



## **Education for the Future: Las Pampas Celebrates Young Community Leader's College Graduation**

On August 26, 2011 Mirna Ramos was accompanied by her family, dozens of classmates and the SHARE team as she graduated at the top of her class from the National University's San Vicente campus with the equivalent of a Bachelor's Degree in Education. Mirna is the first member of her family to study at the university level, a huge achievement for herself, her family, and her entire community. She is a natural leader, dynamic, friendly, and open and has a gift of making everyone feel at ease and a part of any group or activity.

Mirna was able to study at the university level thanks to a SHARE scholarship program through CRIPDES San Vicente. These scholarships are aimed at creating community leaders with the professional skills to work for sustainable, long-term development in their communities. Mirna is the first of this group of 14 students in the department of Tecoluca to graduate.



Mirna will begin her first job soon, coordinating an NGO's departmental-wide literacy program, a part of the Ministry of Education's program to eradicate illiteracy in El Salvador. Mirna is not new to literacy work; in her community, Las Pampas, she facilitated these literacy circles for three years. Nine people with no previous formal schooling reached the ninth grade level thanks to her patient attention, finishing with a certificate from the Ministry of Education. Mirna hopes to find a job teaching at a local school in the future.



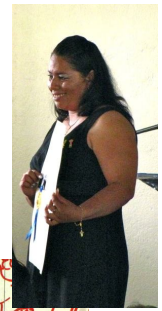
*Mirna, the CRIPDES San Vicente Team, and friends celebrate!*

In her community, Las Pampas, Mirna has been a key motor for youth organizing for years. Part of her work has been to support youth as they create a communal youth garden, which adolescents and teens in the community care for together. She supported the community in planning fumigation campaigns to prevent mosquito-born diseases; dengue epidemics worsen in El Salvador with every passing year, and have the harshest effect on the youngest and most vulnerable members of the community. Mirna also worked with women in Las Pampas to understand and defend their basic rights, as well as helping women design and carry out small, sustainable economic initiatives to support their families.

Gaining experience in her field, Mirna collaborated with local schools in a program for parents, working with mothers and fathers to emphasize the importance of their role in their children's education, to improve communication between teachers and parents, and to give parents the tools to help their children study and succeed in school. She went on to work with high school students at the national institute in Tecoluca, developing values including civic participation and non-violence.

In addition to supporting other students and focusing on her own studies, maintaining high grades

by pulling frequent all-nighters, Mirna worked with professors and student leaders at her university to design a regional program for community disaster prevention. Tecoluca, on the banks of the Lempa River and at the skirt of the San Vicente Volcano, is highly vulnerable to disasters. Mirna helped design a process of training and formation for community leaders to prepare for and monitor disasters in their communities, crucial for saving lives and mitigating losses.



After the all-morning graduation ceremony, at which the Rector of the National University reminded students that their degree should not serve to make them rich, but should be placed at the service of their communities, without whom their studies would not have been possible, we returned to Las Pampas for the celebration. The entire community, along with local social movement leaders, turned out for her graduation celebration, a testament to her dedication to her community.



As lunch wound to a close, fellow university scholarship student Cesar got up to speak. Accompanied by his guitar, he dedicated a number of songs to his best friend and “sister,” Mirna. As his voice rang above the crowd, it was clear that the relationship these two dynamic leaders have formed over their years of studying and organizing together will not end as Mirna leaves the program. They will support each other and work together for the benefit of their communities and region for many years to come.

Congratulations, Mirna, the Ramos family, the community Las Pampas and CRIPDES San Vicente on this amazing achievement!

*August 2011*