



Storms and floods bring devastation to Bombita and La Hoya

At the end of October, and before it was designated a hurricane, Tropical Storm Noel ripped through the Dominican Republic. Much of this has gone unreported in the UK press and media and many of you will be unaware of the havoc and misery that has been caused to numerous communities including Bombita and La Hoya and of the damage to COPA schools and clinics.

Along with others, the populations of both villages, well over 3,000 people, were evacuated to the sports stadium and schools in the nearby town of Barahona and it was several days before any were able to return to assess and clear up damage to their homes. At the time of writing, families are still homeless. Even when they return many will find their houses uninhabitable, which is particularly true in Bombita where most houses are made of palmetto and mud.

All of the COPA volunteers have been housed in the home of Marge, a long time friend to Connie and to the COPA team, in Barahona and we are indebted to her for her care and concern. Until they were able to return to begin the clear up the Volunteers have been helping to distribute aid and comfort the villagers at the stadium.

The schools, clinics and COPA housing in both villages were also severely affected, being under several feet of water for many days. The new La Hoya clinic was immersed to roof level. First reports indicate that whilst the COPA buildings remain structurally sound the contents including generators, computers, sewing machines, furniture, office equipment and fixtures and fittings need to be replaced. School and clinic resources did not survive the flooding and will need to be restocked.

Within ten days a workgroup from COPA in the USA, including Sebert Lane who happened to be on holiday in Florida, arrived to support Connie and assist with the clear up. Ken Fitchew, an electrician from the UK, also travelled out to help and despite their own overwhelming difficulties villagers have been helping with the clear up of the schools.

Our priority now is to have the clinics and schools up and running as soon as possible in order to bring some stability and security to the children and their families.

The cost of repairing the damage to the COPA sites is still being assessed but will run into tens of thousands of pounds. Various aid agencies and the DR Government are providing some aid for the villagers but we know this will be insufficient for their needs and we would like to be in a position to help the communities.

We are appealing for money to help with this emergency and details of how to donate can be found on the back page of this bulletin.

For how to donate to the Emergency Fund please turn to the back page of this bulletin



Pictures showing the flooding in La Hoya and villagers being rescued by boat

How the news reached the UK.....using photographs and extracts from emails received from Connie to give a flavour of the unfolding disaster

Our new volunteer in the DR, Cathy Williams, left the UK on 29th October little realising the situation she was travelling into. Tropical storm Noel had struck the Dominican Republic causing flooding and damage to roads and bridges and so Cathy was delayed in the north of the island, unable to travel to the capital, Santo Domingo, and from there to Barahona. Barahona is the nearest town to the villages of La Hoya, approx 5 miles away, and Bombita, approx 8 miles away.

This was the news we had on **October 30th** but much worse was to follow. News was sketchy but a few emails received over the next couple of days gave a bleak picture saying that there was 4 feet of water in Bombita school and that there had been heavy rains in La Hoya. We heard that the people of Bombita had been told to leave their homes and were in the sports stadium in Barahona and many people in La Hoya were on their roofs. Connie and the other volunteers had evacuated to Marge's house in Barahona.

Then, on **November 2nd**, came an email from Connie which told of the full extent of the devastation.

"This has been a week from hell! Sunday the electricity went out. It was raining a bit so the girls decided not to go to the beach. Sunday night we had terrible winds. Monday it cleared and we cleaned up the 10 or so trees that fell. All the moringa trees fell. The boys from La Hoya helped us clean up and we were quite pleased. No one knew anything about a storm! No electricity so no one heard any radio or tv news. Monday night it began to rain and rain and rain. At 6.30 am the volunteers in Bombita were awakened and told to leave immediately. They grabbed a few some clothes and took off. The river had gone over the banks and they were already under 2 feet of water but they were able to get the van out.

They came by La Hoya and advised us. Perez, the school Caretaker, was there as well and said we should go ahead and leave as well. So we too grabbed a few things and took off. Things continued to deteriorate. Wednesday we returned to La Hoya and lifted things up in the school and office, thinking we might get a foot of water in the buildings. No one from La Hoya was leaving but most everyone left Bombita as it was over 3 feet under water. Everyone ran with just the clothes on their backs.

Thursday morning around 2am the people from La Hoya found themselves in 4 feet of water. I went there today and all you can see are the roofs of a few houses. It is absolutely unbelievable. Someone went by boat with the governor and went up to the school. He told me we were up to the roof in water. I just can't even visualize it! It only makes me sick! La Hoya is a

complete loss. Everyone is in a state of shock. No one ever expected this and no one saw it coming. The storm just stopped above us I guess. I don't know as I never saw any news. No one has died here, though I heard today that one in the next village did.

Four bridges are out between us and the capital. I told Cathy to stay there.

I spoke 5 minutes with the President of the DR yesterday and he sent out 150 food bags today to me to pass out and has promised more. I am to meet with the governor next week and the head of Plan Social from the capital.

Well, what more can I say. It is very hard. It is so sad to see everyone having lost everything."

In all disasters there are certain people who stand out with their concern for others and their actions. This was no exception and the next email from Connie on **November 4th** told us of four heroes.

"I want to tell you that we have four heroes here. First Pachico, caretaker at Bombita and Manuel, caretaker at La Hoya. They have stayed at the schools all the time. Manuel is sleeping on the roof of the bathrooms over the generator. He has continuously tried to keep moving things higher and higher and I think I heard that he was able to save the computers and a lot of other things. He has a tarpaulin that he is under. I can't quite believe it but know it is true. He swims out from time to time and somehow gets some food!

Pachico in Bombita has not left the school. He realized that the floods were carrying a lot of debris. He stayed there the whole time and opened the gates to let the water flow out as they were being blocked with the debris. He has already started cleaning up. Guillermo and Sandy, also caretakers, have been there from time to time, but Pachico has been sleeping in the gazebo in front of the houses.

The other pair are Ruber and Merquelin, the Headteacher and Deputy Head in La Hoya. They did not just go home to their families and be safe. They have not stopped. They arranged for a school in Barahona to open its doors as a shelter. They have fought to get help as an official centre, found food for the people, organized them into committees, etc. I

was so proud of the children as I watched them walk to the dining area for their meal walking in a nice line with their hands behind them as we teach them in school. Yesterday the cavalry showed up after Merq and Ruber went crazy yelling at officials for lack of action. The army came with donations of medicine. Then came the public health officials who vaccinated everyone over 2. Then came a truck with paper products, etc. They have been gone repeatedly to the Bombita shelter to give encouragement. They come by Marge's to keep us updated especially at the beginning when we were all in the dark as to what was happening. They have been amazing!"

November 6th

"We began our clean up in Bombita today. I just can't believe the mud! We are having to wheelbarrow it out and dump it outside the school. Supposedly a front end loader will come later to pick it up. They are working in the next village. People are trying to dry out their mattresses but they will be filled with disease but what choice do they have.

La Hoya is still under water though it is receding some. I have heard that at the school and the houses it is down from the ceiling to knee level, but we will not try and go tomorrow. We got the mud out of the houses of our volunteers in Bombita but tomorrow we will have to try and clean with bleach water if we can get a generator in to pump water as ours are out of commission!

Disease will come later. Those from La Hoya were vaccinated against typhoid and meningitis but I don't know if they got over to the stadium today for those of Bombita. We waited 5 hours yesterday to help and they didn't show up.

Sandy and Guillermo worked tirelessly in the school yesterday though their houses still have lots to do."



Some of the deep mud left in Bombita after the floods



The clear up begins at La Hoya school



Villagers queuing for food parcels in Bombita



Acres of mud surround Bombita school



Flooding in La Hoya



More deep, wet mud in Bombita

November 7th

"Cathy was picked up at the bus station, dropped off her stuff and we headed to the largest refugee centre where the people of Bombita are. The next day she was taken to her 'new house' and we began the clean up. We are hoping to get into La Hoya today to start getting some clothes out. Pastor Pedro's church women are washing everything up for us. What a help. They have done so much and we haven't even started in La Hoya. We used a pressure cleaner yesterday in the houses in Bombita. It worked very well with four people squiggging the water out of the house at the same time. Problem was there is nowhere for the water to go as the mud is higher than the walkways we have cleared! We try cutting channels in the mud!"

November 8th

"Finally we were able to get into La Hoya on Wednesday. It has been over a week since we were able to go there. There was so much flood water we almost didn't get in but soon though we were on higher ground and the road was dry at the school complex. With all that mess, we were still very happy! How can I say that? We were greeted by our adopted dog Socks and our two very happy, but thin cats! We were like a bunch of children greeting them. Also we were thrilled that the water had not, in fact, risen in the school and houses to the roof as we had been told. Everything on my desk was dry. The water had risen only to the very top edge.

We pulled out all our clothes and so appreciate the women from my church (Pastor Pedro) who are working daily trying to wash everything up for us. What a blessing this has been! We will return

today with the pressure cleaner and work on the houses. In the days to come we will work our way through the schools and clinics.

Please continue to keep us in your prayers. Many will become sick after this as they will use mattresses that had been soaked, walk and play in the mud and we will have a horrendous amount of mosquitoes. Public health had a massive inoculation campaign and everyone that would be was given an injection for meningitis and a tetanus shot."

November 10th

"I saw Fermin discouraged for the first time this week. This young man facing an early death due to liver disease, facing a possible transplant, has never been 'discouraged' in his life so that was so hard for me to see in him. I was talking about a song we were going to sing at our Christmas party. He looked at me and asked, "Are we going to celebrate Christmas this year?" I wanted to cry and told him that yes, we were going to celebrate Christmas like never before. Because without Christmas we wouldn't be able to survive this or any other hardship in our lives!"

November 14th

Sebert and the workgroup from the USA arrived to give their help and support. Here are a few extracts from Sebert's first email. "I had read all Connie's daily reports but was still totally unprepared for the mess we have here.

In the school in La Hoya the water submerged the desks but did not reach black boards and wall display boards. All rooms have now been examined. The teachers desks need replacing and some teachers

chairs. The village turned out in great force and did huge job of mopping though and cleaning up. What a credit to them when their homes are in such a mess.

All exercise books, stationery etc., many text books and library books have been lost. Some preschool floor standing equipment, toys, stands etc. will need replacing as will the large rug. Throughout the school most of the cupboard doors which are hardboard faced will have to be replaced by local carpenters as soon as possible."

The COPA truck, motorbikes and mowers were all submerged in the floods. Vic, a mechanic, who was with the workgroup, managed to get most of them running again but some replacements will be needed.

"The scene in Bombita is one of a complete and utter disaster with filthy, muddy mattresses out to dry. The houses here are generally less substantial than in La Hoya and the families in Bombita have been hit harder. If I hadn't seen Bombita I would say there is huge disaster in La Hoya however they MAY get some help from elsewhere. Bombitians are still in the stadium but returning to try to clean up in the day. The dozens and dozens of mattresses we are seeing should never be used again. There is no work and no money. At the school the clean up cannot begin until the mud dries which will take probably another week."

The clean up goes on and we will bring you more news as soon as we can. If you have access to the Internet you will be able to keep up to date by visiting the new COPA website - copa.org.uk

Appeal following Tropical Storm Noel

The fund will be used to help ensure that the COPA schools and clinics are operating again as soon as possible and also to assist with the urgent needs in the communities of Bombita and La Hoya.

Please use this slip with any donation. If you require an acknowledgement for your gift it would ease the pressure on our UK volunteers if you would enclose a Stamped Addressed Envelope.

Enclosed is £ _____ as a donation to the Appeal Fund

Please tick if you wish COPA to recover Gift Aid (this is worth 28p for every £ you donate)
Please note that you must pay income tax or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax reclaimed by COPA on your donation.

To save cost and time I do **not** require an acknowledgement or Please acknowledge receipt

Name _____ Sponsor Ref (if known) _____

Address _____

Post Code _____

Please send your donation to the COPA Treasurer, **David Rush, Flat 98, Block B, The Paragon, Boston Park Road, Brentford, Middlesex, TW8 9RP**. Cheques should be made payable to 'COPA'.

Contact names and addresses for COPA UK:

Treasurer:

Mr David Rush
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Sponsorship Secretary for both La Hoya and Bombita:

Mrs Sandra Samways
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Treasurer: COPA Guernsey

Mr Peter Keeling,
Les Poplairs,
Rue du Felconte,
ST SAVIOURS,
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Guernsey Sponsorship contact

Mrs Margaret Keeling
Address as above

Christmas cards from the Dominican Republic

All the Christmas cards for their sponsors had been completed by the children and young people. These had all been sorted and boxed up ready for their transport to the USA and then on to the UK. The boxes had been on a desk in the school office at La Hoya and such was the speed and depth of the floods many of the cards were unfortunately ruined.

Some cards were able to be salvaged and when they arrive in the UK they will be forwarded to you, the sponsors, hopefully in time for Christmas. I'm sure you will understand if some arrive late but everyone is doing their best to make sure as many of the cards as possible reach you.

Pictured is a display of some of the cards which were able to be salvaged.



Sponsorship Letters and Cards

The address for your letters and cards is:

Child's name and sponsorship number
Escuela de COPA (La Hoya or Bombita)
Apartado 42
BARAHONA
Dominican Republic



Please could you write your name and address on the reverse of the envelope. This will help the volunteers when they are delivering the letters and cards to the children. The volunteers have asked that messages to the children be kept short as each one needs translating into Spanish. As you can imagine, translating up to 800 cards from UK sponsors and 800 cards from USA sponsors is a huge task! Many thanks for your understanding.