



FINCA®

Village Bank Notes

Fall 2017 • Volume 28 • Issue 3

Dirt Roads and Dreams

Written by Bob Price, Director of Donor Services, FINCA International

The driver told me the dirt road through the narrow ravine in which we were traveling flooded every time there was a heavy rain. And that exceptionally heavy downpours knocked down the utility poles that paralleled our path. And he was sure the torrents unleashed by Hurricane Mitch had left the hillsides around us completely denuded. Such was the landscape that set the scene for my visit to Pochocuape, Nicaragua on a sunny day in the dry season (thank goodness).

I was there to meet Estela Amparo Sanchez Guerro. Estela is a long-term FINCA client who, along with her husband, Eddy, owns a tiny general store. Just a few steps off the road, her store is the only convenient option for most people in the area to purchase basic staples (rice, beans, etc.), fresh vegetables (some of which Estela grows herself) and even a small selection of clothing. And her store is the *only* place to purchase those goods when the road washes out!

Estela was born and raised in Pochocuape. Her parents and a few of her siblings still live nearby. She met her husband at a local church event. And despite



Estela's son, Azael Amparo, plays with a toy car outside the family home.



Photo by Carlos Alaniz

FINCA client in Nicaragua, Estela Amparo Sanchez Guerro, weighing grocery items in her shop.

the dilapidated infrastructure, she is happy to be raising her own children in this close-knit community.

During my visit, Estela's 4-year old son, Azael, pulled me aside to race toy cars around the family's dusty yard, and then proceeded to give me a tour of the entire plot. He showed me the enclosure where the family keeps a few pigs as part of an income-generating project, and then pointed out a small solar energy system Estela had installed to power the family's lights during electricity outages. Quite the forward thinker, Azael told me getting power from the sun is *way* better than from the local electric utility.

Throughout our hour together, Estela and her family were a whirlwind of activity as neighbors continuously came to make purchases in the store. In between customers, Estela spoke of her dreams. The dreams she had for herself when she was young. The dreams she has for herself now. And the dreams she has for her children.

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Photo by Carlos Alaniz

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Laughing as she told the story, Estela said that as a teenager she had envisioned becoming a fashion designer. Her parents had enough money to allow her to finish high school, but the requisite further education or an apprenticeship were out of the question. So, Estela became a shop girl and then further deferred her dreams when she got married and became a mother.

Estela made it clear she does not regret the path her life has taken. But when she talked about her daughter, Josefina, Estela's voice tightened up and tears came to her eyes. She told me she hesitates to place any obligations on Josefina ... she knows that her daughter must dream her own dreams and follow her own path. But Estela knows a brighter future is possible. She does not want her children obligated to running a tiny shop like herself.

Thanks to business profits made by possible by a FINCA loan, Estela and Eddy continue to set aside savings. Josefina will finish high school in a few years

and will be positioned to attend college (as will little Azael one day). Given her aptitude in math, Estela envisions Josefina becoming a professional. Perhaps an accountant or a credit officer for FINCA. Maybe even a doctor or a lawyer. Estela realizes that such a life might take her daughter away from Pochocuape. But outside of the rainy season, Estela knows that Josefina will always be able to find her way home.

Estela's hopes and dreams for her children are like the hopes and dreams we find in millions of FINCA clients around the world. They want better lives, for themselves and their children. And they know that the help of small loans and growing businesses moves them one step closer to achieving their dreams.

I plan to be back in Nicaragua next year (hopefully again in the dry season), and I will make it a point to visit Pochocuape in the afternoon or on a weekend. I want to check in on Estela, Eddy and Azael. But mostly I am curious to find out what Josefina envisions for her future. When I find out, I will let you know.

FINCA Celebrates 25 Years of Improving Lives in Uganda

This year, FINCA is celebrating a milestone in Uganda. For the past 25 years, FINCA has provided low-income families and underserved communities with the tools they need to improve their lives.

FINCA co-founders John Hatch and Rupert Scofield witnessed the tremendous impact of your support on a recent visit to Uganda. In a rural village, they met with 15 women who formed the first FINCA Village Bank in Uganda. The women proudly spoke of their accomplishments, including successfully putting their children through school, expanding their farms and improving their homes.

Today, over 130,000 hard-working entrepreneurs are reaping the benefits of access to our financial services, such as business loans and savings accounts. FINCA is utilizing innovative technologies, like mobile phones, to serve hard-to-reach communities with basic financial services. In fact, over 75% of our clients in Uganda live in rural areas.

We are also helping families in Uganda save time and lead healthier lives by improving access to innovative products like clean cookstoves and solar

lighting, through our BrightLife social enterprise. For solar home lighting systems, we've introduced "pay-as-you-go" financing, so that more families can benefit from clean energy in their homes.

Rupert Scofield, said of reaching this milestone, "Seeing first-hand the transformational change that 25 years of support has had in these communities reminds me that we are on the right track."



Photo by FINCA staff

Rupert Scofield (left) and John Hatch (right) meet with a long-time FINCA client in Uganda.

The Value of a Solar Lamp

FINCA has helped thousands of Ugandans to access solar lanterns, through its BrightLife social enterprise. Through recent focus groups, FINCA discovered the many, innovative ways that these solar lamps have impacted families

in Uganda. In fact, the value of a solar lantern is not measured just by the light that it provides, but in all the things that *having light* enables people to do, like running a business at night or supervising children's homework.

Here are some of the impactful ways BrightLife solar lamps are changing lives:



Families save significantly from fewer purchases of candles and kerosene and lower electricity charges.



Children can study at home on average 3 hours longer.



Business owners use the lamps at evening markets, helping to extend business hours and increasing income.



Many customers report fewer respiratory and eye problems and better sleep at night.



Homes are cleaner with less soot on the walls.



Customers report less rats at home and less contamination of food from rats.



Solar lamps double as flashlights at night and keep parents safe when traveling from work to home.

Medical Insurance for Women and Children in Guatemala

To increase access to medical care for women and children, FINCA has launched a medical insurance program for Village Banking clients in Guatemala. Clients can choose between an individual or family plan that covers general medicine, pediatrics and gynecology services. Launched in November 2016, the program has since expanded to all 29 FINCA branches across the country.

Many poor Guatemalans cannot access medical services for themselves and their families. Although health care is guaranteed to every citizen by the country's constitution, public hospitals and clinics are severely underfunded and private clinics are hard to reach or expensive. Guatemalans also face many health problems, with a high prevalence of chronic malnutrition and maternal and child mortality.

Thanks to FINCA's new insurance product, close to 20,000 clients and their family members are now able to access medical services.

Margarita Castillo, a small convenience store owner, finds the new service useful for her children,

especially since her daughter recently had her appendix removed. She especially likes being able to access doctors at private clinics. "At the health center or the hospital, you have to wait a lot. But with private doctors, they attend to us quickly."

With your support, many Guatemalan families have the tools they need to live healthier lives.

Photo by FINCA staff



Margarita Castillo, a small convenience store owner, has used FINCA's medical insurance for her daughter's recent operation.

Reduce Your Tax Burden with an IRA Distribution to FINCA

FINCA is committed to providing the greatest number of poor women and men with access to credit, savings accounts, and other critical, life-changing, financial services and products that they otherwise would not have.

If you have accumulated a significant amount of money in a traditional or rollover individual retirement account (IRA), **consider reducing your tax burden while helping FINCA clients access loans to begin or expand their businesses.** With a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD), you can instruct your IRA custodian to make a direct transfer of funds from your traditional IRA to a qualified charity, like FINCA International (tax ID: 13-3240109). The amount transferred from your IRA as a QCD is not included in your taxable income. Speak with your IRA custodian to learn more about the potential tax benefits, **confident that the benefit to FINCA clients will be tremendous.** Your gift will have the ripple effect of helping to create pathways out of poverty for FINCA clients in 21 countries across five continents. Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment!

FINCA Client and Grandmother Creating Ripples in Kyrgyzstan

Uulkan Toktorbaeva is a 55-year old woman living in Kyrgyzstan, and has been a FINCA client for eight years. Recently she looked at her grandchildren and did what adults the world over do: she pondered what kind of future these children would have. Uulkan decided her grandkids need not wait until they are older to begin preparing for a brighter tomorrow. So she took her granddaughter and two grandsons to their local FINCA branch and opened savings accounts for the children, placing in the initial, modest deposit herself. Back home, Uulkan gave each grandchild a glass jar for saving spare change. Once the jars were full, Uulkan would take the kids back to the FINCA branch to deposit their savings.

Upon returning to the branch, FINCA Kyrgyzstan employees were stunned—not because the children came back, but because the children had saved all of the money themselves. In doing so, the children were mirroring their grandmother. Like FINCA clients everywhere, Uulkan is creating the solution to her family's poverty herself, with her own hard work and ingenuity. Likewise, these children are now writing their own destinies, no one else. Consider this: one of the grandsons already managed to purchase a bicycle with his savings!



Photo by FINCA staff

FINCA client, Uulkan Toktorbaeva, with her grandchildren and their personal savings in Kyrgyzstan.



FINCA.org
+1.202.682.1510



FINCACanada.org
+1.855.903.4622



FINCAUK.org
+44 (0) 758.466.1825



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