them that they must harvest the land. I take my children to the fields. When we go to plant, Jose Daniel clears the land and Milagro plants the seeds. I even took her to harvest the pipián that we grew. You have to encourage them so that they will love the land.

They are being taught to milk the cows. They have been taught to take the cows to the pasture—which is at the bottom of the hill where there is a lot of mud—and to bring them back. They are being taught to help, to put love into everything we have. When they come back, they are covered in mud, all dirty. The land where we take the cows to eat is part of the agrarian reform. It’s five manzanas in size.

THE 2018 COUP ATTEMPT

Those days were sad. They felt long. No vehicles passed by— it was all quiet. We limited how much we talked about the government out of fear, and if we talked, we talked quietly. We were afraid because at that time everyone was against Sandinismo. The people in the roadblocks were against the government.

There were roadblocks in Jinotepe, so I didn’t go to Jinotepe. I told my husband to leave his militant card at home, since he had to travel every day. He had to go on side roads, as if he was hiding, so that he didn’t have to go through the roadblocks. Once he fell off his bike because he was on a bad road. His route was much longer, he had to spend more fuel, more time. He would leave earlier because he had to go off-road to avoid passing through the roadblocks.

At the roadblocks, he would have to pay and they checked everything—the backpack, the wallet—and sometimes if someone had money they took it out. I would say, “leave your card,” because there were cases when someone carried something that identified them as Sandinista, they were kidnapped and tortured and in some cases killed. Every time he went out I prayed to God that he leave and come back okay.

It’s a lie that the situation was peaceful. My husband saw that they were armed. For me a stone is a weapon. They had firearms, they had weapons. It was not peaceful, it was violent. I think that it was financed by the United States.

These were difficult, sad times, especially when they went to remove the roadblocks, and a compañero from the nearby community, Remberto Benito Cortes Zapata, died. We affectionately know him as “Palermo” because he was a historical combatant, very Sandinista. His family still has not overcome his death. Whenever they remember him, they cry.

We knew him too, so it affects us as well. At the same time we look at him as a hero because he gave his life to save many other lives. If he didn’t go to remove these roadblocks, there would have been more kidnappings, more deaths. When this group organized and went to remove these barriers, all these people were freed. Palermo died, but thanks to him, many lives were saved. We look at him as a hero.

In 2021 there will be elections, and with this attempted coup, people who are Sandinista became more Sandinista, and now we have seen who is against the government. The Sandinista that was shut off has been turned on. It ignited the flame, motivated us.
I am Rosario Vega...

I’m from the community of Marlon Alvarado in Santa Teresa, department of Carazo. I was born here in 1952, sixty-six years ago. I have lived here all my life.

THE HISTORY OF MARLON ALVARADO, SANDINISTA MARTYR DURING THE INSURRECTION TO DEFEAT THE SOMOZA DICTATORSHIP

He was from Masaya, sixteen years old, and a student. He was housed in the community of El Cacao. On May 13, the Sandinista guerrillas were going to take Santa Teresa to overthrow Somoza’s National Guard and take power. The whole group of guerrillas organized, and Marlon Alvarado participated in that confrontation. They went and achieved the objective: they ousted the National Guard and took command.

But the National Guard reinforcement arrived from Jinotepe and Managua. The guerrillas ran to their vehicles and fled towards La Conquista. As they arrived, the Guard was catching up to them. They ran, and at that moment the Guard shot Marlon Alvarado. Marlon fell and told his comrades to go on, that he would provide cover. To provide cover meant to stay and shoot so that others could escape from the Guard. Marlon was killed by the Guard and taken to Managua. No one knew anything more about it. At that time, if you went to pick up a corpse, you wouldn’t return alive, and nobody had the courage to go and pick up the corpse of Marlon Alvarado.

So we had the idea of naming the community after him. We invited Marlon’s mother. We do a mass every May 13th, the day of the liberation of Santa Teresa, where we make food and gather the community. That’s where our name comes from, and we are proud to have the name of a martyr in this neighborhood.
LIFE UNDER SOMOZA

In the era of Somoza, women had ten, twelve, up to sixteen children. There was no family planning. There were no contraceptive methods. My mother had ten children and she couldn’t put us in shoes because my father worked in the fields and my mother was a housewife. We walked barefoot with one dress to change into. There were no schools. Most of the children at that time didn’t study. Their parents took them to the fields to work the land. The government of Somoza had us as if it didn’t want us to learn to read so that we would live in darkness and abandonment.

When the Revolution came, the people woke up. The people, seeing the situation, began to organize themselves, and began the rebellion against Somoza. That’s when the ATC began to organize the peasantry. We knew the young guerrillas. They lived in the community, they lived in peoples houses. In this way people supported these young people.

The war that we suffered was one of many years. The repression was horrible. I was afraid of the National Guard.

Another thing that President Daniel did when he came to power was give educational opportunities—schools and universities—to the whole country. I have a sister, the youngest of us, who, because of this Revolution, received a scholarship through the 6% (guaranteed federal budget for university education) and an allowance for transportation. She was able to graduate and now she is a professional. Of my ten siblings, she is the only one who was able to study, when Daniel came to power. Those of us who lived through the crisis of Somoza only studied up until the sixth grade. You couldn’t study before. Nowadays everyone studies.

The government opens the doors so that even the poorest can go to school. It organizes education delegates to visit every house to make sure that all the children go to school, so that no one is left without learning to read. Right now illiteracy is very low in Nicaragua. In the same way, the government offers adult education. Two years ago, I finished the sixth grade as an adult.

As I said, there are countless benefits that the government has given us: roads, housing at a fair price. That is why we support this government, because it is the government

Before, we were marginalized as women, we were discriminated against. Not today.

When Somoza left, when we triumphed on July 17, 1979, it was so joyful for us. The people felt that we had been reborn. Then when we, the Sandinistas, Daniel, came to power, Daniel began to build from below, to set up schools, to construct roads, to organize women.

SANTA TERESA TODAY

We can talk about the achievements we have had as a community, as women: the government productive programs where they give cows, pigs, wire, pig food, chickens, with the idea that in the countryside we can help ourselves in our homes. In my case they gave me a pig. This sow gave me sixteen pigs, which I can sell for a good price.

Now with the ATC project they have taught us how to make concentrated pig food so that we don’t depend on the commercial houses and can make our own pig food.
that has remembered poor people. It is the government of the poor, so the poor are the ones who support it.

In previous times women were housewives and didn’t leave that role, making tortillas, waiting for their husbands to arrive. Not anymore. Today women can work, both women and men look for jobs, they both contribute to the home. I see their marriages as beautiful. There is a lot of respect, from men towards women. Before we were marginalized as women, we were discriminated against. Not today. There has been a very big change.

THE FAILED COUP ATTEMPT IN 2018

Remembering last year, the situation of the tranques was horrible for us because we didn’t expect that in the first place, and suddenly they started taking to the streets.

It started with some students who did not agree with the social security reform or with the policy of this government, but there were young people who were not students, they were kids who were paid. For example, here in the neighboring communities there were many young people who were paid to go. Since young people like to have some money, they joined that group. But they weren’t all students. There were also people who were financed by countries that do not agree with this government.

At that time being a Sandinista was a crime, because if a Sandinista went out on the street, the tranquistas grabbed you, burned you, killed you, only for the crime of being a Sandinista. There were so many Sandinistas who were killed. Life was worth nothing at the time. Those who guarded the roadblocks were people who were drugged, drunk, with a lot of hatred, a lot of resentment. Not even in the war that took place in ’79 and before to overthrow Somoza did we see the types of things that they did in the days of the roadblocks.

We lived in fear, as we have been Sandinistas since the Revolution and there is no one who doesn’t know that we are Sandinista. We organized and started surveilling. Thank God they didn’t come here.

The economy has gone down a lot: things are more expensive, sales have gone down. As a woman, I sold pig food concentrate and I sold my pigs, and now pigs sales have gone down. The same problem has hit the country’s economy, but we hope to lift it.

Everyone, whether they are Sandinista, or opposition, who lost a son, or lost a neighbor, has been impacted emotionally. We don’t want to have deaths. I say that the best way to overthrow a government is with elections — transparent, clean elections. It is not necessary to kill ourselves in order to overthrow a government. There wasn’t the number of deaths that they put on their lists, but there were several policemen, people from the countryside who were very determined to defend the government. As Nicaraguans, we didn’t want to lose any Nicaraguan brothers or sisters, regardless of which side we came from. We have to learn to respect each other.

My hope is that we will live in peace, that we will look at each other as brothers and sisters and that we move forward together. As I said, I am hurt by their deaths on the other side and our deaths, because we are human beings. The best thing is that we learn to get along as Nicaraguans and live in peace, which is the main thing we need in this country: to have peace and tranquility.
I am Marina Alvarez...

I am from here in Marlon Alvarado. I grew up with my parents in San Jerónimo, a nearby community, but I have been here for 32 years. All my family that I have is in Marlon Alvarado.

I received the bono productivo and it has helped me because they gave me chickens. I didn’t let them disappear, I’m breeding them and this has helped me with my diet, as well as economically because sometimes you have chicken, and people come to buy, “Do you have a chicken?” “Ah yes,” I say, “Here’s this.” Eggs too, I can sell eggs.

So, it’s helped because there are times when there’s no money. Money never comes at a bad time. Every time it comes, it comes at a good time. So you help yourself.

I always maintain the chickens so that I never run out. Because my kids come and ask, “Do you have a chicken to make soup?” “Yes,” I say. And then another one comes and says, “Could you give me a chicken?”

So I don’t have to buy chicken anymore. This helps to feed our family, and it is something that my family likes to eat.

With the agrarian reform, we formed a cooperative and we obtained the land that we sow today. This land is so good because before we didn’t have any land to plant. Through these means that the government gave us, we get the ingredients for our food.
Youth gather dried beans
We are Lucila and Bismark...

**Bismark:** My name is Bismark Vega, I live with my wife and children. I was born here and have lived here all my life. I am 55 years old. This was my mom’s house. All my life I have worked the land as a peasant farmer.

**Lucila:** My name is Lucila Reyes, I’m from Santa Teresa but another community about three kilometers down. I live with my husband. We’ve been married for 25 years. We have three children: two daughters and one son.

**THE REVOLUTION AND THE ATC**

**Bismark:** I lived my youth in the times of Somoza, I remember that there was extreme poverty. Before the Revolution, most of us walked barefoot. My father died when he was 40 years old, at that time, there were no health programs. We went to the healer because there were no doctors. He has been dead for 50 years now.

There was a lot of illiteracy. These houses were straw huts made of tree sticks. It was a barbaric poverty... there was no drinking water, we couldn’t bathe every day, there was no electricity.

I was 15 years old when the Revolution triumphed. My older brother joined the guerrillas, I didn’t. Many changes took place: now there is potable water, electricity, improved roads, not perfect but much better. We joined the ATC, the Rural Workers’ Association.

**Lucila:** The truth is that now we are better off than before, we are healthier because of the hospitals where you can get treated. There are many benefits for us women. Now that we are with the ATC they have come to train us to develop our own business, what to do with the profit, what to do if we have losses.

**Bismark:** Right now, with the ATC, we are implementing
a project that does not apply as chemicals in the fields, working with green fertilizers. We are sowing canavalia to revitalize the soil. They have taught us how to make organic compost.

Lucila: With the ATC, we have implemented the deep bed (cama profunda) system for our pigs. This is more comfortable for them than raising them on cement, which bothers their hooves and gets dirty. We are rice producers, and with the rice husk we implement the deep bed. It has turned out to be easier for us. In the deep bed everything becomes fertilizer and there are no flies, no smell. Here we have two little pigs, which we got as part of a government program.

THE OPPOSITION

Bismark: When the Revolution triumphed, a war was financed by North Americans. Part of Somoza’s guard went to Honduras and convinced peasants that communism was coming. When I was a kid, they told us that communism was in Cuba and that they made the old people into soap there.

As one did not know anything, in the most remote places in the north of Nicaragua, they deceived many peasants and went to war against the Sandinista front, a war that left 50,000 dead. At that time, I was a 20-year old boy, and I suffered many hardships watching my compañeros die.

That’s why the government and all the Sandinistas want peace. We don’t want war, because war doesn’t leave anything good. The best thing is dialogue.

With the Revolution there were women commanders, but they and Henry Ruiz came to hate the government so much that they separated themselves and turned directly against Daniel. What they wanted deep down was to take Daniel out to put themselves in.

They say that women don’t have rights, but this government is the one that has supported women the most. They have even campaigned against machismo so that it is not so brutal. In Somoza’s time, men even killed women with machetes and no one said anything, everyone was silent.

We don’t want war, because war doesn’t leave anything good. The best thing is dialogue.

What the FSLN fought for here was for the system to change so that there would not be so much poverty in the country, and this is happening. Even though there are always poor people, extreme poverty is decreasing. One part stayed with the FSLN, others moved away and aligned themselves with the right.

At this moment we see that the only thing the opposition wants is to remove the government in order to put themselves in power. They say that they are the majority. If that’s the case, they should win by voting. But it is not true, they are not the majority.

Lucila: For example, when you vote, you are free to go and vote. My husband tells me that in the past, when you voted with Somoza’s guards, you went to vote but the votes were robbed.

Bismark: It was the army that counted the votes, the Guard, and so what credibility did they have? Now each party has its own prosecutor, both the opposition and us, so
the elections cannot be stolen. But there is no need to steal.

That’s why the opposition held those protests. On April 19th three people died, one policeman, one Sandinista and one who was at the protests, but the opposition said that there were 36 dead. Of course, because it came out in the news, one believes it, and I was scared. How are the police going to behave like the Guard? But now we know that it was a theater.

Everyone is free to have their own ideology; we are not going to fight about that. Here there is permission to mobilize strikes, peaceful marches. But what is a peaceful march? You have to have a permit from the police and there has to be a person who will respond in case someone breaks something. But the opposition doesn’t want anyone there to respond because the protests are not peaceful. They have even burned down houses; they don’t want to comply with the Constitution and protest without hurting anyone.

Police all over the world have to keep order. The protestors didn’t let anyone pass through those blockades, prices rose, and they were armed in the blockaded streets. Of course, we have beans, rice, squash, and bananas here because we grow food, but there are many people who depend on their salary and need to buy things for their homes every week. Everyone suffered because of a few people who wanted to get rid of the government, even though the government gave them a chance to dialogue.

In the programs and in the news—here is one of the places with the most freedom of expression—I was watching Channel 10 (an opposition station) and they say whatever they want. I heard them say that the only thing that can work here is international pressure. But at an international
level people don’t know anything, only if you come here can you see the reality; there is no repression here, everything is peaceful, everything is calm, you can go anywhere.

I imagine that when you come here your families are worried because of the vision of Nicaragua from over there, as if you were coming into the lion’s den. It is your job now to go and tell the truth, as they try to confuse people by using lies. The OAS and other human rights bodies and a part of the Catholic Church that are very involved in politics, are confused.

DEFENDING THE GAINS OF THE REVOLUTION

Bismark: For our children, they don’t know how that road used to be. If we don’t tell them, they wouldn’t know the difficulties. I’m sure my mother didn’t want me to burn my feet in the sun, but she couldn’t buy me shoes. Maybe they don’t realize that, they think that because that road has a little ditch they say that this road is useless and that it is the government that is useless. But it’s a slow process.

In this coup d’état that they wanted to carry out, many young people were confused, believing that there has always been access to education, when really it is until now with this government that there is free education and even university education. My eldest daughter won a scholarship, she was even given transportation. Before, being a high school graduate was the greatest thing there was. It’s clear that if you don’t talk to your child, everything will be taken for granted.

One of the laws the government passed is that 6% of the national budget goes towards universities, even to the private ones. Of that 6%, they give scholarships, sometimes even in cash. My daughter studies at the UCA, a private university, and she doesn’t pay. Thanks to this government that has free education here, she is able to go.

Lucila: When neoliberal president Doña Violeta triumphed in 1990, she tried to take away that 6%. The people rose up in protest, and if that hadn’t happened we would have had to pay. There was a struggle where people died. Even I was a part of the strikes between Jinotepe and Teresa where we had a sitin. There was a national strike that lasted about 15 days, and in the end they were successful and did not cut the 6%.

Bismark: Of course there are two systems here, capitalism and socialism. In capitalism, they only want to make more capital, socialism is the one that wants to help the poor so that they are not slaves. In Somoza’s time, the peasant was a slave of the boss, of the rich. They would start at six in the morning, and leave late, killing themselves working to earn very little money.

Now because the government declared that the land is for there are two systems here, capitalism and socialism. In capitalism, they only want to make more capital, socialism is the one that wants to help the poor so that they are not slaves.
the peasants and carried out an agrarian reform, I have a piece of pasture and another piece where I plant corn, beans, rice, and I have a little forest and plantain trees. With that we get by.

We don't live in wealth, but we are never short on food. People in the countryside have other privileges: corn, beans, yucca, squash. For juices we have tamarind, star fruit, orange, mango.

Now with the ATC, and the organizations that support agricultural workers, most of the projects that come are for women and not for men. We don’t get jealous because we know that the woman is the best manager of the household. We, thank God, get along very well. She manages the economy of the house, to buy the gas, pay for the water, and manages the sales of the harvest. When we have a surplus of beans, rice, or anything we grow, we sell it. That is our business. Another business is her selling cell phone top ups.

Lucila: When he goes to the market he comes home without anything, not even a pound of sugar, but when I go I come back loaded. As we are the ones in the kitchen, we know what we need and that’s why we are the ones who handle the shopping.

Bismark: That’s why we get along well at home, the most important thing is communication, sincerity.

Lucila: We have to respect each other so that there is peace in the house.
I am Zeferina Traña...

I was born on January 8, 1973. I was born in a community called Ochomogo. I like the countryside very much, and everything about growing food. We grew up in the countryside. From there I grew up, got married, and had three children: two boys and a girl. Then I went to work in Managua for 12 years as a domestic assistant.

Then I fell in love with Marvin and came to live here in this area. I have lived here in Marlon Alvarado for 8 years. When I came here, I didn’t know anyone in the community, I didn’t even know their names because I wasn’t from here. But I saw that they were very relaxed. It’s a small community, with few houses, but they treat me well. I made friends with everyone, we all get along. One tries to make friends wherever you go, to be well. I joined the group that is organized with the ATC two years ago. At the moment I feel good.

The celebration of July 19th means a lot to me. My parents were Sandinistas, they still are. Since we were little, we are Sandinistas. I don’t know how things were before, but I grew up and saw things.

2018 affected all of us. When they put up the roadblocks, everything was closed, they wouldn’t let anyone pass. To be able to pass by on a motorbike, they asked for money. They even killed people there because they didn’t want to let them pass. Marvin couldn’t go to work because he couldn’t pass through. He didn’t work for a month, until they lifted the road blocks. It was hard. The crisis was bad.

They put up the roadblocks because they wanted to make the President resign. But they’re not going to take him down. He won’t leave until there are elections, and if he wins again, he will stay for another term. With votes from the country. I vote. We have to vote so that he stays.
I am Eveling Morales Cortez...

I am from here, from the Marlon Alvarado community in Santa Teresa, Carazo. In my life, I have always been organized, since I was young. We are a group of women working here. We are united and in solidarity, all of us.

I like to be supportive, to share. I am a popular educator, I teach young people and adults. I have even been selected as one of the best here in the municipality. I have been teaching for seven years now. The little that I know, I pass on to others. For example, in this neighborhood, now everyone knows how to read, thanks to this government as well.

Since 2011 we have been organized with the ATC. They have taught us about women’s entrepreneurship, how to have our own business. For example, I have my small store in my house. It is not big, but it helps us. For all of us who are participating in this training, it has helped us a lot for our different projects. Now we know how to take out loans, who to go to.

Now we are stronger. There is more organization. We have a directive. We meet every week. Every month each member contributes 10 córdobas. It is not much, but to be able to have a fund for anything, we always maintain a fund.

We celebrate each other’s birthdays. If someone has a birthday coming up, we meet, and make a program. Everyone brings something. For example I bring the cake, someone else brings beans. We also celebrate Mother’s Day.

If something happens, we are also in solidarity. For example, when someone dies, or if we have a problem with a family member. The husband of one woman had an accident, and we collected funds, we took them food, we took them money. That’s how we are. We support each other in everything. We are not individualists. If there is a problem, we are all united.
We invite young people. There are even some who want to get more involved. One said she wanted to join the group, and we said, “Yes, no problem.” We accept everyone. If you have a child, bring them. They start liking it and we help them learn how to organize themselves, to be together, to share. Let them get involved, let them come more to the meetings. They are liking everything.

We are well organized, we say. And if something happens, we are learning along the way. We are not always perfect, but we are working to be well organized.

**SHARING THE SANDINISTA REVOLUTION WITH HER DAUGHTERS**

I didn’t live through the Revolution, but my family is Sandinista, revolutionaries. My mother is someone who fought, she helped the guerrillas who rose up in this area. At that time, my mother says, the whole family says, that it was here that they fought in combat, here in El Cacao. They were very supportive of the Sandinista guerrillas because they knew that they were fighting so that we could live in freedom and have everything we have, thanks to their struggle. They fought. They are our heroes, because they fought for us to be well.

I have a lot of knowledge. Since I was a little girl, my mother and all my family have been saying that the Revolution has achieved many things. My father, for example, received land in the 80s through the agrarian reform, at the time when Daniel won the elections. That is where they grow food today, on the land that the government gave them in the 80s, the government of Daniel and the Revolution.

Fourteen years ago we didn’t have electricity. I remember that I lived my youth, all of my childhood, without light. We remember that we lit a gas candle and put a rag or a strip of old clothes on it and from there it gave light. But in the morning we woke up with our noses full of smoke. Thanks to all this government has done, we have been improving in many things.

As a mother, I am teaching my daughters what is good: that they see, that they compare, that they pay attention. We are organizing them more, telling them to look at the good, the bad, to look at the difference...
through social media, the internet, the telephones. There are young people who may be Sandinista but they were convinced by their cell phones. Their parents don’t explain the importance of each change in government, the changes that have taken place, how they have fought so that today we are in peace, that we live better.

Maybe in the future, we are going to continue to compare because we don’t know if we will always have this government. But my daughters are going to compare which government has done better. My older daughter, maybe she hasn’t lived very long, but she has seen the change, in her parks, in that her school is free. Now only those who don’t want to don’t study. She goes to the high school here, and she doesn’t pay a single córdoba.

There are always those who want to destroy something good. But if one has knowledge of all this, of who has fought the most, they don’t deceive us. They do not deceive us, because we already know the reality. They are not going to deceive us because we see the reality with our own eyes. There is no way to deceive us.

As a mother, it is good to explain to them that it is the Revolution, that these are the good things, and that the government has been fighting, so that all of us continue fighting for peace and tranquility.

**YOUTH IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

With this government, most men and women have all educated themselves. Some are doctors, others are engineers, many are people with different university degrees. They have graduated, they have their profession. Here we are a small community. Therefore, sometimes we have to migrate to another place, a city, for work.

The adults are the ones who are growing our food here in the fields. My husband works in Managua all week, but on the weekend we plant in our little plot where we have beans, we have corn and we have cows, all that. All of that has not been lost yet. It’s good for our daughters to educate themselves, but to always cultivate the land. It’s important that the youth are interested in agriculture, that they also love to grow our own food in our community and don’t forget where they were born.

These are the ideas of the government as well, because they help in this. They have projects. Here they help, along with other organizations like INTA (Nicaraguan Institute of
Agricultural Technology), to form a collective where they plant beans. The government is encouraging us to always cultivate our land, so that we have our food. They give us citrus, they give us bananas, papaya, lemon. We just have to go harvest. We have jocote, mango. They always continue the bono productivo program so that we grow something. In our plot, we are always growing something.

A MESSAGE FROM NICARAGUA

I would like to say that here in Nicaragua, thank God, we are recovering from everything. We are recovering peace, we are fighting. As citizens in our country, we want to be allowed to be free. We don’t want to be dependent on someone saying to us, “Look, do such a thing...” Let us solve our own problems. I think it is not necessary for other governments that are more powerful to have more than us. We want to be set free! Let us do everything that we are doing here to have this peace, this tranquility that we have had since 2007. We have recovered so many good things with this government.

So we want them to let us work. To let us continue to fight, us as Nicaraguans. We are people in solidarity, we are people who do not like living in war, we are people who share... We are humans and we would like them to respect us as we also respect all their rights in their country. We want to enjoy the good things this government is doing; it is with this government that we have managed to advance with everything. We want to continue with this government because it is a government that looks out for us, for us as peasants, for us as women, and for us as the poorest, for the children, for the youth.

We see, sincerely, that here in Nicaragua there have been so many good changes with this government. Most of us stay here, we don’t immigrate much, we don’t immigrate to other countries. If we immigrate it’s not too far, it is from here to Costa Rica. But to go to the United States... of the immigrants who go to the United States, there are few from Nicaragua. Thank God, we hardly ever go, thanks to this government which has given us work, has given us so many things: education, healthcare. We want to continue enjoying all of these benefits.

As Nicaraguans we ask the world to look at how well we are doing here in Nicaragua. That everything in the media is a lie. Let people come here and so that they can see that everything that the media says is happening here is a lie. We are free. We go out when we want to any part of our country, we talk, we share our opinions, and everything. We are fine. And we want to continue to be calm and in peace. I ask the world, if it wants to, to come and visit us. If people visit us, they will be convinced by our reality. And I ask that they don’t believe all of the media that is telling lies. Let them come and see for themselves. We are fine, we are calm and, thank God, we are recovering from all of this.
ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION...

This publication is a part of a testimonies project produced by the Friends of the ATC, a solidarity network with the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC, or Rural Workers Association). Founded in the context of the Sandinista Revolution, the ATC is an organization of struggle that defends the rural workers and peoples of Nicaragua. We organize at local and international levels to spread awareness, form solidarity, and facilitate support for the struggles and initiatives of the ATC and the international movement La Via Campesina. In the spirit of internationalism, we believe in the necessity of supporting ongoing struggles for justice in our own communities and around the world.

Our main activities are the following:

- Sharing information and news about the ATC, the CLOC, and La Via Campesina
- Organization of events (exchanges, delegations, and speaking tours)
- Logistical support for relationships between the ATC and other organizations and individuals around the world
- Securing resources for initiatives of the ATC, CLOC, and La Via Campesina

From July 11–21, 2019, the Friends of the ATC and the ATC hosted their “Solidarity with Nicaragua” delegation. A central purpose of this trip was the collection of testimonies in order to clarify for international audiences and solidarity activists the current state of revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua. Over the course of our time in Nicaragua, delegates conducted more than 20 interviews with ATC organizers, students, and members, whom described today’s political situation in Nicaragua as well as efforts to build agroecology, food sovereignty, socialism, and anti-imperialism in the region. These testimonies have been transcribed, translated, and condensed by Friends of the ATC and will be released in a series of packets like this one.

If you have any questions or want to become involved in the work of the Friends of the ATC, please write us: info@gmail.com (English, Español). You can also visit our Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/friendsatc) or our website (https://friendsatc.org/).

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