

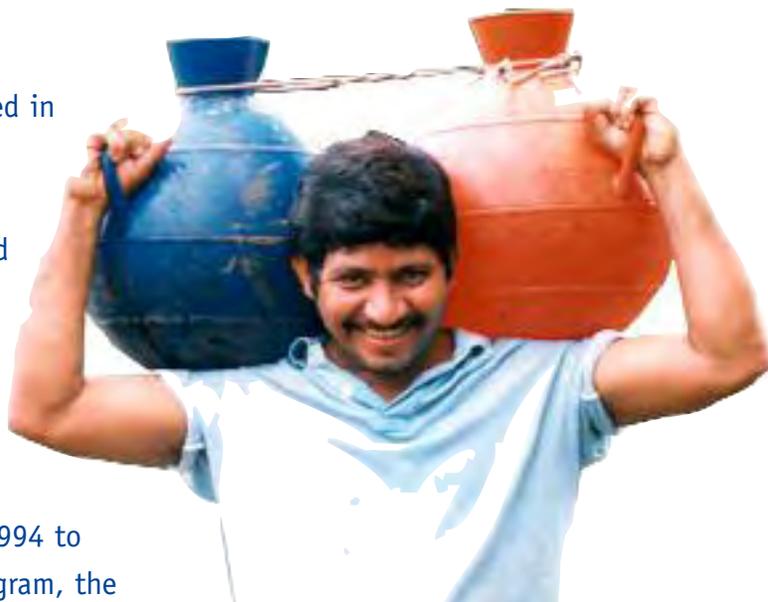
El Salvador

Making Environmental Issues a National Priority



From 1980 to 1992, El Salvador was mired in a bloody civil war that killed 80,000 people and devastated the country's environment and economy. USAID embarked on an ambitious plan to help rebuild El Salvador. Part of the plan focused on halting environmental degradation and making protection of natural resources a priority for Salvadoran citizens.

GreenCOM provided technical assistance to support USAID's environmental program in El Salvador from 1994 to 1999. During the first phase (1994–1997) of the program, the project's task was to mobilize educational institutions and environmental organizations to collaborate in developing a unified environmental education policy and to train journalists, NGO representatives, and other stakeholders to use environmental communication tools to enhance their programs. The second phase (1997–1999) of the program was focused on rural community mobilization around water conservation and quality.



Phase I: Education and Communication Capacity Building

During the first phase of GreenCOM's program, the focus was on building education and communication capacity among formal educators, journalists, national park staff, and agricultural extension workers. Project staff also collaborated on a mass media campaign to raise the profile of environmental issues among Salvadoran citizens.

Formal Education

GreenCOM's objective was to introduce environmental education in the national curricula for students in preschool classes through the sixth

grade. The integrated strategy, developed with the Ministry of Education, consisted of the following:

- 1. Establishing environmental education as one of the main cross-cutting components of national education reform.** After the civil war ended, El Salvador's Ministry of Education undertook major reform of the country's schools. Part of this reform was the desire to create a cross-cutting environmental component.

GreenCOM established an environmental education unit in the Curriculum Development Department of the Ministry of Education. The unit was staffed by two professional environmental educators who worked with the team in charge of creating educational programs for all subjects to ensure the presence of environmental topics. These two staff members helped to formulate contents of the “Science, Health, and the Environment” subject for all grades and the contents of other subjects in the curriculum for preschool through the ninth grade, thus surpassing the original goal of reaching the sixth grade.

GreenCOM also addressed secondary school curricula and introduced environmental subjects in seminars and student social service activities. By 1997, more than 86 percent of the topics in seminars and social service options were focused on the environment. Environmental subjects were also introduced in universities through seminars for professors on addressing environmental degradation. As a result, several schools (Universities Tecnológica, Panamericana, Matías Delgado, Francisco Gavidia, Modular Abierta, Católica de Occidente, and Universidad de Oriente) later established environmental studies programs.

2. Formulation of a national environmental education policy. GreenCOM and El Salvador’s Executive Secretariat of the Environment



(known as SEMA) convened a national conference on environmental education in 1996. Twelve hundred educators, NGO representatives, and government officials participated in this event, which was opened by the president of El Salvador, the director of USAID/El Salvador, the minister of education, and the director of SEMA. An important outcome of the conference was a document defining the guidelines, strategies, and activities of a national environmental education policy. This document was later revised and delivered to the minister of the environment and natural resources by the minister of education in a ceremony attended by more than 800 guests.

3. Training teachers to cover environmental subjects. To ensure adequate coverage of environmental issues in schools, GreenCOM designed a teacher training strategy that reached 5,177 teachers through 90 training events. A major component of this training was a set of four environmental education teaching guides developed by the Ministry of Education with assistance from GreenCOM.

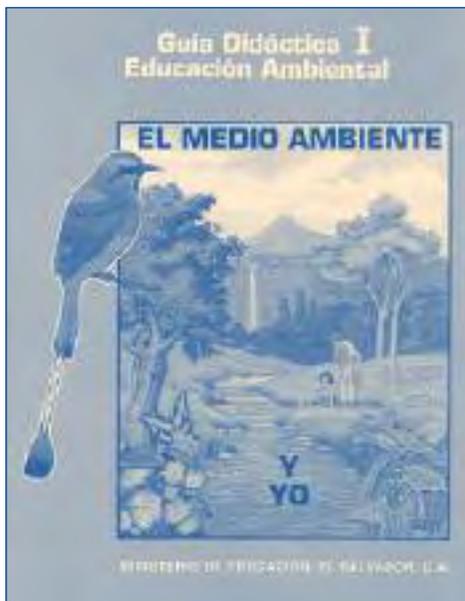
The guides covered key environmental topics and suggested practical activities teachers could use at different grade levels. The guides also demonstrated ways that teachers could infuse environmental topics in other subject areas to increase students’ understanding of the critical issues the country faced. Activities were carefully designed and pretested with groups of teachers and students. The four guides included:

- ***I Take Care of My Environment:*** For preschool teachers. Offers many activities to introduce very young students to the environment.
- ***The Environment and Me:*** For teachers of the first cycle of basic education (first to third grade). Introduces students to

environmental subjects from their own individual perspective.

- **The Environment and Us:** For teachers of the second cycle of basic education (fourth to sixth grade). Describes the social dimension of environmental issues for students' broadening social awareness.
- **My Community and the Environment:** For teachers of the third and middle cycles of basic education (seventh grade to second year of secondary school). Approaches environmental situations, problems, and solutions from a community perspective and highlights the role of schools in environmental improvement.

The development of the guides was also a process of institutionalization and capacity building, as GreenCOM worked with the Ministry of Education's environmental education unit to produce them.



GreenCOM collaborated with Salvadoran environmental educators on textbooks for primary and secondary schools. (Available online, <http://www.greencom.org>)

An unanticipated result was that the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) bought several hundred copies of the guides to include in educational resource packs sent to Spanish-language schools associated with NAAEE and other Latin American institutions.

4. **Developing materials for trained teachers.** In addition to the teacher guides, GreenCOM helped develop a series of classroom materials that trained teachers could use. Multimedia materials included radio, video, and print products. The box on page 5 highlights specific educational products created by GreenCOM and project partners.

An important aspect of these formal environmental education efforts was the support GreenCOM built with private businesses. Collaboration with the private sector generated funds for production of educational materials and environmental newspaper supplements.

5. **School-community project development.** The main objective of GreenCOM's school-community projects was to provide opportunities for school involvement in solving the environmental problems of their surrounding communities. Part of GreenCOM's teacher training concentrated on designing environmental projects that involved teachers, students, and parents.

Students in a school near El Imposible National Park, for example, established a tree nursery to reproduce native species from the park. At another school, students planted trees in the schoolyard and were responsible for taking care of them until graduation.

Journalist Training and Awards

Between 1995 and 1998, GreenCOM organized six national conferences for environmental journalists and representatives of NGOs and other

environmental experts. The purpose of the conferences was not only to establish a contact between communicators and experts but also to offer participants an opportunity to analyze El Salvador's environmental problems together. The journalists gained reliable sources of environmental information and the NGOs developed media contacts to help them broadcast environmental messages and activities.

Another related activity was GreenCOM's creation of a national environmental journalism awards program. Awards were given for outstanding coverage of environmental topics in print, radio, and television, with three awards in each category. Each award (sponsored by private businesses) included a check and a certificate.

Activities with the mass media led to a significant increase in coverage of environmental topics. One of the best examples was the newspaper *El Diario de Hoy*, which signed an agreement with GreenCOM in 1994 to dedicate one issue per month of its Sunday children's magazine supplement, *Guañaquín*, to environmental topics. From 1995 through the first half of 1999, the paper printed 54 *Guañaquín* supplements devoted to environmental subjects, with an average printing of 112,000 copies each. A GreenCOM evaluation in 1996 found that 86 percent of teachers used *Guañaquín* to prepare their classes and 83 percent of students used it in their homework and conducted many of the suggested experiments.

El Diario de Hoy established an annual environmental contest for *Guañaquín* readers that was extensively promoted in schools throughout the country. The first contest in 1994—with the slogan "Let's paint a green El Salvador"—drew 2,500 entries. Each subsequent year the entries multiplied, reaching a total of 121,909 in 1999.

National Parks Educational Opportunities

In El Salvador's national parks, GreenCOM developed environmental interpretation capacity by training technicians, guides, and rangers. The first step was to create an interdisciplinary team with representatives from all institutions involved in park administration such as the National Directorate for Renewable Resources, the National Patrimony Directorate of CONCULTURA, the Salvadoran Tourist Institute, and two NGO counterparts, AMAR and SalvaNATURA. After the members were trained, they trained other guides and rangers and developed interpretation plans for all of the country's national parks.

In 1995, another training program was organized in collaboration with the University of Idaho. This program trained 180 guides and rangers and established interpretative trails in several national parks—Cerro Verde, Montecristo, Walter Thilo Deinger, Saburo Hirao—and the national zoo. Trainees also designed education plans and facilities for El Imposible National Park and the Barra de Santiago.



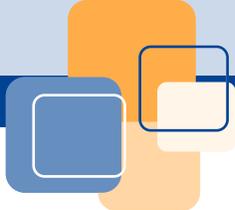
GreenCOM and a Salvadoran newspaper collaborated on a monthly environmental issue of the Sunday children's magazine *Guañaquín*.

Environmental Education Materials

- **Retoñitos**, a series of six books for children, was prepared by several NGOs and the Ministry of Education. The NGOs each received a number of books to sell or give away and they were encouraged to seek sponsorship for future editions. The Ministry of Education distributed *Retoñitos* to school libraries around the country and the series was later incorporated into the ministry's mobile libraries. The collection consisted of:
 - *Me lo contó un pajarito (A Little Bird Told Me)*, about native birds and produced with the Audubon Society of El Salvador.
 - *Pasito a pasito, carapachito (Step by Step, Little Shell)*, about turtles and produced with AMAR, the organization in charge of the turtle conservation program in the Barra de Santiago Park.
 - *De rama en rama (From Branch to Branch)*, about forests and produced with SalvaNATURA, which manages the El Imposible National Park. SalvaNATURA secured sponsorship for a special edition of this book and later produced a new series called *Las fabulosas fábulas de el Imposible (The Fabulous Fables of El Imposible)*.
 - *Mi amigo invisible (My Invisible Friend)*, about air and produced with Swisscontact, an organization dealing with air quality in Central America. Swisscontact later published another edition to be distributed in other countries.
- *Sube, corre, vuela, amiguita viajera (Get Up, Run, Fly, Little Traveling Friend)*, about water and produced with ASPAGUA, which carries out many water protection activities.
- *5 gatitos, los felinos silvestres de El Salvador (Five Kitties)*, about native wildcats in danger of extinction and produced with the Natural History Museum of CONCULTURA, the National Council for Culture and the Arts.
- **Gotita a gotita: las aventuras de Clarita en su viaje por la tierra (Drop by Drop: The Adventures of Clarita in Her Travels Around the World)**, a radio series featuring a water droplet named Clarita and her friends as they fall from the clouds and ultimately return to them by evaporation. A teacher's guide explained the topic and El Salvador's water problems.
- **Our Home, the Environment**, five 15-minute television programs (with accompanying teacher's guide) covering topics such as water, air, soil, biodiversity, and urban environmental problems.



GreenCOM and project partners developed educational products on a wide range of environmental topics.



GreenCOM's interpretation work in El Salvador became a model in Central America and was replicated by the project in Nicaragua and Panama. According to a report by the U.S. Information Agency, 86 percent of Salvadorans in 1998 considered the environment a priority issue for development of the country.

Capacity Building for NGOs

GreenCOM collaborated with the Salvadoran Environmental Unit on a training plan for technical staff of environmental NGOs. This plan covered the design, implementation, and evaluation of environmental education projects. It was used with 54 staff members from 18 NGOs in a series of five weeklong theory and practice workshops that were followed by projects carried out at their home institutions.

One year after the workshops took place, the Americas Initiative Fund of El Salvador, a major funder for environmental organizations, reported that the number of grant applications dealing with environmental education had increased and nearly 50 percent of its approved grants were environmental education projects. Later, the organization began to require that all grant proposals contain an education component that guaranteed the active participation of communities in which the projects were carried out.

Agricultural Extension Training

GreenCOM trained more than 60 agricultural extensionists in the application of appropriate environmental technologies and conservation to counteract the effects of harmful pesticide use and the increasing problem of soil erosion. Those extensionists were charged with training colleagues and efforts were also made to infuse environmental and conservation issues in the training program of the National Center for Agriculture, Livestock, and Forestry Technology (CENTA).

In 1996, GreenCOM and CENTA technical staff created an organizational manual for the CENTA communications unit, which was used to train 27 CENTA technicians in communication technologies.

Mass Media

GreenCOM and SEMA's communications staff collaborated on a multifaceted public communication strategy to reach Salvadorans with messages about the environment, develop awareness about environmental problems, and generate public support for environmental laws. This campaign was carried out in three phases, each of which began with target audience research and pretesting of products and resulted in radio, television, and print advertisements and promotional giveaways.

The slogan of the first phase (September–November 1995) was “The environment is your home” and covered general environmental topics, highlighting their importance in the daily lives and concerns of Salvadoran citizens, especially with regard to health and livelihoods. Audience measures showed that the campaign reached more than 750,000 people.

The second phase (September–November 1996) concentrated on the theme “A clear conscience about our environment” and dealt with the dangers of industrial pollution, including a call to manufacturers to stop polluting. The campaign reached more than one million people.

The third phase (June–December 1998) carried the slogan “Let's clean the water” and focused directly on the industrial sector and its need to protect water resources because of their importance to all of life and to the national economy. The launch of this campaign was a special event led by the president of El Salvador.

Phase II: Community Mobilization on Water

In 1997, GreenCOM's programmatic focus shifted to providing communication and education assistance to help USAID/El Salvador focus on increasing rural access to clean water. GreenCOM began to work closely with El Salvador's new Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) on a project known as PROMESA. MARN and USAID/El Salvador selected 18 priority municipalities for water-focused PROMESA activities.

GreenCOM and project counterparts provided communications assistance for implementing PROMESA in those municipalities. Their strategy, formulated on the basis of formative research in the target communities, focused on personal and community behavior change related to conserving water and reducing pollution for cleaner drinking water; promoting community-based management of water supply systems; and making water issues a priority for community action.

Communication Campaign

One of the primary vehicles for achieving these goals was a regional communication campaign to spread messages about water through the mass media, interpersonal channels, and educational materials. The campaign theme was "Let's stop polluting water, we need it clean for life."



Cántarito became the spokesperson for GreenCOM's campaign on rural water issues.

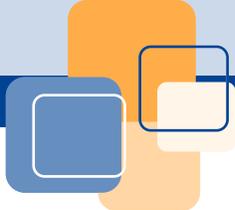
GreenCOM developed a fictional character named "Cántarito" (after the *cántaro*, a water jug used throughout rural El Salvador) to be the campaign's centerpiece. After several rounds of pretesting, his appearance changed to reflect the feedback of individuals who used cántaros every day. Cántarito appeared in three radio messages broadcast by six national and four local radio stations; two television spots produced and broadcast by a local cable channel; a poster, calendar, leaflets, story booklets, and puppet shows.

GreenCOM also produced materials to support training activities such as a flipchart on watersheds; an audiovisual series called *Clean Water for Life* (three educational programs on water quantity, water quality, and community organization); an audiovisual series for schools called *The Water's House* (six videos, six complementary booklets, and a teacher's guide); and a 12-booklet series called *Basic Library of Water and Sewage* for community leaders and water and sewage technicians. New editions of earlier educational materials produced by GreenCOM in El Salvador were also reissued.

A subsequent evaluation of regional and national media coverage determined that the Cántarito campaign reached more than 280,000 people in 57,000 homes directly or indirectly.

Community Training

GreenCOM offered training on community organization, decision making, and management to strengthen the communities' ability to solve local problems. Sixty-five training workshops were held in which 434 community leaders from 13 priority municipalities of the department of Usulután learned about sustainable water supply management and clean water.



In addition to the workshops, GreenCOM implemented a hands-on activity with local teams of water and sewage technicians, development workers, and teachers. Team members were asked to define and implement a common approach for sustainable community water and sewage projects. Overall, 320 technicians and development workers and 1,589 teachers took part in this skill-building exercise.

Organization and Social Mobilization

In the 18 priority municipalities, GreenCOM and its PROMESA partners also built local action networks to strengthen rural water and sewage organizations, municipal authorities, and citizens and to encourage their collaboration. This activity took several forms:

- **Creation or strengthening of local organizations related to water issues (water committees, water assemblies, health committees, ecology clubs).** Eighteen water committees, 16 community development associations, and five youth groups were created or strengthened. As a result, three members of the Managuitas del Agua youth group were recognized for their work in their school and community with scholarships to study at the Universidad Gerardo Barrios in Usulután.
- **Training of municipal authorities.** Nine municipalities of the Usulután region received training and technical assistance through a municipal program called “How to Sustain Water and Sewage Projects.” Nine mayors and 18 councilors participated in this program. Other products of this training program included the drafting and enactment of 12 environmental municipal ordinances, the proper identification and acquisition of two sites for new municipal garbage dumps, and the investment by eight municipalities of one-half million colones (more than US\$57,000) for the improvement and protection of their water supplies.

- **Coordination of activities with regional networks.** GreenCOM organized the First Regional Encounter for Development Institutions, held in 1999 with institutions working in eastern El Salvador. This meeting enabled better collaboration among the organizations.
- **Collaboration with schools.** As part of GreenCOM’s educational strategy, the project worked with schools to organize 15 water festivals. Most of these festivals occurred with the organized participation of communities, including hundreds of teachers and students. The festivals’ mobilization and information activities ultimately reached about 285,000 people. In eight of the 13 priority municipalities of Usulután, youth groups painted water-related murals to remind community members of water issues.
- **Professional development.** GreenCOM provided training for 1,589 teachers and 329 technicians on water-related issues. The project trained 434 community leaders, nine mayors, and 18 councilors in different aspects of managing sustainable water projects.

Lessons Learned

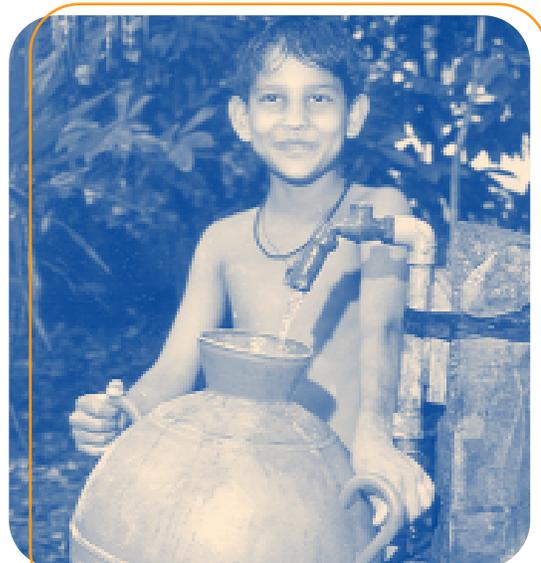
The preceding section noted results of GreenCOM's activities when possible. This section highlights lessons learned over the course of the five-year program in El Salvador.

1. An integrated environmental communication strategy that utilizes all possible communication and education channels is fundamental. Isolated interventions or the use of only one channel will not increase knowledge of environmental issues in different segments of the population. In El Salvador, GreenCOM's broad-based strategy meant that different channels fed into one another. Mass media activities motivated teachers to cover environmental topics in their classrooms. NGOs were also encouraged to learn that the mass media could be used to publicize their environmental messages. In turn, the interest in environmental issues that teachers and NGOs generated among various population segments motivated the media to provide yet more coverage of environmental topics. By "heating up" the public dialogue on environment and natural resources, some private businesses felt compelled to focus on their environmental track records with public relations campaigns.

2. Programs such as GreenCOM are successful when they build partnerships with a broad cross-section of public and private organizations. From the beginning, GreenCOM formed interinstitutional working groups to analyze environmental issues and determine plans for action. In the second phase of the program, GreenCOM brought together national and local government officials, skilled tradespersons, extensionists, schools, and the mass media to build wide support for water conservation and quality.

3. A unified national environmental education policy requires both strong government support and interagency cooperation at the national government level. El Salvador's education ministry was one of the largest government agencies GreenCOM worked with. Yet the support of other government organizations made the policy truly "national." Formal letters of understanding between agencies were required to ensure that cooperation was sustained.

4. Community mobilization programs require community articulation of the issues to be addressed. This allows the people who are directly affected by (or who contribute to) environmental problems to identify those problems and take responsibility for solving them. Community residents should also be made aware of local resources they can access and efforts should be made to involve all of those stakeholders in activities from the start. Local governments should solidify those relationships in official municipal environmental plans.



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GreenCOM

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