

ENCA



Environmental Network *for* Central America

www.enca.org.uk

Issue 71 November 2017

Belize Coral Reef

Recovery continues, but more work is needed.

Defending Defenders

A round-up of our event with PBI in London.

Indigenous Medicine

Examining how COPINH uses traditional treatments.



Agrotoxics, Monocultivation and worker's health



ENCA aims to work directly with people in communities who are seeking to arrest environmental degradation and who are often struggling against the repression and violence of armies and police forces acting under the command of wealthy individuals, transnational corporations and corrupt politicians. We campaign with them to place environmental rights within national constitutions and to ensure that the exploitation of natural resources benefits the many and not just the few and is carried out within sustainable and renewable bounds.

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Agrotoxics and Monocultivation: their impact on the health of the Salvadoran population

In the last decade ENCA has reported regularly on the dangers of the over-use of toxic pesticides and herbicides, especially in Central American monocultivation plantations. The problems have not disappeared, as the following communication from the Salvadoran NGO UNES illustrates.

The monocultivation of sugar cane has been developed in El Salvador over several centuries. It is presumed that it was introduced to the territory at the time of colonisation, but it was in the 1960s that production increased by 43% and between 2001 and 2011 that it increased by yet another 30%.¹ According to data from the Salvadoran Ecological Unit (UNES), national cultivation of sugar cane is currently around 108,427 manzanas² (2014-2015 sugar harvest) and in the coastal zone cultivation reaches 52,000 manzanas.³

El Salvador is one of the countries which has increased its use of pesticides and intensified its use of fertilisers; which, according to CEPAL (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), is far above the Latin American average and makes it one of the four nations of the region in which they [toxics] occur in consumption. However, this does not translate into a significant increase in productivity of crops like basic grains. According to Voices on the Border, the intensive use of agrotoxics is seen largely in the cultivation of sugar cane.

This problem has been reviewed by the UN Special Rapporteur for the Human Right to Water and Sanitation who has shown his concern over the quality of waters in El Salvador. The problem largely stems from the uncontrolled use of agrochemicals in farming activities. In his final mission report of 11th-18th May 2016, he noted precisely:

“There is an important point of concern regarding the potential dangers which can affect water quality for human consumption. Information was gathered from various sources during the visit about the uncontrolled use of agrochemicals in agriculture, chemicals which are usually hardly removed from the water treatment plants. This even includes the use of some that are prohibited in other countries.”⁴

Also in 2016, the Human Rights Defence Attorney (PDDH), David Ernesto Morales, produced a report on the use of agrotoxics and their impact on human rights.⁵ This report provided follow-up to the open record since 2000 on the impacts on health in the Bajo Lempa region, on the database of denunciations of serious health effects, especially cases of chronic kidney disease associated with contact with herbicides and pesticides used in the cultivation of cotton in previous decades.⁶

The extensive and abusive use of agrotoxics is having an impact on the health of the Salvadoran population, according to the network of hospitals which reported in its ‘Report of Works 2011-2012’ for MINSAL [Ministry of Health] that terminal chronic kidney disease is the third cause of death in adults of both sexes, being the first cause for men and the fifth for women.

To date there are no actions being taken to prohibit the use of agrotoxics, despite the fact that many of them are prohibited in other countries and yet are sold without restriction here.

Concerned about the lack of action on the part of the state, UNES is referring to the Inter-American Court for Human Rights to demand that:

1. The Commission requests from the Salvadoran government reports on the public policies and regulations relating to the environment and health and management of agrotoxics, the means of sustainable life⁷, which guarantee the right to a clean environment and to health and which present specific indicators on each of these rights and on the inhabitants of the zones where monocultivation is practised. That the Commission carries out analyses and produces recommendations to the state of El Salvador relating to its compliance with its duty to protect life.
2. The Commission distributes a report on the compliance by the Salvadoran state with the Inter-American standards relating to food

sovereignty, the right to water, health and a clean environment.

3. Upon the distribution of its report, the Commission requests of the state of El Salvador that it presents periodic reports with the aim of evaluating the advances in the achievement of the recommendations.
4. Upon the distribution of its report, the Commission requests of the state of El Salvador that it promotes an end to the expansion of the agroindustry of monocultivation which assaults human rights and the means of life of indigenous peoples through clear public agrarian, economic and fiscal policies.
5. Upon the distribution of its report, the Commission requests of the state of El Salvador that it investigates the denunciations

made by community leaders against the assassinations, threats, industrial contamination, environmental contamination, deforestation, land grabs, contamination and diversions of rivers, and labour conflicts resulting from agroindustrial activities.

6. Finally, we ask the Commission, through its Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights, to visit the country to verify the situation so described and to generate a report relating to agrotoxics and monocultivation and their impacts on human rights.

By UNES, the Salvadoran Ecological Unit
www.unes.org.sv/
 7th September 2017



¹ Voices on the Border, 'Large scale production of sugar cane', 2016, p.2.

² 1 manzana is equivalent to 1.75 acres.

³ UNES, own calculations based on information from Data Collection from Sugar Cane Harvests in El Salvador, 2012-13 and 2014-15.

⁴ United Nations, A/HRC/33/49/Ad. Report of the Special Rapporteur for the Right to Water and Sanitation on mission to El Salvador, paragraph 61, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/170/69/PDF/G1617089.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵ Attorney for the Defence of Human Rights, *Report of the Attorney General's Office for the Defence of Human Rights on the Use of Agrotoxics in El Salvador and their Impact on Human Rights*. PDDH, San Salvador, 21 July 2016, 82 pp.

⁶ Ramón García Trabanino, *Terminal Kidney Disease in the Rosales National Hospital. Probable association based on contact with herbicides and pesticides (June 2000)*, cited in Attorney for the Defence of Human Rights (2016), op.cit, p.4.

⁷ According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, "a means of life is sustainable when it can withstand and recover from ruptures and sharp shocks and maintain its capabilities and its activities in the present as well as in the future without undermining its natural resource base. Thus, the means of life are seen to be affected by external factors which allow it to increase its resilience and consequently decrease its vulnerability." 4 May 2017 in <http://www.fao.org/in-action/herramienta-administracion-tierras/glosario/m/es/>

Initiatives to protect Belize sea life show good results: But threats remain a worry

Summary prepared by Pamela Machado*



Belize's coral reef, the second largest barrier reef in the world, shows strong signs of resilience as corals keep growing despite environmental threats and damages from tourism and man-made activities.

A restoration project in Laughing Bird Caye, southern Belize, has succeeded in giving hope to threatened marine species, reports *The Guardian*¹. Despite survival pressures caused by external environmental factors, 90% of sea life has survived and is thriving, marking the endeavour as "the most impressive coral restoration effort in the Caribbean". The project is led by a grassroots group born from the efforts of fishermen, tour guides, environmentalists and scientists.

Another step to keep marine creatures safe was taken early this October by the government of Belize when it announced the inauguration of the world's first ray sanctuary. The waters of

Belize are home to more than 20 species of rays, according to Florida International University², whose scientists' research inspired the creation of the sanctuary.

Due to an unhealthy environment – a result of the combination of climate change effects, overfishing and habitat loss, rays are threatened with extinction, with some species being critically endangered, such as the smalltooth sawfish and Ticon cownose rays. "I was surprised to hear how threatened rays are globally and decided that Belize could be a good global citizen by protecting them," said Belize Fisheries Administrator Beverly Wade.

Regardless of the efforts from authorities and independent groups, numbers are far from representing an ideal scenario for environmental protection and preservation of the ecosystem in the waters of the reef.

Laughing Bird Caye, for instance, although declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996, entered the danger list in 2009.

Initiatives such as restoration projects and sanctuaries can only do so much in protecting their fauna and flora. Finding a healthy balance between human intervention and nature's own pace can be a challenge, particularly in a country where preserving nature is also an important source of economic earnings. Approximately half of the Belizean population depends on activities such as snorkelling, diving and fishing - which come mainly from tourism.

The increasing levels of pollution and water contamination are causing fleshy macro algae to flourish excessively, impeding the further growth of corals. On top of that, oil extraction, poor law enforcement and construction of hotel resorts around the reef could be factors holding back the development of sea life in the future. If so far actions to preserve the reef ecosystem have been thriving, the growing exploration of and other pressures on these resources leave uncertainty on how long a sustainable balance can be kept.

1 Nina Lakhani, *The Guardian*, 22 August 2017
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/aug/22/belize-coral-reefs-improving-grassroots-restoration>

2 Florida International University, 4 October 2017
<https://news.fiu.edu/2017/10/belize-to-create-worlds-first-ray-sanctuary-guided-by-global-fingerprint/115920>

* Pamela Machado is a Brazilian student of journalism in London and a member of ENCA.

LATIN AMERICA 2017



ADELANTE!

The Trump Presidency has seen a worrying rise in US interventions in Latin America, with the blockade on Cuba being tightened, and further sanctions plus military action threatened against Venezuela.

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The interoceanic canal

Earlier this year (2017) Global Witness produced a report entitled 'Defenders of the Earth' which documented the global killings of land and environmental defenders in numerous countries around the world during 2016. Global Witness is an organisation whose researches ENCA has used and promoted before, and we shall no doubt use them again in the future. The organisation's 2017 report, however, exposes a few issues and questions behind the definitions used by Global Witness and the quality and depth of their research. The specific point that first raised an alarm about the report is its reference to Nicaragua as "the most dangerous country in the world per capita" (p.24).

For seasoned Central America watchers and visitors such a description is nonsensical, especially when viewed against the records of the neighbouring 'Northern Triangle' countries of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Quite apart from the differences in these countries' statistics on drug trafficking, homicides and other crimes, there is a palpable difference in the atmosphere and ambiance of security in Nicaragua in comparison with its neighbours to the north, and that is true for rights defenders as it is for regular citizens. That is not to say that there are no security issues in Nicaragua. There are, but to frequent Central America visitors as well as to Central Americans themselves, in security terms, you take a quantum leap into the abyss as you cross the frontier from Nicaragua into the territory of one of its northern neighbours. Moreover the suggestion that protesters against the proposed interoceanic canal in Nicaragua are

likely to receive the same kind of treatment meted out to protesters and rights defenders in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador is false. We refer the reader to various items listed at the end of the following article for further reading on this subject which may help to outline where Global Witness's research went astray.

The article below by **John Perry**¹ briefly addresses the situation of the protests against the proposed Interoceanic Canal.

John Perry writes: For her recent trip to Nicaragua, Bianca Jagger probably didn't pack her favourite shoes (Miu Miu boots with diamanté heels). She joined a protest march against the interoceanic canal planned to cross the south of the country, calling it 'an insane project.' Amnesty International claims Nicaragua's government 'secretly sold the country's future to the highest bidder.' The Guardian [says](#) the canal has 'provoked a mix of anger, fear and defiance not witnessed since the civil war between the Sandinista government and US-backed Contra rebels ended in 1988.' Global Witness has declared Nicaragua the world's most dangerous place per capita for environmental activists. Francisca Ramírez, leader of the anti-canal protests, told them: 'The only response we have had is the bullet.' (Global Witness's report mixes coverage of the canal protests with reports on deaths in land disputes in an entirely different part of Nicaragua.)

Despite being one of the poorest countries in Latin America, Nicaragua is

also one of the safest. And opinion polls show more than 70% support for the canal. It would create 50,000 jobs in a country which will add over 350,000 to its working-age population in the next five years. Nicaragua's growth rate is 4-5%, but the government believes it needs to be 8-10% if extreme poverty is to end.

The environmental challenges are enormous. They focus on the use of Lake Nicaragua as part of the canal's route. It's a large but shallow inland sea, which will have to be dredged to create a wide shipping channel, with uncertain effects on its ecology. On the other hand, the canal's need to capture rainfall will require a massive tree-planting programme. The government argues that only the canal will provide the resources needed to protect the country's vanishing forests. ERM, the British firm that did the environmental impact study, concludes that the project could 'create lasting benefits for biodiversity.'

It's also estimated that 30,000 people will lose their land (Amnesty says the real figure is 119,000). About 100 of these accompanied Jagger and Ramírez as they led the latest protest march. Organisers say it would have been bigger but for police holding up those intending to join in. Ramírez says her family is constantly threatened. Nevertheless, she's managed to organise 91 marches so far, fully reported by the opposition media.

¹ John Perry lives in Masaya, Nicaragua where he works on UK housing and migration issues and writes about those and other topics covered in

his 'Two Worlds' blog which can be found at: <http://twoworlds.me/>.

A note from PASE to ENCA

PASE is a Nicaraguan organisation that advocates for sugar cane workers and ex-workers who have Chronic Kidney Disease of non-traditional sources (CKDnT). PASE stands for 'Professionals for Social and Economic Transparency'. It dedicates much of its time to helping sugar cane workers and their families gain the pensions and social security benefits which are due to them when they fall to CKDnT. It has also assisted the La Isla Foundation in its research work into the causes of CKDnT and ways of preventing and treating it. Having reached the end of its large-scale funding at the end of 2016, ENCA made a donation to prolong its work for a few months in order that it could bring more workers' cases to a conclusion. But this too ran out and in September this year PASE had to close its office in Chinandega, leaving many sugar cane workers and their families with nowhere to turn to for help and advice in how to apply for and gain their pension rights.

PASE's letter (from the organisation's Nicaraguan coordinator, Alberto José Legall López) to ENCA sets out a more recent twist to their difficulties, one that strikes a bit closer to home for we Europeans.

Dear ENCA,

I'd like to share with you some news I think may be of much interest for ENCA. Because of the restrictions imposed by the United States to Nicaragua's foreign trade via the NICA ACT, the European Union is now actively increasing exports through the Association Agreement between Central America and the EU.

According to the latest news, the exports to the EU show an increase of 46%. The United Kingdom holds the first place among all the countries in receipt of these exports, and sugar and rum, produced in Chinandega's sugar mills, are among the main exports. This is of vital importance as it reflects a trend for the future: to date there has been no exchange of communication, no information, no supervision, backing this increased alliance between Nicaragua and the European Union in the export of the sugar and rum produced in the Chinandega sugar mills. [There is no monitoring whatsoever, no information concerning the working conditions and living standards of the communities who take part in the production of the sugar and rum purchased by the EU.]

This reality confirms the urgency of the work that PASE was doing in Chinandega with the sugar workers, ex-workers and

their families in order to improve their living and working conditions

I am absolutely convinced that this new state of affairs in Nicaragua, namely the increase of sugar and rum produced in Chinandega and exported to the EU, presents ENCA with an opportunity to make the EU fully aware of the situation: they need to support projects such as PASE in Chinandega to enable us to carry on supervising, monitoring and providing follow-up and continuity to improve the life and working conditions of the sugar mill communities who are one of the links in the production of sugar and rum.

We could report in the ENCA newsletters, and we could provide information and news concerning the affected communities. Below you will find 2 news items that confirm the information I am sharing with you. Of course there is more information available, but the most worrying issue is that there is no mention of the living and working conditions of those communities.

In the first link you'll find 2 interviews. The first one is a statement by the president of APEN (Nicaraguan Association of Producers and Exporters) who confirms that exports to the EU have increased by approximately 46% this last year. In the second part of the video, the EU ambassador expresses the wish to strengthen his links with Central America via the Association Agreement.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o712hRHeO4>

The following link concerns the principal EU importing countries of which the UK is number one, as well as mentioning the main products exported to the EU via the Association Agreement, and it confirms the predominance of the exports of Chinandega's sugar and rum.

http://www.centralamericadata.com/es/article/home/Nicaragua_Se_recuperan_exportaciones_a_Europa

Saludos cordiales y fraternos...

Alberto...



Tropical Storm Nate

Tropical Storm Nate hit Central America in early October causing at least eight deaths in Costa Rica, eleven in Nicaragua, three in Honduras and one in El Salvador.

In Costa Rica, nearly 400,000 were without running water and thousands had to sleep in shelters. All train journeys in Costa Rica were suspended and many flights were cancelled. A particular concern was the possible displacement of

crocodiles to areas where they would not normally be expected. Many popular national parks were closed as a precaution against falling trees. The Costa Rican government declared a state of emergency.

In Nicaragua as much as 15 inches (38 cm) of rain fell causing extensive damage to infrastructure and the closure and destruction of numerous roads and bridges. As with their neighbour to the south, thousands of Nicaraguans had to be evacuated from

their homes and had to spend several nights in shelters. Similarly, many basic services were disrupted.

In Honduras, as well as the three deaths caused by Nate, several people were reported missing. One man was killed in a mudslide in El Salvador and another person was reported missing.

Sources include the BBC, Reuters, The Guardian and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign.



ELECTION MONITORING IN EL SALVADOR, 2018



March 4th 2018 is the date of the elections for the Legislative Assembly and Municipalities in El Salvador, and as usual the Centre for Exchange and Solidarity (Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad – CIS) in San Salvador will be running an election monitoring delegation. Over the past few years during previous Salvadoran elections, ENCA has organised a mini-British delegation to form part of the CIS delegation, the majority of whose participants are North American and Salvadoran. It is always a fascinating experience from various standpoints.

The CIS will again be organising a delegation from 26th February to March 6th, for which period the CIS is seeking election observers who will go through their week long training and relevant visits as well as the actual monitoring and reporting itself. At the moment the CIS is also searching for longer term volunteers who are needed from January 2nd to March 24th to work on preparation for the larger delegation.

You can find out more about the CIS election delegations by going to: <http://cis-elsalvador.org/index.php/en/volunteer/election-observation-volunteer> from which site you will be able to download the application form to join the delegation. If you wish to discuss the possibility with someone who has been a participant in the mini-British delegations in the past, feel free to ring Martin Mowforth on 01822 617504 or to email him on mmowforth@plymouth.ac.uk

Indigenous Medicine and COPINH in Honduras

By ENCA member James Watson*

COPINH is the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras. ENCA report regularly on their work and the violence they face – including the assassination of their leader Bertha Cáceres in 2016. ENCA member James Watson visited COPINH in May and June this year to carry out a project with their community healthcare groups, and to learn about the importance of local knowledge for indigenous communities in resistance.

The West of Honduras is a mix of green forested mountain ridges that hide either deep cut river valley networks, or occasional wide plateau plains. It is also the home to the indigenous Lenca, descendants of the ancient Maya. Contemporary

Lenca communities are commonly campesino farmers, almost indistinguishable from ladino communities with little indigenous identity. However whereas elsewhere in Central America farms are often owned by large landowners, many Lenca farm their own smallholding plots, growing products like corn and vegetables mainly for self-consumption, or coffee for sale.

Through the 1989 UN Convention ILO169 on Indigenous Rights, they are increasingly demanding their rights to indigenous community-owned land titles – a key to their identity in their own space – and protecting their spaces from outside speculation. Some live in

communities relatively easy to access by car or bus, some in deep valleys requiring hours of walking to get to. Over 2 months this year I was hosted by COPINH to visit women's community medicine groups in some of their communities. I had the logistically demanding task of working out how to visit these groups – where to get buses from, on what days they ran, what happened when rain washed out the roads, where to meet the guides to trek me through the mountains to my destination. The ultimate goal was for me to learn what they needed and were striving for, and to put onto paper for them a record of their local natural medicine knowledge, to help them protect and deepen it. I was hosted by amazing people, and



The hills above the community of Candelarita, where local kids helped me find and photograph local medicinal plants

learnt a lot – though I feel I only scratched the surface.

Indigenous rights organisations in Honduras aim to protect and develop their communities and increase the standing of an indigenous identity. This is a social development project, bringing resources and education to marginalised communities, and a cultural project, promoting the importance of indigenous culture. In Honduras this is also a battle for survival. The country's political elite is hooked on selling off the country's natural resources in return for urban development, and has successfully taken control of the judiciary and US-funded military to enable them to do so with impunity – as any reading through previous ENCA articles will attest. This view treats indigenous people culturally as an embarrassing throwback, and socially as a pesky barrier to accessing natural resources.

In truth, the eight indigenous groups in Honduras are the inheritors of a strong Mayan cultural heritage that links them to Honduras' land and a diversity of traditions and languages that has survived years of repression. This includes a strong sense of connection to their local land and its ecology, and of community identity, pride and self-organisation. This gives them a unique and important strength, to be at the forefront of successful organising against the violence they encounter. Since Honduras' 2009 military coup they have been fighting even harder for their voices to be heard, with the different indigenous groups working together in well organised networks. Both on a local level, strengthening communities marginalised and attacked by the government or



In the community of Guachipilín, Tinturas mix indigenous plants with western alcohol to cheaply preserve the plants' medicinal properties

prospectors, and nationally and internationally to fighting against the exploitative oligarchy and the system that backs this up, they are at the forefront of the fight.

COPINH's organising has had remarkable success in their communities. Through peaceful means they have declared several municipalities in Western Honduras 'autonomous', with Lenca indigenous town hall governance. This means the governance structure starts working for the locals themselves; and they envisage similarly autonomous systems in key areas such as education and healthcare. The groups I visited were a possible starting point for Lenca-orientated local healthcare delivery. This would be a system sensitive to Lenca cultural traditions and the interests of the rural poor – lacking a national health system that serves their interests. Instead the national

health system is led and staffed by people from the middle classes, and increasingly starved of money by the corrupt government. It would mean a system that balances western medicine and technology – valuable but also expensive and hard to get to – with local remedies and techniques readily available as part of the communities' environment and heritage. It would mean another pillar of support to the powerful indigenous identity that the Lenca are reigniting and showing to the world – showing that an alternative social, political and economic model is possible against the brutality and exploitation that Western 'development' has offered them.

** As part of completing his UK training to become a doctor, James Watson spent his time learning with COPINH as an elective course of study.*



Defending Rights Defenders Event Report

On the 25th September 2017, ENCA hosted an event entitled 'Defending Rights Defenders' on board the Tattershall Castle, a boat moored on the River Thames. ENCA was strongly supported by Peace Brigades International (PBI), OFRANEH (Black Fraternal Organisation of Honduras), the Guatemala Solidarity Network and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign. The event explored both the causes and potential solutions to the dangers of being a defender of land rights, environmental rights and human rights in Central America, attracted 140 people and provided a platform for discussion and solidarity.

The event was chaired by **Doug Specht** of Voz and the University of Westminster who introduced three speakers: **Martin Mowforth**, author of 'The Violence of Development' opened the talks with a contextual introduction to the northern triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) where life for rights defenders is extremely dangerous. He cited research by the Centre for

International Environmental Law (CIEL) and Global Witness that stated that since the 2009 military coup d'état in Honduras, 123 land and environmental activists have been murdered in that country with countless others threatened, attacked or imprisoned. The situation for rights defenders in El Salvador and Guatemala can hardly be described as any better than for Hondurans.

Following this introduction we were delighted to be joined by **Aurelia Martina Arzú Rochez**, vice-coordinator and spiritual guide of OFRANEH, who gave a powerful and personal account of living with the oppression of being an activist in Honduras. The Garifuna people are currently experiencing illegal takeovers of their ancestral lands by Canadian investors who are intent on developing a tourism industry that caters to wealthy foreign cruise passengers but which displaces and dispossesses the Garifuna people from their land. Moreover they suffer constant criminalisation by the authorities which are intent on protecting international investors rather than Honduran people.

More case studies of abuses of rights defenders from around the region were then presented. Following Aurelia and the other case studies, **Emily Spence** of Peace Brigades International took to the stage to explore ways in which rights defenders can be defended and supported through the work of PBI and other solidarity networks. The presentations were rounded off with a lively and interesting Q&A session.

While the presentations may have concluded on a sober note, the feeling of solidarity and the importance of pushing forward for new and better ways of living and fighting for rights was, quite literally, drummed home by the Pengenista samba-reggae drum band who capped off the evening with a lively range of dance and protest songs that got the whole room on its feet to join in celebration of what can be achieved when we engage in solidarity.

More photos and videos can be found at www.enca.org.uk/defending

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Meeting Dates 2018

February 18th | June 10th | October 14th

ENCA meetings are held at the NSC's office at the Durham Road Centre, London, N7 7DT. Meetings are held on Sundays from 12:30 pm to 5 pm and we start with lunch which is made up of whatever people attending choose to bring to share.