



CWS

## Summer Story

ACTION AGAINST POVERTY



By Gillian Southey, CWS communications coordinator.

Although Nicaragua was hit by severe drought in 2014, CEPAD helped Hermalinda and her community manage the difficult growing conditions.

## Looking out for Each Other

Hermalinda's gift of avocados was greeted with great joy by her neighbours. She had been given a tree by CEPAD (the Council of Protestant Churches) as part of their programme to improve income and food for small farmers. With the training she received, she was delighted to share her patio garden harvest.

Last October, she proudly showed international programmes coordinator Trish Murray her garden in rural Nicaragua. Cinnamon, mango, tangerine, avocado and 12 orange trees were flourishing despite two years of unpredictable weather. She grows papaya, pineapple, squash and 26 new plantain plants. The original 15 chickens had provided eggs and food for the family. Despite giving chickens to neighbours for special occasions, her flock now numbers 25.

Hermalinda and her husband don't know how they would have managed without CEPAD. The drought has been long and the seasons too short. "Nature hit us very badly last season," said husband Damaros. He lost not only his crops and investment but also traditional seed – what they gathered was of poor quality. The community worked together to address their common problems but their story could have been different. "We did not see a drought like this before."

According to Hermalinda, Ministry of Agriculture officials collected data but gave no help. It was CEPAD who gave them corn seed and heat resistant sorghum to plant. One man told Trish he now had to turn the wheel 22 times to get water from the well instead of eight. Even though heavy rains had washed away their bean crop, the water had disappeared rapidly. It has been a challenging time.

The community listens closely to Radio CEPAD for advice



CEPAD runs workshops to teach new skills and help the people learn from each other.

on how to feed their family with less – some have sold animals because they can no longer feed children and animals. It is not for want of trying. "We were like the ants, we saved, but have almost finished our savings," said one member.

The community of Nacascola has now graduated from CEPAD's five year training programme. The combination of technical help and community building has enabled them to make the most of what they have been given. "By working hand in hand with us, we have improved a great deal." The local committee set up as part of CEPAD's involvement is strong and resilient. They are working together to adapt to the severe weather. Sharing those first 40 avocados was a turning point for Hermalinda – a new crop for the community and a food they could not afford to buy – and a cause for celebration.



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**By digging at least two hectares of land, he can grow enough food to feed his family of six and pay school fees and medical costs. "It is hard because I use my hands for digging every day," he says.**

On the other side of the world South Sudan has suffered through major conflict and poverty. Many people in the world's newest country have been left to fend for themselves and the hope that came with independence in 2011 has gone. Although more than 1.8 million people are displaced and violence and hunger too common, the town of Maridi has been relatively safe.

Arnesto Zara aged 31 was determined to have some education despite decades of war. His father died when he was six and his mother worked hard to grow the food they needed to stay alive. In 2011 he had saved enough money to sit the Sudan School Certificate but with few jobs available he had to return to farming. By digging at least two hectares of land, he can grow enough food to feed his family of six and pay school fees and medical costs. "It is hard because I use my hands for digging every day," he says.

He dreams of going back to school but his priority is his children. CWS partner the Maridi Service Agency has made the difference. Like CEPAD they formed a young farmers group of which Arnesto is chairperson. Last year MSA lent them a tractor to plough their land and now is providing training to improve their farming techniques. In a fertile area of the country, the farmers are keen to expand operations. But without more help, progress will be tiny.

MSA is busy. It runs the local high school, three preschools, the only radio station, health and civic education, rehabilitates child soldiers, promotes



**Mr Arnesto rejoices in not having to dig his few hectares by hand thanks to MSA. He can feed his family while most South Sudanese are struggling through political turmoil and war.**


education for girls and supports small business. Set up by local young people, they know the importance of making the community strong in order to survive difficult times when resources may run out.

The commitment of MSA and CEPAD to the communities they serve is impressive. They are achieving short term gains – more nutritious food for families and education – and working on a long term plan to future proof very vulnerable communities against conflict and disaster.

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Summer 2015

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