

For remote villages on the slopes of Nicaragua’s volcanoes, access is a major problem. Nuevas Esperanzas is working to assist around 1,100 people who live in dispersed rural communities in the Municipality of Telica, Department of León, western Nicaragua. These are traditional ‘campesinos’ who live from subsistence agriculture and typically have an income of less than \$1/day. They live high on the slopes of the Maribios volcanoes, away from access to basic services and ‘out of sight and out of mind’ of NGOs and local government. Many face a four hour walk for water every day. Nuevas Esperanzas is improving rural infrastructure, promoting more environmentally and economically sustainable agriculture and providing support to address the social and spiritual needs of these ‘forgotten’ people.



## The Need

Around 150 families live in the hills around Volcán Telica and Cerro Rota with no water or electricity, accessible on horseback only when the weather permits. Both men and women considered improved access to be the greatest need after water in participatory rural appraisals carried out in each community last year.

Farmers are currently not able to transport their produce to market with ox and cart, greatly limiting their income. In a medical emergency, a patient cannot be brought down the hill safely, and in case of a volcanic eruption the time to reach the bottom of the hill could be too long. For the people who live in these communities, a road would represent a lifeline. Better access will not only address all these needs, but it will also make it possible to deliver materials to improve water supplies through construction of rainwater harvesting systems and protection of spring sources.

## Project description

Until 2009, none of the seven communities in the programme area was accessible by vehicle. In 2008, Nuevas Esperanzas began work on improving access to two of the seven communities, El Ojochal del Listón and El Caracol. This work consisted of widening paths and infilling areas of significant erosion. Steeply inclined stretches were paved with cobbles and mortar and structures built to divert water. Gabions were also used to protect fords where streams unavoidably cross the road. This is hard manual work and requires consistent and committed community participation.

This project will extend these improvements to access to the five remaining communities. Where possible, roads will be improved to allow access by four-wheel drive vehicle. Where this is not feasible the aim will be to permit access by ox and cart. This work will only produce lasting benefit if the routes are maintained on an annual basis to repair erosion from the wet season and so local committees of farmers will be trained in basic repairs and encouraged to collect contributions from users to fund future maintenance of paths and tracks.

### About Nuevas Esperanzas

“Nuevas Esperanzas” (Spanish for “New Hope”) works to assist poor communities in rural Nicaragua through projects which provide practical and technical assistance in support of long-term sustainable development. Nuevas Esperanzas works in a number of sectors including water and sanitation, rural infrastructure, agroecology and conservation and aims to integrate innovation and technical excellence with good practice in development, always mindful of the complex web of economic, environmental, social and spiritual issues which conspire against those living in poverty.

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### Expected outcomes

- Improved access to agricultural land through improvements to paths and tracks which allow better access to markets for small farmers
- Improved roads to target communities to allow access by four-wheel drive vehicle to facilitate other projects which will improve access to basic services
- Established and recognised evacuation routes available in case of volcanic eruption, hurricane, mudslide or medical emergency
- Community organisation and leadership developed so that access routes can be managed and maintained in the long term

### Project duration

2 years

### Estimated costs

Rota – Las Pilas	1.3 km	£4,100
San José de Apante – El Cacao	2.3 km	£7,200
Las Quemadas – Agua Fría	4.1 km	£14,000
Las Quemadas – El Ñajo	2.1 km	£6,500
Las Pilas – Mata de Caña	2.6 km	£8,400