



**Welcome if you are reading the annual ACTS newsletter for the first time.** Welcome back if you have been with us for years or decades. With 37 years of community development in rural Honduras, we honor local Honduran leaders who have been our partners and you, the engaged donors that make it possible. With local partners, ACTS has developed water systems, medical and dental care, micro banking, agricultural training, English and computer classes, libraries, latrines, support for disabled individuals and the elderly, cancer screening, leadership training for teens, and more.



*In October, farmers used pointed sticks to plant beans – several months later than usual due to weird weather patterns.*

Circa 2023, our impact is wholistic and ranges from basic food for people hungry because of crushing drought and inability to plant on time, to microfinance for seeds and supplies. We improved food production by recruiting volunteer experts in regenerative agriculture and soil science; funded vital medical and dental treatment; and are in Year 3 of a 4-year project developing a water system for every home in Ocotal. As of 2023, we have responsibility for a colegio (high school) that will help pull their families out of poverty.

## AGRICULTURE

### **ACTS involves international experts to mitigate effects of climate change on agriculture.**

Persistent and acute drought in the historically “dry corridor” of Central America, including Honduras, drastically diminishes yield from agriculture. Corn and beans are local

### **What is ACTS’ service area**

El Rosario and more than 12 dozen small communities in the mountainous “Locomapa” in the department of Yoro, Honduras.  
GPS 7MGG+F2R, La Laguna, Honduras

### **About that colegio –**

We are assuming full responsibility for the colegio from Portland Maine-based NGO The Children’s Initiative. Founder Charlie Miller said, “I’m well beyond retirement age and am transferring TCI’s assets to ACTS for two reasons -- I respect ACTS’ focus, relationships, and outcomes in El Rosario and beyond; and I am encouraged by the younger generation of 30-some-things ACTS has recruited to partner with long-term members. The future is bright with multigenerational talent and commitment.” Frankly, we’re wildly enthusiastic about the colegio. It’s regional and includes extremely poor indigenous communities. Post-pandemic, ACTS brings hearts and hands to rebuilding a rigorous academic program and increasing enrollment.



*600+ new high-quality books in Spanish refreshed the libraries. “The Human Body” transfixed this group of girls.*

## **What is a true partnership?**

*When each party brings something the other needs.*

ACTS is a rewarding long-term commitment that I reaffirm regularly because ACTS gets stuff done. Please take the next step by contributing to fund effective community development in rural Honduras. Your questions are always welcome.

Thanks! Linda Kennedy, ACTS president  
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staples; in a good harvest, they provide families food and some income. The annual economic cycle has no margin for error. Lack of rain in May and June 2023 was devastating. Rain began on August 28 and farmers are racing to catch up. Without corn income, families did not have cash to buy supplies to plant the July bean crop and are using ACTS-supplied funding for a novel locally-managed micro finance project that loans seeds to planters to be “repaid” to a seed bank after the harvest in January.





ACTS' July 2023 multinational agriculture team led by Betsy Rybeck Lynd with experts from Honduras, Brazil, and USA.

Globally, climate predictions are dire, and Honduran weather has become unpredictable and extreme. We are determined to learn if farming is sustainable in this "new normal" drier climate. Latin American experts in soil science, subsistence farming, hydrology, GIS mapping, and forage (what animals eat) are volunteering with ACTS to measure, map, sample, and test water, soil, air, and plants in El Rosario. In short, they determined the situation is not hopeless but will require significant change in crop and livestock management practices to succeed.

**What are the problems?** Deforestation left underground springs exposed causing reduced rain and less water stored; long-term use of hybrid seed and pesticides negated local seed collection and created dependence on commercial products usually purchased with high interest loans; re-using fields depleted soils drastically reducing critical organic matter in the soil; livestock foraging in fields post-harvest removes valuable plant debris and compacts soil.

The experts recommend a multipronged approach. Primary goals: reforesting natural springs, rebuilding soils with cover crops and less chemicals (aka regenerative agriculture), and use of non-hybrid seeds suited to the environment. This is complicated information. Most "mid-career" farmers have an average of three years of elementary education; they are reserving judgement on new techniques preferring to let



Helen Whyte with Honduran leaders Nelson Mejia and Ronis Martinez at the source of a well-forested underground spring being piped to a holding tank that will supply people and animals at a lower elevation.

others go first. A cadre of "early-career" farmers is better educated, committed to living locally, eager to innovate, and to teach others.

Over 15 years, ACTS has discussed the ethic of volunteering with Hondurans and results are building. In October, ACTS funded 15 men who initiated and worked 600 hours to develop a catchment and distribution system for water from an underground spring for use by people and livestock.

## HEALTH

**HEALTH effects of drought are physical, mental, and economic.** Water shortages, crop failure, and hunger are ill-effects of drought. Combined, they cause drastic or complete elimination of income.

The ACTS-funded Medical/ Dental Clinic in El Rosario serves anyone who can get there. Every morning, mothers walk an hour or more to bring sick kids to see the nurse. A "Helping Fund" provides free care and medicine as needed. Clinic president Nelson Mejia says no paperwork is required to establish need, "We just know." Due to the drought and inflation, the need for free or subsidized care is increasing. Nelson reports every month the medicines he buys for the pharmacy go up in costs – as does the need for ACTS funding. We expect medical expenses to increase substantially in 2024.



Sue Burgos visiting the home of a family with several disabled children.

The Clinic is staffed full-time by Nurse Nolvía, now in her eighth year living in El Rosario. A doctor, dentist, and dental assistant work part-time. The staff is fully funded by ACTS. Outreach to other communities includes school visits for dental screening and fluoride treatments, vaccines for everyone, and contraception. Families are choosing to have fewer children and the nurse tracks each woman to be sure she receives her contraceptives without interruption. Free condoms are always available from an open box outside the Clinic. Home visits to the elderly and housebound ensure their needs are met.

Patients with serious illnesses are followed by Clinic staff and ACTS personnel. The Department of Pathology at Dartmouth Health assists in unusual cases. For example, over a decade, four children in an

extended family were diagnosed with the genetic disease homocystinuria including blindness, severe cognitive delay, and other significant symptoms. ACTS provides their single mother with home help, groceries, vitamin therapy, and a wheelchair. Next door, Pathology identified a child with Kabuki syndrome. For these kids, there is no cure, but with a diagnosis, some symptoms can be treated.

Prior to ACTS' supported dentistry, a local carpenter pulled teeth with pliers. We began dental outreach with a simple

set-up and thanks to donors now have a well-equipped dental clinic staffed by Hondurans four days/month. With 24 outreach days/year, Dr. Reina visits every elementary school with prevention and screening of hundreds of children. Keeping dental equipment functioning in a hot and dusty environment is a challenge and maintaining the clinic's viability is imperative. To share our wealth of knowledge, the ACTS dental group, headed by Dave Bogacz and Bob Keene, is active training Honduran dentists in progressive techniques.

## EDUCATION

**ACTS has a positive impact on EDUCATION at all levels.** After a 3-year shutdown for the pandemic, schools reopened in 2023. Buildings had deteriorated, teachers found other work, and families became accustomed to children not attending school. Many adults have had little or no schooling. Post-pandemic, attendance is down at every level. Rebuilding the culture of regular school attendance in that environment is a challenge.

The Honduran rural standard is a basic one-room schoolhouse style education with a solo teacher using workbooks to teach grades 1-6. Many children drop out before finishing grade 6. Continuing to grades 7-11 often involves travel and fees and is a hard choice for families. With the colegio, ACTS is removing barriers making that choice appealing and sustainable.

In the rural context, most jobs in the informal economy are low-pay and do not require education. For girls -- cleaning, babysitting, or doing a family's laundry; for boys -- farming or heavy



*Futbol is wildly popular at the colegio.*



*Colegio students chose an eagle mascot and spirit t-shirts are popular.*

### Critical Need: More Students = More Costs

Growing the enrollment is a priority and every student represents \$250 in real costs to ACTS. Join us in making this possible with a generous donation.

labor. Better paying jobs are in the formal economy, closer to urban areas, and usually require a high school diploma. A person with a high school diploma can make a significant difference to their family's standard of living.

The colegio is a quality academic program serving grades 7-11.

After three pandemic years with no school, many teens and families are "out of the habit" of prioritizing school, particularly one with a robust academic program. In 2023, a transitional year, ACTS co-operated the colegio with TCI.

**To attract and retain students, ACTS and the local Colegio Committee are going all out to remove barriers to participation and make school compelling.** Our shared goals are to: make school fun, attract and retain students, and promote community involvement. Accordingly, all students have scholarships, uniforms, and shoes; the library has new

furnishings and books; lunch is free; bus travel is free; breakfast for early arrivals gives a solid start to the day; ten indigenous children are the first in their communities to pursue diplomas; soccer for boys and girls uses new equipment; students in the drum line march around (loudly!); fencing protects the teaching garden; and roof repairs keep everyone dry. Currently, three colegio grads are attending university.

The ACTS-funded Community Education Center in El Rosario is open to everyone in the region. Programming includes a library with books and computers; mornings it is a

hive of teachers and K-6 students; afterschool it is a hub for older students working on homework projects. Free courses in English and Computers give teens and adults skills for future jobs. ACTS replaced half of the computers this year; old machines are scavenged for parts. A cooperative garden led by women demonstrates new techniques.

ACTS brings books and more books. Pictured here are some of the 650 books funded by the Zondervan Foundation to refresh libraries at the Community Education Center, the colegio, and ten "traveling libraries" that circulate monthly among ten rural schools and provide the only non-workbook printed materials in the schools. From easy-to-read picture books through Harry Potter, our goal is to tempt and enchant new readers and open the world to their exploration.



*What a treat to be there when a roomful of kids discover books.*



## INFRASTRUCTURE

### Developing communities with livable INFRASTRUCTURE is a priority for ACTS.

What constitutes livable infrastructure? The basics include good water, a safe and private place to toilet, accessible medical and dental care, schools that educate, adequate food, and public safety. For decades, ACTS has been helping local people to build the elements of infrastructure that afford life with dignity.

In El Rosario, ACTS meets with community committees to discuss goals, options, resources available and needed, and strategies to move forward. Their needs are legitimate. After 37+ years, we can freely ask questions to try to understand complicated situations and potential solutions. Sometimes we offer knowhow or the ability to investigate alternatives, and sometimes it is funding, equipment, or supplies. Fortunately, internet connectivity is decent and we frequently email to sort out details. When an urgent or critical need is identified, ACTS can securely wire funds to a trusted leader.



ACTS' water projects are ambitious and necessarily novel. The 4-year project in the community of Ocotal is a stunning example of a clearly articulated need, teamwork by professional engineers, community sweat equity, and \$100K from generous donors dedicated to ACTS' projects. The goal is consistent good water at each home. Leading design and implementation are six professional engineers volunteering their time. The plan requires a large bridge, 3 miles of pipe-line trench hand-dug by local men, break tanks to reduce pressure from transit down slopes, and unprecedented community involvement. Lately, PVC pipe has increased 300% in cost. Do we have any doubts?

No! A water spigot frees women from transporting water for hours, residents can wash daily reducing skin and intestinal diseases, women start "kitchen gardens" to improve food options, and everyone benefits from adequate hydration.

## WE APPRECIATE OUR PARTNERS

**Friends, partners, donors, colleagues, associates, family, and so many talented experts – YOU make ACTS' able to do what it does best – to help Honduran communities help themselves.**

This year we have new partners and structures improving our work, many in Honduras. Thanks to Almacen El Estudiante for helping us select and import books; to Esperanza for orienting us to the new colegio; to Hanover Rotary for supporting Rotarians participation; to Department of Pathology at Dartmouth Health for identifying Kabuki syndrome in a little girl; to Karla and her Honduran church for providing a beautiful bed for a needy family; and again, to the Zondervan Foundation for providing books and more books. For more about our partners check the website - [www.actshonduras.org](http://www.actshonduras.org).

**How much does ACTS spend on the organization? \$4500/year:**  
PO box, IRS, wire transfer fees, newsletter printing and postage, Squarespace, and baggage fees  
(no executive director, catering, retreats, swag, travel, gifts).

## STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**We are a group of committed professionals bringing tremendous breadth of knowledge and experience to community building in Honduras.** We extend special thanks to Hart Silverwood, retiring from his position as ACTS' treasurer since 1987. Fortunately, Hart will continue as a valued member of the Steering Committee.

**Heather Bryant**, agriculture in low resource areas, Lyme NH  
**Suzanne Burgos**, primary care, Bethel VT  
**Matt Garton**, education and finance, NYC NY  
**Michael Harris**, educational administration, Etna NH  
**Robert Keene**, global health, dentistry, Hanover NH  
**Linda Kennedy**, education, cancer prevention, Thetford Center VT  
**Betsy Rybeck Lynd**, agriculture, education, Plainfield NH  
**Peter Mason**, primary care, public health, Lebanon NH  
**Charlie Miller**, education, Portland ME

**Juliana Ortego**, teen leadership, NYC NY  
**Lisa Purvis**, education and public health, Woodstock, VT  
**Jennifer Randolph**, organizational data, Hanover NH  
**John Sanders**, medicine, Lyme NH  
**Hart Silverwood**, treasurer, Durham NH  
**Brad Taylor**, agriculture, veterinary medicine, Ithaca NY  
**Helen Whyte**, community organizer, Lyme NH  
**Dean Seibert**, active emeritus, Norwich VT