

## For the Common Good

Working with local community groups and church groups on advocacy and action is Christian Aid's partner UNES. The groups meet in a hall given to the community by an Italian priest who



helped them understand that the church must work on behalf of the poor. Named after him, it continues to be a place where people can meet and serve others. His desire was to defend the poor and that is what they continue to do.

Together with UNES they are exploring the meaning of advocacy and action. Marches, fairs, simulation games and visits to areas of most concern have all been arranged to highlight environmental problems such as dumping and erosion. Participants have been encouraged to write letters to the Government and file complaints to the Mayor. However, despite all this action, they often do not make progress. They share ideas on how to help the community, especially as it is situated in an area vulnerable to earthquakes and flooding, made worse by overcrowding and deforestation.

Blanca Alicia Díaz describes herself as an environmentalist. When she saw how businesses were dumping rubbish illegally up the mountain directly above their homes, she decided she wanted to take action. She asked for help from UNES and arranged a cleanup walk to inform people of the dangers to them and to the environment. The group that was formed looked at the dump and then issued a complaint letter asking the Mayor to move it from the mountain as it was threatening their homes.

"If it slips it will threaten our homes and would bury us." she said.

When asked about the Mayor's response, Blanca replied, "He did not do anything. He said that the land it was on was privately owned."

The group held a press conference and got support from the community health teams with some success. They also arranged for an article 'denouncing' the dump to be in the local

newspaper. This made a few of the companies who were dumping there find alternatives. They have recently renewed their efforts with help from UNES.

“This is our struggle,” she said, “Sometimes it is dangerous to complain: we have been threatened with guns, but we will continue to tell the Mayor to get rid of this garbage and construction waste.”

There is a very different attitude to community work. They understand that they are working for ‘the common good.’ If the government says they will not do something, they keep on campaigning and are prepared to roll up their sleeves and do it themselves if needed.

IMAGE© Commitment for Life: Blanca Alicia Díaz