



Update from Santo Domingo

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We Did It Ourselves

Dear Friends,
Greetings from the Dominican Republic. Hmm, how many more times will I be using *that* greeting again? We are in transition already and we haven't even left the country. Certainly using the phrase "last time" for this or that has become normative between Patti and I. She accompanied me last week on a field visit that no doubt was one of those last times. What follows is that story:

"We did it ourselves" is not a phrase you often hear in towns and communities in the Dominican Republic. Most people expect that the solutions to their problems should come from someone, somewhere, but *certainly not* from right here! This is a negative legacy the country has inherited from the 30 year Trujillo dictatorship where patronage and paternalism were the order of the day. Too often when one arrives in a village somebody will greet you with the question "What did you bring me today?" as if assuming that as a visitor I *must* have brought something with me to give away.

It is in this difficult setting that the Dominican CRC's community transformation program has formed eight savings groups in five communities. Staff provides



Natalia Pérez, new group member in Villa Nizao

initial group training but no loans or seed money are used: only group savings. Twice a month the groups meet to collect their designated savings and decide who receives the lump sum that day.

This program is growing because participants can do something significant with their money. In the three original communities, a second group is being formed in each one. Two new communities are forming groups as well. Group members have experienced positive change in their lives, and others in the community have noticed and want to participate.

These savings groups are very sustainable over time, since no outside funding ever comes into the community, only savings

from group members.

Community transformation is all about people coming together to use their skills and organizational abilities to make life better. "We *did* do it ourselves!"

In little more than a month we will begin two months of home service and final debriefing with CRWRC. We look forward to visiting each of your churches. So many of you have supported us forever, or so it seems. Thanks from the heart.

Joel Zwier