



# ECOLOGICAL BRIGADES

Guardians of nature at school and at home





## Ecological brigades

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**María Elena Orozco Rodríguez, María Ester Aguirre Vallejos y Delia María Palacios** are teachers at several municipal schools in Villa El Carmen, Mateare and Managua. In 2008 they fell in love with the idea of running ecological brigades with 4th, 5th, and 6th-grade students, and here they share their experiences:

“The purpose of creating these ecological brigades with the help of CANTERA is to improve environmental health conditions in the communities. Communities often have the problem of poor waste management and environmental neglect.



Ecological brigades start at school and little by little begin to involve parents and family members until the entire community is participating. We've made school and family vegetable gardens, and many children have planted tomatoes and come to show me their beautiful harvest.

We raise awareness in several different ways. We try to find creative ways to eliminate bad habits because, many times within a family, it's the children who teach the adults.

We hosted a campaign that said: "A plant for a trash bag!" First, we gave out garbage bags, then we gave a plant to the families that filled the bags with inorganic garbage they collected. We think the children are changing. They know the difference between organic and inorganic waste, they know they can use organic waste to make fertiliser, and they know where to deposit garbage correctly. The problem is putting that knowledge into practice. That's what we need to encourage... and we're making progress."





**Juan Alberto Moreno** of CANTERA explains in more detail the methods used to interest children:

### **What are ecological brigades?**

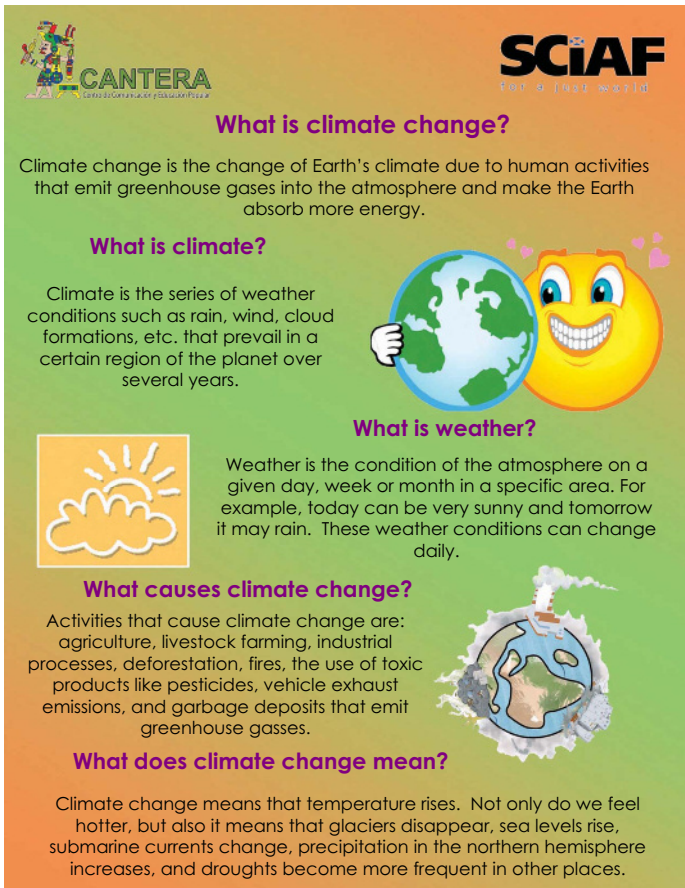
Schools are not only social places where classes are taught but also centres of community activities. Teacher participation is very important.

At the beginning of the school year, teacher meetings are held to decide on issues to tackle and actions to take during the school year.

The first step is organising brigades in classrooms and schools. Make affinity groups in each classroom of six to eight children, trying to ensure there are as many girls as there are boys.

At school, the process is based on offering a fun teaching method that incorporates movement, feelings, games, dance, theatre, puppets... in other words, lots of joy. It's about learning while playing.





**What is climate change?**  
Climate change is the change of Earth's climate due to human activities that emit greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and make the Earth absorb more energy.

**What is climate?**  
Climate is the series of weather conditions such as rain, wind, cloud formations, etc. that prevail in a certain region of the planet over several years.

**What is weather?**  
Weather is the condition of the atmosphere on a given day, week or month in a specific area. For example, today can be very sunny and tomorrow it may rain. These weather conditions can change daily.

**What causes climate change?**  
Activities that cause climate change are: agriculture, livestock farming, industrial processes, deforestation, fires, the use of toxic products like pesticides, vehicle exhaust emissions, and garbage deposits that emit greenhouse gasses.

**What does climate change mean?**  
Climate change means that temperature rises. Not only do we feel hotter, but also it means that glaciers disappear, sea levels rise, submarine currents change, precipitation in the northern hemisphere increases, and droughts become more frequent in other places.



Cards, notes, or stickers are used to help teach issues related to the environment and climate change.

Each group prepares a presentation that they will use at the beginning of each activity, which includes

- ✓ **Name of the group:** Choose something from nature, like an animal, to be the name of the group. For example, the Turquoise-browed Motmot, Nicaragua's national bird.
- ✓ **Group motto:** Analyse the role this animal plays in nature and connect it to the activity of the ecological brigade. From this information create a motto that represents the group. For example, "Guardians of nature at school and at home".
- ✓ **Sound and movement:** Have the group imitate the sound and movement of the animal.

✓ **Drawing that represents the group:** The group draws a picture that illustrates the group.

### What do ecological brigades do?

#### Brigade meet-ups

Ecological brigades meet in the classroom during the time allotted for the subject of Technical and Vocational Guidance according to the academic calendar planned by the teacher's meeting.

Videos, games, or activities that complement the notecards are used, covering subjects such as the environment, protection of natural resources, climate change, and agroecology.





### **Awareness raising activities**

There are activities that take place outside of the classroom with the intention of raising awareness in the community about issues such as health, environment, and proper use of resources such as water, firewood, trees and garbage. Some of these activities are:

- ✓ **House-to-house visits:** to raise awareness on the importance of keeping yards clean and correct drinking water management to avoid the spread of diseases, using the 3 Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.
- ✓ **Community workdays:** on reforestation, cleaning up litter, and raising awareness on waste management.

- ✓ **Workshops:** on the importance of a healthy diet and implementing agroecology through family or school vegetable gardens.
- ✓ **Contests:** to motivate children to take care of the environment and natural resources, and represent this in drawings or handicrafts.
- ✓ **Ecological brigade exchanges:** to share lessons learned. At the end of the school year, all the participating schools' ecological brigades get together for a community exchange. This includes an exhibit fair of the different agroecological practices that farmers have implemented.



In conclusion:

**Yaosca de los Ángeles Gómez Berrios, María Isabel Acevedo and Leonardo Benavides**, students of the "Cristo Viene" school in Filos de Cuajachillo:

*"We're the ones that are teaching our parents how to take care of trees and the environment. We tell them: you can*

*put organic waste on trees because fruits are like fertiliser. Inorganic trash needs to be buried, and plastic bags can be reused.*

*What we want is for lots and lots of trees to be planted. Our dream is for our community to be clean and that nobody will litter, and that every day it will be even prettier."*

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