

JJCF Report #2



Ben Armstrong



August Facebook Post:

Despite being pregnant or having young children these health promoters in Saavedra have done some of the hardest work of anyone with campaigns for health, vaccinations, and destroying mosquito nesting grounds.

Many of them do their work with their children on their backs, but even so they do exemplary work (and without any salary!)- just for the betterment of their community.

Introduction:

Like in the last report I have been doing a little of everything. Luckily the roads finally dried up at the end of July so we are finally able to bring construction materials to the communities and visit the communities with ease for workshops. All of the projects are now advancing rapidly and everyone that has a new position has been settling into their new work schedule. Our financial administrator quit because she wanted a full time job that we could not offer her, the staff has taken on her work also. During these past two months I helped deliver materials and coordinate the latrine construction with the Coordinator Fabi, translate project reports and revised financial reports, conducted monitoring and evaluation visits, and helped with workshops in the communities.

The last few months have also been difficult with personal health, and I hope that the next few months will go smoother. I was sick to my stomach quite a few times, finally got rid of scabies that I had for three months, and am now healing from a case of eczema. Luckily I am learning how to balance my work life and personal life and have found some friends in the city of Montero, which has helped relieve the stress.

Translations and Monthly Reports:

I have still been translating all of the monthly reports, and I made a new monthly report format that was put in place for August based on what I saw from the past reports I got. There was a lot of repetition and with the new format everyone should be filling out their reports as they go so that they can write down testimonies, stories, and recap events as they happen instead of at the end of the month. In September we will adjust the format and see how it went during the month of August.

Social Media:

I have continued to write the weekly Facebook updates and I also made a brochure about Etta Projects in Spanish. Most of our materials are in English since they focus on raising funds for the projects, and I think it is important that we have more publicity in Bolivia so that the city and communities know who we are and what we do. We had another volunteer come down for two weeks to make a promotional video, so I helped him edit it. Please check it out here- it is inspiring and conveys through images what we do:

<http://vimeo.com/101158428>

Sharepoint:

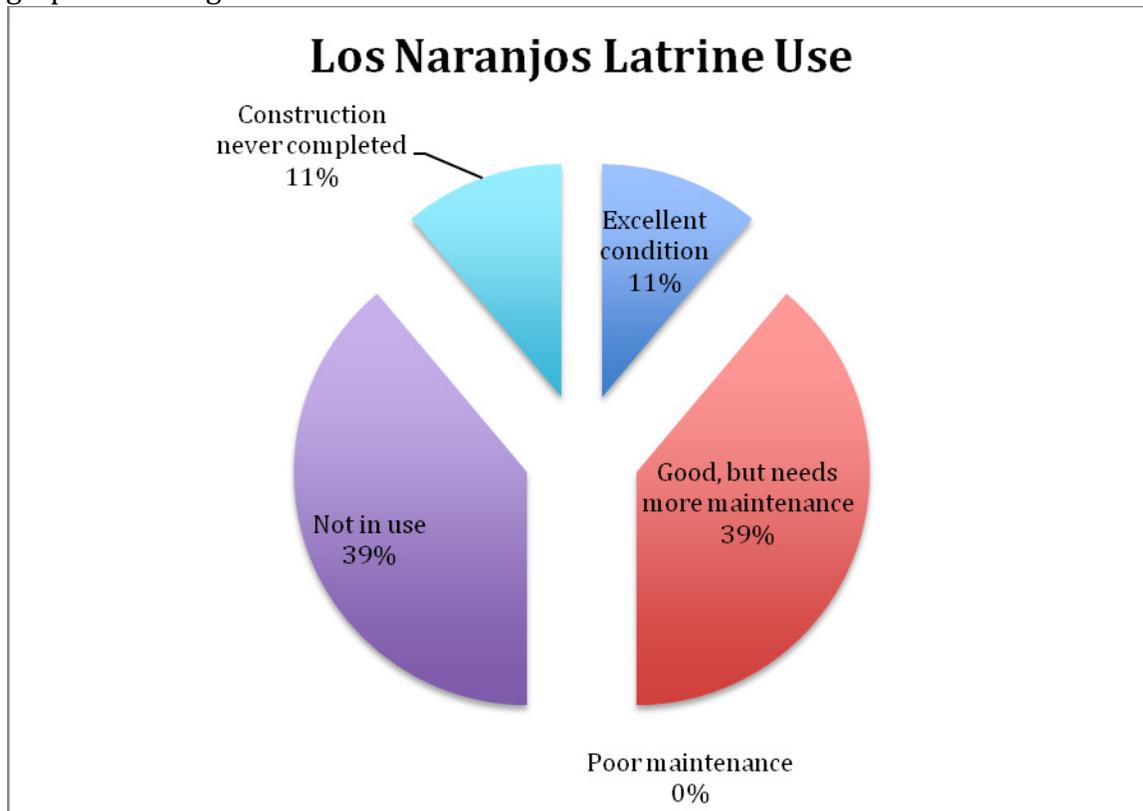
I have been continuously updating SharePoint and giving updates to staff. People are using the tool a lot now so I have less and less work to do with this. It is exciting to see the communication improve within the team and see them embracing this new tool.

Manuals:

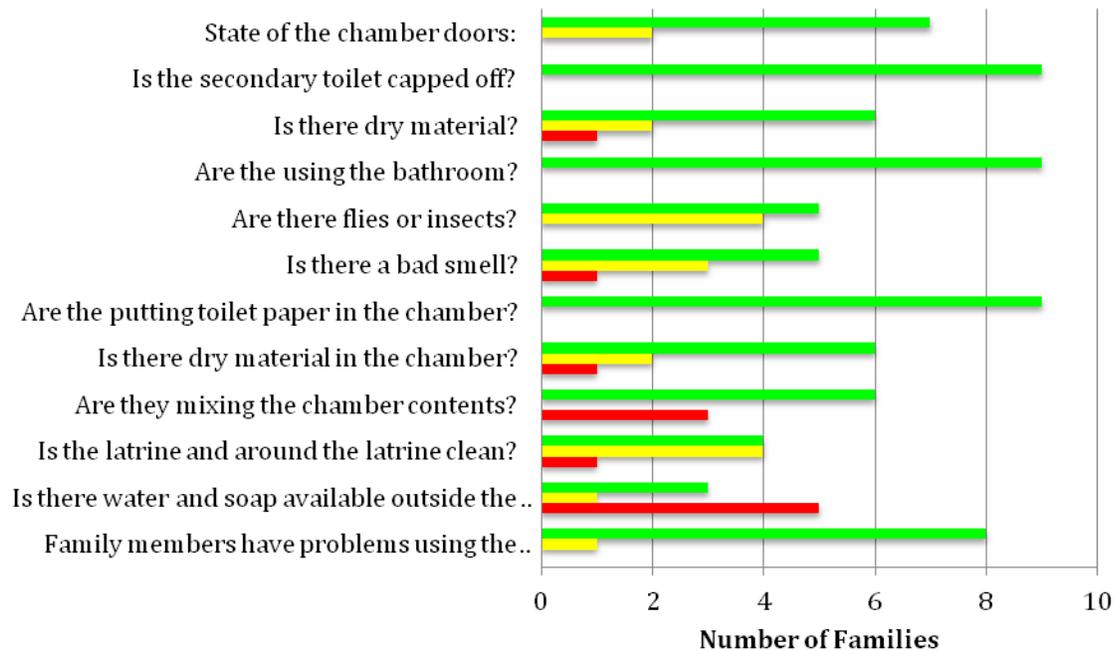
I was only able to work minimally on the manuals, however I plan to finish the latrine manual by the next report.

Monitoring/ Needs Assessments:

During the time that we were looking for a new Monitoring and Evaluation coordinator I did a lot of the monitoring work. We were unable to get to the community Naranjos when we did the last monitoring, so I went to this community and found that most of the bathrooms were in poor condition. Only half of the latrines were in use, there were various construction errors, and those in use were not very well maintained. Here are graphs showing the state of the latrines:



Maintenance of Latrines in Use (9 in Los Naranjos)

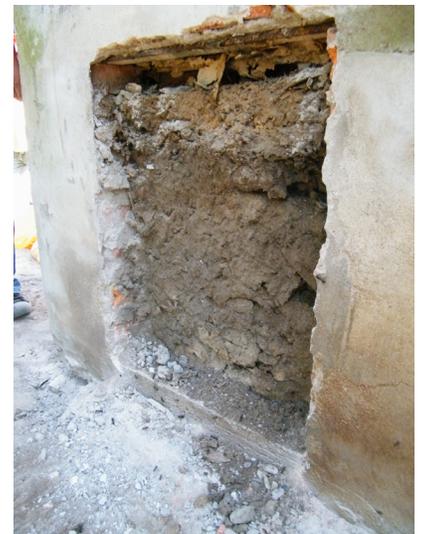


I asked the families about their latrines and found out that this community did not receive the proper workshops and education about how to use their latrines so many of them started to smell and the families stopped using them. Some children and elderly people were having problems getting into the latrines, and most people did not have soap to wash their hands.

From what we found we had a meeting as a team and decided to give it another try in the community. We went and gave a workshop on use and maintenance of the latrines and we also did an evaluation on the construction or use problems people were having. When we went back we found that those that were not using their latrines still were not using them, but those that were using them had perfect maintenance and had changed their use habits! We will go back to the community again with our construction worker to fix the construction errors.

We also talked with Elizabeth whose chamber was ready to open. Since no one on the team had opened a cement door before all of the staff went out to learn what it is like to chip the cement door out. Though ideally families need to leave their chambers to sit for more than 4 months, in just 3 months this family's poop had turned to compost! In our next meeting with the community we will take the door off another lady's bathroom to show them how to do it and show them that the compost really has no smell or traces of excrement.

Here is a testimony from a well used latrine:





Guillermo Parilla Hustillano from Los Naranjos is very proud of his bathroom. He showed me around and told me, *"There is no bad smell at all because we know how to take care of our bathroom with dry material and everything. I also put this window in the wall to get some airflow, so even when you are using the bathroom you don't smell anything and you get a fresh breeze that passes through the bathroom. Before I had a pit latrine, and every time it rained it would flood all over my yard and then I would have to dig a new one. Now I don't have to worry about that with my new bathroom. I like my bathroom because Etta Projects allowed me to personalize it. From the beginning they involved me and informed me about what I would have to pay and how the process would go."*



Guillermo smoothed all of the cement between his bricks to make it as pretty as he could, and he built a handrail. Even now that he broke his leg and uses crutches his handrail lets him get up the stairs to use his bathroom. He openly talks about how much more beautiful his bathroom is compared to his daughter's and his neighbor, but is also proud that they have a better sanitation system and encourages them to keep their bathrooms as well maintained as his.

Latrine Construction:

We constructed an ecological latrine in the office so that everyone on the team can use and understand the latrine, so we could learn about the construction process, and so that we can live our values and turn our solid waste into compost instead of sending it to an underground tank. We had an inauguration for this latrine with members from the board, other nonprofits, and friends. I led a poop relay race to teach people how to use a latrine where people had to run, deposit a fake poop into one of our model toilet seats, deposit dry material and toilet paper in the toilet, and then run bag to tag in the next person with the toilet paper. Not only was it hilarious but people practiced how to use a latrine and were able to see if the dry material they used truly covered their “excrement”.

I went with a truck loaded with construction materials to the communities, and after delivering the materials at midnight (since a truck was stuck and blocking the road on the way) we got caught in the rain and ended up staying in some sugar cane workers houses. I helped various other times transport materials from one community to another and to monitor the construction progress with the coordinator.

Water Projects:

In July a few team members went to monitor the water projects with solar energy in the communities Guadalupe and Monte Rey and found that neither community had a working CAPyS (local water committee) and that some of the meters were not working. We therefore made a plan to go to the communities to re-establish and train the water committees. I helped give a workshop talking about what a water committee does and officially introduced the water committee to the community.



Figure 1 Inauguration of the new water committee.

In Monte Rey they now have a new CAPyS team that will start charging monthly water fees for the upkeep of the water system and talking to families about their water system. In Guadalupe there used to be 80 families and now only 15-30 live in the community, so it will be harder to organize the community. We have another meeting planned with both communities in September.

I also went on a trip to monitor the water system in Moro Moro. While the facilitator was giving a workshop to the children on health and sanitation I went to do household meter readings with some of the CAPyS members there. Everything was functioning well and the organization seems to have a good handle on monthly payments, system upkeep, and explaining how things work to the families. The community also asked us to revise the ecological latrines there that were constructed by another organization, so at the same time I talked to families about how to use an ecological latrine and did a quick checkup on their use and maintenance.

Other Projects:

I trimmed all of the trees, worked on the garden, and helped organize the construction of a storage space for all of the materials.

I attended a workshop in another city (Cochabamba) with representatives from 15 nonprofits in Bolivia talking about climate change. During this three-day conference we created a common vision, talked about climate change facts and perceptions, and talked a lot about holistic thinking and how we can change what we can do in our day-to-day lives to live our values. I have been sharing these items bit by bit with the team.



Team Retreat:



After so many changes in the organization and the personnel we needed to solidify positive team dynamics and get to know everyone better to overcome any bad energy from the past. For this we had a two-day team retreat in a hotel in Buena Vista- a beautiful town near the national park Amboro. There we learned more about each other, cooked healthy food together, and talked about our personal, global, and organizational vision for the future. Though we focused on more abstract concepts and ideas, it helped solidify who we are and what we do before the executive director comes down in September. Now I think we will be able to work better as a team and talk about what we want and our vision for the future

with the director to generate beneficial outcomes for the organization.

Each team member also led an activity. I led an activity talking about climate change and had people stand on a “scale” of agree to disagree with statements like “climate change is harmful to the earth”. It was interesting to see the diversity of opinions on individual questions, since we all generally agree that climate change is a real phenomenon.

One of the most important aspects for me was to talk about what we think is our true impact. Interestingly people did not talk about health or sanitation or any of the specific projects that we do. Rather they talked about the change in the communities we work in after we complete various projects there. The people have more leadership skills, motivation, and knowledge about their rights which really causes long-term changes in the communities. Now these same communities are holding their government officials accountable, demanding changes, and gender equality. For example when Jorge went to a meeting in the community La Patria where the community was discussing what to do with a man who stole money from the water committee during his time as treasurer, only 2 men were at the meeting and the women were not saying "I need to consult with my husband" or "my family/ husband thinks". Rather they were taking a personal stance and making community decisions by themselves. It was powerful for me to see that even though it seems like things might not be functioning the way we would like below the reports the foundations get there is a true revolutionary impact taking place in these communities.

Looking Forward:

The next two months will be very busy. Our executive director will be coming down September 5th from the U.S. to visit and she wants to visit all of the communities possible during her month here. My friend Eryn who I worked with at Etta Projects last year in the U.S. will also be coming down, and I think it will be good to have meeting with a good representation from people that have worked with in the U.S. and in Bolivia to bridge the gap between the two places. We hope to do a lot of planning and visioning while she is here to solidify the team and what we do.

I did not have time to work on my manuals last month, so my goal by the next report is to have a complete latrine manual revised and edited.

I hope to return to Monte Rey and Guadalupe to give more workshops to the communities and water committees about how to manage their solar water systems, visit Naranjos again to help give another workshop on latrine maintenance and to fix the construction errors.



Figure 2 Elizabeth, her family, her latrine, and her compost!