

# INGEAR

THE NEWSLETTER OF PEDALS FOR PROGRESS



## Sewing Machines for El Caño

by Patricia Hamill

High rates of unemployment, alcohol abuse, and teenage pregnancy. Little or no access to free or inexpensive transportation to good schools and employment opportunities. Our inner cities and rural areas are locations of potential concern for us, but, with multiple petitions, appeals to government officials, and perhaps celebrity involvement, communities may very well gain financial allotments for educational and environmental programs that enable at-risk youth to climb out of fiscal uncertainty and create financial independence. But what if the country is not large or powerful enough to compete for international attention of consequence or if the bedrock of the growing economy such as tourism and retail is not of benefit to those in remote locations? What if international celebrities have overlooked a place in need in their quest for the highest return on their sponsorship? The solution to the cycle of poverty must rest solely on a community's ingenuity, savvy entrepreneurs, and established nonprofits who work in remote areas or small countries that don't often rate primetime news coverage.

In the Monte Plata region of the Dominican Republic, the rural community of El Caño is in the process of developing its own sustainable niche in the economic development of this country. The financial divide here is not unfamiliar.

According to the 2013 Index of Economic Freedom, published by the Heritage Foundation with the Wall Street Journal, "Corruption, wasteful government spending, and unreliable electric service reduce investment returns, driving high unemployment." Much of the country's wealth is not trickling down.

The community of El Caño had, at one time, a functioning sewing project in place, but this ended when the partnership with the NGO dissolved. Then came the students of Boston's Northeastern University who visited El Caño as part of their Social Enterprise Institute's (SEI) Innovation Consulting Project. Students conducted an asset map and quickly learned about the community's needs in order to increase their marketable skills and income.

As a result, the idea for the Cooperativa de Costura de El Caño (CCC) was born. The students then developed a partnership with the nonprofit MOSCTHA (Socio-Cultural Movement for Haitian Workers). Originally formed to focus on human rights, advocacy, and infrastructure services for oppressed Haitians, MOSCTHA has expanded its work in "improving and empowering underrepresented communities" to the Dominican Republic.

To replace the sewing machines that departed with the previous NGO, Pedals for Progress has stepped up to the plate and arranged delivery of 13 sewing machines for the approximately 28

sewers who range from younger to older men and women. All are welcome to join the co-operative. When the CCC reached out to P4P, they requested foot-operated manual machines. This would logically be in consideration of unreliable electric power and thus be another way to avoid pitfalls to production schedules and project development. Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, P4P could only find one to send them.

Once the sewing machines arrive,

output of products like table cloths and school uniforms can resume and the members of the CCC will return to selling their goods to neighboring communities and even to people in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. Catalogs of the co-operative's products, created by participating Northeastern students, will enable the CCC to promote more goods to a wider segment of the population. This income will gradually empower their younger generation by providing access to higher education, gainful employment, and comfortable and safe living conditions. This type of sponsored self-sufficiency looks to be a promising antidote to the socioeconomic pitfalls poor and uneducated people must overcome in order to enjoy the advantages many of their fellow countrymen already have. Thanks to the partnership and cooperation of the students of Northeastern University, MOSCTHA, and P4P, the men and women of El Caño have and maintain gainful employment and the dignity and respect that comes from participation in your present and control over your future.



## A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS AND MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS

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GHANA

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

P4P long ago figured out how to ship full containers of bicycles. We needed to develop a way to pack them efficiently to maximize the use of all the space available. I needed to learn how to do export documentation for the government here and the proper documentation so our partners could get the containers out of customs overseas. I also needed to learn to deal with the shipping industry and all of the pitfalls which can significantly increase cost if one is not careful.

When we first started shipping sewing machines, it was thought of as a way to increase the value of our containers so our partners would be more successful and we would reach more people to help. What we soon discovered was that not all of our bicycle partners were interested in sewing machines. As sewing machine production rose, and a litany of requests for machines began flowing into our offices we had no way to ship small amounts of sewing machines short of air freight which is extraordinarily expensive.

A new methodology was to ship just a pallet of sewing machines. I discovered that there are shipping lines which will consolidate a single pallet into one of their shipments. The first time, in 2011, we shipped a pallet of sewing machines to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It allowed us to respond to small projects with big results at a reasonable cost.

This spring we were able to ship a pallet of 15 sewing machines to Cameroon and another pallet of 13 machines to El Caño in the Dominican Republic. Due to the recession our bicycle collections have had lower totals than previous years. Our collection of sewing machines however has continued to have increasing production. Just this spring we were able to ship 185 sewing machines which brings our grand total now to 2,586 to 18 separate countries and every continent barring Antarctica. Also with the sewing machine shipped this year the number one recipient has switched from El Salvador (609) to Ghana, which has now received 615 of our machines.

In the last newsletter I put in an advertisement asking for tinkerers to help with the sewing machine refurbishing. A longtime donor, Dennis Smyth of Piscataway New Jersey stepped forward. Many of the machines we receive are obviously in perfect working order, but Dennis was able to take about 35 of the machines this spring which I had questions as to their viability and repair them. So there were two major improvements to our organization this year. The greater ability to ship small amounts of sewing machines at low cost and a new critical volunteer who makes sure our machines are in perfect working order. Our bike production might be temporarily down, but P4P is moving forward, recycling where we can, and alleviating poverty worldwide.

Dave Schweidenback

## ISLAND CO-OP BEGINS TO GROW ROOTS

Last year as I sat at the high school graduation in the rural community of Balgüe, Nicaragua, I counted that a third of the girls in my class were either pregnant at the time or already had a child. I know I am failing to count a few as I was unaware they were mothers and that many other girls failed to make it to graduation day, dropping out previously due to teen pregnancy. Aside from this obvious problem, many other young Nicaraguan women choose to drop out of high school due to the pressure to provide for family needs within the household. Many may feel a need to be at home to complete daily chores like patting tortillas and cooking beans, looking after the men's needs in the household, or caring for young children. While many urban communities may see a different situation, this is still the reality of a Nicaraguan woman in a rural community.

You see, this takes place on Ometepe, an idyllic island where at any point you look up to find two looming volcanoes within a freshwater lake. It's considered the pearl of Nicaragua. Mark Twain has been known to write of it and a couple years ago it was shortlisted for the seven great wonders of the world. It is essentially a little slice of paradise. But, on the other hand, this paradise falls short of providing many opportunities for youth to plan their futures. Employment opportunities that allow islanders to stay on the island are hard to come by.

With the brightest students, you often see that a "brain drain" syndrome is ever present. Usually if youth come from families with resources they will study in the university in the capital, pick a career that makes it hard to find work on the island, and are forced to stay in the capital to find employment. I was proud to see many of my last year's high school seniors go on to study advanced careers, but the reality is - how many dentists do you need on a rural island when dental care is still viewed as a luxury? For those that do not or cannot choose higher education, employment is still a challenge. Last year when asking a young woman what she would do following high school, she told me that she would most likely emigrate to Costa Rica to find work. Many feel that more opportunities lie abroad taking them outside of their borders.

Hopefully, as the economy shifts from an agricultural to tourism based economy, the diversity will bring more opportunity and islanders will realize the necessity to focus on the training of trades. With tourism, there is a need for some push from government and educational institutions for programs like business education and English training. With creating sustainable employment opportunities, more islanders will be able to stay closer to home while also allowing tourism to develop in a sustainable manner where the benefit is felt in more island communities.

A recent donation of six sewing machines by the organization Pedals for Progress has helped to improve the lives of one particular group of women, Girasol Sewing Cooperative. (A girasol is a sunflower in Spanish). This sewing cooperative on the Island of Ometepe was started to provide an opportunity to learn the trade of sewing to improve their personal economic situation as well as that of their families and community. Sewing provides an income

## MISSION STATEMENT

TO DELIVER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AID BY  
RECYCLING BICYCLES AND SEWING  
MACHINES IN THE U.S. AND SHIPPING THEM TO THE  
PEOPLE OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD

generating activity for the women of the community of Balgüe where employment opportunities for women are virtually non-existent.

Creating a self sustaining sewing cooperative on an island can be difficult as resources like sewing machines and materials still have to be imported by boat. This in turn drives up the prices of basic goods like school uniforms. However, what is beautiful about the Nicaraguan entrepreneurial spirit is that these women can view opportunities when many others view challenges. For Girasol, these challenges bring opportunities as tourism grows, and there is opportunity to break into a market where



Girasol Members outside of their workshop in Ometepe, Nicaragua



The island of Ometepe, Nicaragua

the majority of souvenirs come from off-island departments of Masaya or Granada.

In March of 2012, these women were sitting in a classroom as we reviewed what a basic fraction and decimal were as none of them were able to finish high school due to circumstances beyond their control. At the same time, the women participated in sewing classes led by the designer Kim Farrugia and began laying the foundation for their very own sewing workshop. Currently, in a little over a year, they have begun selling in multiple locations on the island and preparing their first international orders.

Pedals for Progress has continued to lend a helping hand promoting economic development in Nicaragua as well as many other countries around the world. It is notable what a couple hundred cordobas extra a month can do for a woman, however, less talked about and equally important is the role of this cooperative in the personal lives of these women. The majority of these women are single mothers and have also never had the opportunity in their lives to earn a peso for themselves. Many still have to ask permission from their spouses to buy basic household necessities like toilet paper. With learning the trade of sewing, these women are allowed to see the potential of their own two hands, develop their creativity in a society that does not always nourish it, and understand the pride that comes from being able to contribute a small income to their families.

With P4P's donation, the current cooperative will be able to formalize. More importantly, these sunflowers will be able to grow. With the new machines, there are plans to hold a new sewing course and to allow new women to be incorporated into the group as it expands. This means more women within the community are given a reason to get out of the house to go to triweekly meetings reminding them that they are strong, creative, and smart women. This is women's empowerment, and it would not have been possible without the help of P4P.

Pedals for Progress has improved the quality of life for many Nicaraguans in the department of Rivas, with currently over 22,500 bicycles donated. In addition, P4P's new partnership with Girasol Sewing Cooperative and donation of sewing machines has helped to lay a foundation for sustainable economic development on the island of Ometepe. Girasol's transition from a project to a sustainable, independent business would have been difficult without the help of David Schweidenback, his team, and the contributions from Pedals for Progress's supporters.

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## COUNTRY UPDATE: ALBANIA

by Joseph Matar

Pedals for Progress' partnership with the Social Stimulating Alternative Programs (SSAP) in Albania has led to the founding of a number of initiatives that have not only bettered people's lives, but the country's environment as well. The first of these was the Ecovolis bike-sharing system—based in the country's capital of Tirana—which helps to circulate donated bicycles throughout Albania. An extension of this system, the Ecovolis Service, has built up a countrywide reputation for its reliability in the repair and maintenance of bikes.

There is also the Eco Bicycle Shop, the biggest bicycle shop in Albania. In under two years, the shop has repaired, sold, and put around 2000 bikes back on the streets of Tirana, as well as other urban and rural areas. Furthermore, the shop provides training on the repairing and selling of P4P-donated bicycles to young people, thereby preparing them for employment.



Employees at the bike-sharing kiosk in Tirana

One of the major goals of the SSAP is to provide jobs for members of communities in need and, so far, the SSAP has employed approximately 50 people, many of whom are students, to assist in the operation of its various services. Aside from repairing and selling bikes, 10 students earn money riding advertisement-toting bikes around for SSAP's newest venture, Green Advertising. These used bikes have been modified to function as mobile advertisements for companies who have embraced this new, economical, and environmentally-friendly method of advertising. Another of the SSAP's most recent projects that seeks to improve environmental conditions in Albania's capital is called "I Recycle." Typically, a method of survival for the hundreds of struggling families of the Roma community is to search through public garbage bins in order to find and collect paper, plastic, and aluminum. They then take this recyclable waste to be exchanged for a very low profit. Commonly, this process means that much of the unrecyclable waste is removed from the bins and left to scatter about the streets.

The Roma people need bicycles to transport the goods they collect as well as to efficiently check all the bins in a given area. To accomplish this, they either share a bike, using it in shifts, or, unfortunately, resort to stealing bicycles from the Ecovolis bike-sharing system. Those unable to procure a bicycle instead opt to search the tons of garbage disposed of daily in landfills. Frequently, this job is left to the Roma children, who chase the garbage trucks as soon as they are spotted, in an effort to be the first to get a chance find recyclables in the trash. Perhaps it goes without saying that these children are not attending school. In response to these problems, the SSAP came up with “I Recycle,” a multi-part, long-term solution. First, over 100 bicycles were donated to the Roma community in Tirana, markedly reducing the number of bicycle thefts as well as moving toward eliminating the need for children to chase garbage trucks and make visits to landfills. Second, to put an end to all of the digging around in bins and to reduce the amount of litter on the streets, the SSAP manufactured and distributed color-coded garbage bin structures around Tirana. Each of the structures is divided into four bins:



I-Recycle employee collecting plastic and aluminum waste.

one for paper, one for plastic, one for aluminum, and one for other waste. With their new bicycles and the recyclables now already properly divided up, the Roma people can make their collections more quickly and simply, thus increasing their incomes. The eventual goal, however, is to systemize this practice and provide the Roma people with long-term occupations. Working with the municipality of Tirana, the SSAP has begun this process by employing the Roma and providing them with cargo bicycles specifically constructed for the collection and transport of recyclable materials. The money collected from exchanging these recyclables is then put toward the employees’ salaries and the maintenance of their bicycles. Only adults are employed as the SSAP strictly forbids the use of child labor. In adopting this system, Tirana is gradually becoming one of the first cities worldwide that has a recycling process based entirely on bicycle transport, helping to reduce the need for and pollution from huge garbage trucks.

Sinan and Neritan were the first of the Roma community to

become employees in the “I Recycle” program. Previously, their families would scrounge through landfill garbage, ultimately not earning even half of what Sinan and Neritan earn now. It gives them great pride to be able to begin new lives for their families and to be a part of the cause toward making Tirana a cleaner city. Furthermore, with the SSAP taking a strong stance against child labor, a condition of this employment is that the children of families with employees in the SSAP begin attending school. It is clearly fundamentally wrong for a childhood to be spent scavenging in landfills. This problem is increasingly being phased out as Sinan, Neritan, and other members of the Roma community can now provide their sons, daughters, sisters, and brothers with the educations they deserve.

None of this would have been possible without the donations of used bicycles from the American people that have been shipped to Albania by Pedals for Progress for over three years. The partnership between P4P and the Social Stimulating Alternative Programs was originally begun in 2010 with the goal of reintroducing bicycles to an automobile-centric society in order to decrease pollution and provide citizens with a healthy transportation alternative. However, this initial goal has been greatly expanded upon with bicycles being distributed throughout rural and urban areas, providing assistance to those in need. Companies are even finding the bikes to be useful as vehicles for advertising. Moreover, formerly a completely non-recycling community, the capital city of Tirana is making great strides toward accepting and adapting to the “I Recycle” system. In doing so, living conditions have improved and previously needy people have found employment. The progress is encouraging and has fostered interest from other needy communities in Albania. However, in order to spread the “I Recycle” project and create more jobs countrywide, contributions and bicycle donations remain as vital as ever. With every bicycle donated, there is the potential for more successes—like those of Sinan and Neritan—in Albania. Every bicycle means one more opportunity to liberate a child from days spent fruitlessly scouring landfills for a few recyclable goods to instead give them a proper education and hope for a better life.



I-Recycle rickshaw in the streets of Tirana.

## COUNTRY UPDATE: GHANA

by Joseph Matar

Pedals for Progress seeks to stimulate the economy of developing countries through its work. This would be impossible without the cooperation and tireless efforts of its partners throughout the world. One such partner is Wright Enterprises, a company that imports consumer goods to Ghana. Working in conjunction with P4P, Wright Enterprises founded WEBike, an organization that, for little to no profit, distributes bikes and sewing machines to those in need of them. Here is a selection of stories of Ghanaians whose lives have benefited from the work of P4P and WEBike.

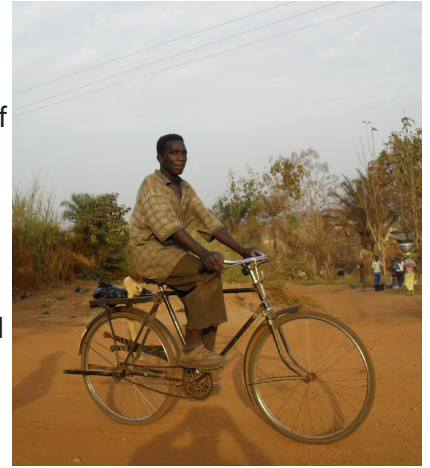
1. Usifu is a student teacher in the small town of Walewale in the Northern Region of Ghana. A limited staff at his school means that Usifu must perform multiple duties. First and foremost, he teaches a fourth grade class. Additionally, before morning lessons begin, the students sweep the classrooms and school compound, a job Usifu must be present for to oversee and provide assistance with. There is a distance of 4 kilometers (about 2 ½ miles) between Usifu's home and the school. Having to walk made it difficult for him to arrive before the start of classes to complete his duties in time. Furthermore, traveling by foot daily would leave him exhausted, not to mention would cut into the time Usifu, like any teacher, needed to prepare for upcoming lessons. Now, thanks to WEBike, Pedals for Progress' partner in Ghana, Usifu rides a bicycle to and from school each day. This drastically decreases his travel time, giving him more of the time and energy he needs to do his job. He can now get to school on the dot and is prepared and focused every day when he enters the classroom.



2. In some Ghanaian villages, it is common practice for citizens to pursue auto mechanic apprenticeships. It is a worthwhile career track for many people as, once they have become proficient in the field, they can bring their talents to the bigger cities where the need for mechanics can translate into a lucrative job. Paa Joe is a young man hoping to procure such a position. An apprentice in the Suhum/Kraboah/Coaltar District in the Eastern Region of Ghana, Paa Joe must traverse a distance of 5 kilometers (or over 3 miles) to get from his residence to where he is learning his future trade. Formerly, his only transportation option was one very early bus that would get him to his apprenticeship before the workday proper began. If he missed this bus, he was forced to walk. Either approach left him exhausted. After receiving

a bicycle from WEBike, Paa Joe became able to bike to and from his auto mechanic apprenticeship every day. Functioning on his own schedule, he is now energized in his work and much more hopeful that he will one day be able to move to the city to begin a profitable career.

3. Yaw Aboah is a gristmill operator in Kasoa, a suburb in the Central Region. Long work hours and a distance of 3 kilometers (about 2 miles) between his house and his workplace meant that Yaw was often forced to sleep at the mill. Obviously, this was far from ideal as an industrial building hardly possesses conditions conducive to a good night's rest. Worse, however, was that sleeping at work would mean Yaw would typically not see his family for days at a time and, further, often had to spend money on meals away from home. Thanks to the bike he's received, staying overnight at the gristmill isn't even something Yaw has to take into consideration. He is able to bike easily to and from work every day, providing him with a more economical lifestyle and, most important of all, giving him back his time with his family.



4. Nana Yaw teaches a sixth grade class at the LA Middle School in Nsawam, a town in Ghana's Eastern Region. He lives quite far away in a small village called Ayakwah, on the outskirts of the Nsawam area. Covering this distance daily was a huge issue for Nana, but then he received the gift of a bike from WEBike. He can now go between school and home much faster and with much less effort. He is thankful to WEBike for this, as well as for providing him with the means to perform various errands and to travel around the area with ease.



5. Coming from a poor background, Ama Attah became a seamstress' apprentice, hoping to learn and eventually use the skill to improve her family's financial standing. However, shortly after the completion of her apprenticeship, Ama's sewing machine was one day accidentally knocked from a table to the



ground, damaging it beyond repair.

As a result of WEBike's intervention, Ama received another, working sewing machine. She is overjoyed that she can now put the sewing skills she worked so hard to learn to use and can make money to support herself and her family.

6. Esi is a teenager who lives in a small village in the Nkwanta North District of the Volta Region. She is a student at Nkwanta Senior High School. The school is located so far away from where Esi lives that it would take her two hours to walk there. With the school day beginning at 7AM, Esi had no choice but to be up every morning well before 5 in order to be sure to get to class on time. Furthermore, the road she travels on is frequently a busy one, making her daily trek all the more arduous and slow-going. All of these factors contributed to Esi's fatigue, which was obviously detrimental to her health, especially at a developmental age. It also made it difficult for her to be attentive during school and hard for her to dedicate energy to schoolwork in and out of class. After receiving her bicycle from WEBike, Esi found she was able to negotiate the distance between school and home within an hour, sometimes even managing it in 45 minutes. She is no longer unnecessarily exhausted and is sure to be on time, prepared, and fully alert in class each day.



7. Efoe Kojo lives in Nkwanta in the Volta Region and works as a harvester. Going to and from the field where he works, he had to walk a distance of 6 kilometers (over 3 ½ miles) in total daily. He also had to carry with him a canteen of water, his lunch, and the machete with which he does his work. This proved to be a serious problem for Efoe as he would repeatedly, upon reaching the field, find himself too tired to do any harvesting.

Now that Efoe has his bicycle from Pedals for Progress and WEBike, he is no longer too exhausted to perform his duties. Not

only does his bike transport him to work quickly and easily, but, rather than lug his supplies around himself, he can put everything in the bike's basket.

8. The partnership with Pedals for Progress doesn't just benefit those on the receiving end. Joe is an employee with WEBike, distributing bikes around the Kasoa area in the Central Region of Ghana. Thanks to his involvement with WEBike, the people of the Kasoa area now know to go to Joe for reasonably priced bicycles. The money he is making helps him support his family. He is able to afford his rent and pay for any fees that might arise from his children's schooling.



9. In Accra, the capital city of Ghana, there are many boys and girls who, after finishing high school, wish to learn to sew. Maame Yaa is a seamstress who runs an apprenticeship program training young people to be seamstresses and tailors. She would not have been able to offer this education without all of the sewing machines she received from WEBike for the children to train

on. With her program as a springboard, many of Maame Yaa's students are able to become self-employed and Maame herself profits from her business, all thanks to the sewing machines from WEBike and Pedals for Progress.



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Bicycles Shipped by Country	
Nicaragua	39,919
El Salvador	24,457
Ghana	12,940
Barbados	7,876
Honduras	7,376
Guatemala	6,880
Panama	6,520
Uganda	4,140
Dominican Republic	3,560
Moldova	2,770
Eritrea	2,761
South Africa	2,180
Colombia	1,699
Ecuador	1,555
Albania	1,465
Vietnam	1,135
Fiji	1,012
Sierra Leone	938
Senegal	890

Sewing Machines Shipped by Country	
Ghana	615
El Salvador	609
Nicaragua	335
Uganda	304
Guatemala	222
Georgia	82
Honduras	46
Yemen	60
Moldova	40
Costa Rica	37
Albania	30
Dominican Republic	30
Sierra Leone	30
Kyrgystan	25
St. Vincent	20
Cameroon	15
Panama	14
Jamaica	6
Domestic USA	3

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