Case Study: The El Trío Community

The El Trío community is located in the Santa Ana sector of the Antimano District of Caracas, Venezuela. El Trío is a makeshift settlement with approximately 300 homes, all of which are located on land adjacent to a large slope that was once an active mining site. Global climate change has triggered life-threatening changes on El Trío’s slope.

Although Venezuela’s wet season is a recurring event, global climate change has altered the intensity and amount of rainfall each year. Heavier rain over a longer period of time increased natural disasters such as floods and mudslides.

Hydrometeorologists and oceanographers now agree that this intensified wet season poses a threat to life in communities throughout Venezuela, especially those like El Trío that are located on uneven topographical terrain. In fact, El Trío experienced some of its worst mudslides in 2017 after a torrential and prolonged downpour.

In his encyclical *Laudato Sí*, Pope Francis said:

> We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental (139).
The situation in El Trío is a perfect example of Pope Francis' statement. The environmental problems caused by global climate change in communities like El Trío are intimately linked to Venezuela's social problems.

For decades, poor urban planning, high population growth, and increased poverty have driven thousands of people out of costly Caracas and up into the steep slopes surrounding the city. Without the financial resources, landscaping equipment, and technical expertise to build suitable energy and waste infrastructures, as well as safe housing, people on the slopes have 'made do' the best they can. As Pope Francis says, unless people understand these social realities, they will not fully understand the impact of global climate change on Altimano District communities like El Trío.

Over the years, residents of El Trío have managed to direct water coming down from the slopes into three channels that merge into a single aqueduct five meters deep. The aqueduct runs through the community, supplying water to the residents. However, the huge rainfalls intensified by global climate change now flood the three channels and the community's aqueduct. As it descends the slopes, the overflowing water picks up trash and solid
waste and carrying these toxic, disease-bearing materials into the community and the community’s aqueduct. At these moments, residents risk their lives removing debris that collects at the aqueduct grates and blocks water flow.

Such events cause not only physical injury, but also emotional and spiritual harm. When fear increases in a community, anger, resentment and distrust can also grow. People can wonder why God is allowing this to happen, why God is not answering their prayers.

Fortunately, the residents of El Trío have recently recognized the need to organize community participation for the resolution of the urban environmental problem caused by the inadequate disposal of waste and solid waste on the slopes of the water courses that flow into the sector. They decided to take a hard look at their situation: their location, their limited resources, and the effect of global climate change on their region’s rainfall. Concrete data about their community’s demographics and vulnerabilities was important to know.

After studying the situation, the community decided what it could do, even with its limited means. They decided to reinforce the columns beneath their homes and put homes on more elevated bases where possible. They decided to find better methods of waste disposal. They decided that it was important to build better communication between themselves and neighboring villages. Just as importantly, they developed a plan:

**Schedule of Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marzo-Julio 2018</td>
<td>Diagnosis of the socio-environmental conditions that are vulnerable to the effects of climate change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Septiembre 2018- Enero 2019</td>
<td>Community visit for census</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enero-Febrero 2019</td>
<td>Community intervention proposal design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marzo- Mayo 2019</td>
<td>Design and organization of community workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junio-Julio 2019</td>
<td>Execution of community workshops</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Accompaniment to the proposed community initiatives</td>
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The people of El Trío are doing just what Pope Francis hoped for in his encyclical *Laudato Sí*. They realize they are not suffering at the hands of “two separate crises”, but
“one complex crisis which is both social and environmental”. And they are doing something about it.

**Closer Look**

Go to this report, to learn more about adaptations Caracas area communities are making in response to the increased rainfall caused global climate change.

What are the environmental and social conditions that have created a crisis for the slope communities surrounding Caracas? How are these conditions related?

What ethical issues are part of the environmental-social challenge facing communities like El Trío? Is the city of Caracas involved in this issue? The government of Venezuela? North America?

The Case Study suggested that some people might consider God to be involved in the environmental-social crisis facing El Trío. How? Do you agree? Is there any other way to explore the spiritual dimension of this environmental problem? Is there a spiritual dimension to its solution?

What actions were taken to improve the situation in this Case Study? What further actions would you suggest to Make even further improvements?

**Image sources:**
Antimano District: http://caracasshots.blogspot.com/2014/06/slum-life-antimano.html