

News from Venezuela

Summer 2019



Dear friends of Centro Madre,

Thursday, March 7th 5pm, we had a blackout in Caracas. When I lived in Barlovento in Centro Madre for 17 years, that was common, but not in Caracas. I was in the car. All stop lights went out. The streets filled with people coming out of the metro walking home or standing in long lines to take a bus. Workers, students, mothers with young children, all on their way home in a city that was about to become pitch dark very soon. Immediately the bus drivers doubled their price. The bus must be paid in cash, but most people have almost no cash as the banks have no cash. Most hospitals are in bad condition. No electricity and no backup generators, creates horrible situations. Later we learned the blackout was in 80 percent of the country.

Four days later most places had partial electricity (on again, off again). The metro, schools and government offices remained closed the whole week. Some areas continued without electricity for almost two weeks because of explosions that had happened in sub stations. Slowly communication came back and last of all water was pumped again into the cities and the houses. People who did not have water stored in a water tank, or could not afford to buy water, were particularly hard hit.



No electricity means: you cannot buy or sell, there is no metro or bus, you cannot buy gasoline, no water is coming to your house, there is no cellular service so you cannot call friends and family to ask if they are safe, there is no WIFI, clinics are closed, hospitals barely function, etc.

Monday, March 18th, two weeks later, everything had gone back to normal. But on the 25th the electricity went out again in most of the country. It didn't last as long as the first time, but again a week without metro, schools or government offices.

Melqui, the mother of Juan David, moved in with me as she is finishing her high school diploma. Monday she went enthusiastically to the institute but the metro was so full, she had to come back to ask me for cash to take the bus. But next day the institute was closed as the metro was not working. The metro is free, but the bus for many people is too expensive and you have to pay in cash. So there are very long lines to get into the metro.

I had to cancel my appointment with the dentist several times due to lack of electricity or water. When she finally was able to work on my teeth, she stopped half way because there was a fluctuation in the electricity and she was afraid it could damage her equipment. It is very stressful and scary when your means for survival are being threatened. My bookkeeper needs an operation to remove a brain tumour. She had to buy all the medical supplies, including the gloves for the surgeon. Every time they had to change the appointment because of electricity and water problems. This is giving her much stress, exactly what she doesn't need.

At the moment there is more food in the stores. Maybe this is because the Colombian border is closed and so the Venezuelan National Guard can no longer smuggle 40 percent of the food out of the country for a big profit. Venezuela is heavily dependent on the export of oil and the import of almost everything else. The government centralizes the economy and plays the role of the father who provides housing, food, etc., which makes people dependent and passive. We don't pay for gasoline, except a tip for the attendant, but we pay very much for food and other things. On the other side, the opposition seems to be to blame for the electrical failure and at the same time is inviting the United States to invade militarily. We now have the military presence of Russia and China who are defending their economic interest in Venezuela.

It is obvious that the real crisis in Venezuela, as well as in the world, is a crisis of leadership. We lack political leaders with moral and spiritual vision. They fight over wealth and power and the people are the victims.

Crisis opening new opportunities

Together with the Foundation Territorio Kribe (an agricultural project) and the Consumers Cooperative Zamorano en Guatire, we are promoting small scale industries to guarantee the basic necessities of the local people. These will be managed by the local people and will not be affected by political changes and turmoil. We are starting a pilot project with a corn and cassava processing factory to provide staple food for the people in the area. This can be replicated in other areas of the region until the need is covered. All beneficiaries will also participate in courses about leadership and ethics.

Those who oppose small scale industry may say it is not efficient. Though efficiency is very important, it is not more important than the welfare of the people and the environment. And when scientists focus their studies on projects that benefit the welfare of the people instead of multinational corporations, small scale industry will be very successful.

We are visiting industries that make machines to get their prices. Together with members of the cooperative we are also making machines using recycled materials.



A visit to a factory



Making food processing machines from recycled material



Health centre

The first need of the health centre is to make the building safe from burglaries, which we are doing. Our first health project is to start a vertical vegetable garden that people can make in their house. The participants learn about growing green leafy vegetables and about their importance for health. They also learn about making compost in their own kitchen with redworms. In our house we are already applying it successfully. And Juan David is my eager student of worm culture.



The team of the health centre



Vertical garden



Juan David studying worm culture

Yaracuy

Many parts in Venezuela are in crisis. Electricity is irregular, water supply is limited, cooking gas is hard to get and food is too expensive. This already was the case before the electrical

blackout, but after it has become worse. Poverty and crime are on the rise and the situation for many looks desperate. Our land project in Yaracuy is therefore becoming more and more important. It is four hours from Caracas and I need to put my car in good condition to be able to go there safely. Our long term plan with the land is to create a food forest which will require neither fertilizer nor water.

Your support makes it possible for us to continue with new projects, which in this time of crisis is very important. The crisis in Venezuela is becoming worse, the poverty is increasing, but so are the opportunities to contribute something concrete for a better future of Venezuela.



Hendrika and Juan David

Much love from Venezuela

Hendrika Renkers

For more information about Hendrika's work in Venezuela please refer to her website www.centromadre.org . If you want to contact her, or support a project, please write to centromadrebarlovento@gmail.com

You can also contact our Dutch organisation: www.centromadre.nl

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