

**Purified Water and Savings Group in El Coyol, Jutiapa, Guatemala  
Guatemala  
Wheaton College  
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**Section I**

The main goals of the project were to provide a water purification system to the community of el Coyol in order to reduce the proliferation of waterborne illnesses and socialize a monetary-savings and educational system to supply purified water sustainably to future generations. These goals were achieved without the need of other fundraising-efforts.

The project was successful but presented limitations along the way. One of the greatest difficulties that I faced during my project was convincing some families that I was not a swindler. In the past, these families have been victims of different scams. For this reason, many found it hard to believe that someone was giving them water filters and school supplies for free. Unfortunately, these families acted as scoundrelmongers and were reluctant to support me at the beginning of the project. Another difficulty of the project was the access to this remote village. To reach the village I needed to travel for two hours from Guatemala City to the town called El Melonar; then, I had to hike to the village for more than an hour. The location became a difficult one since I had to travel to the city to get supplies for the project and carry them to the village every week. The first time I had to get to the village, three more people and I carried everything up the hill. The trips became easier because every single time that I arrived at the village with materials, I found more people ready to help in any way they could. The last time I went up to the village, twelve people helped me to carry the materials to the village. It took some time until all the villagers realized that I was honestly trying to help them. The villagers took ownership of the project, and the ones that had recognized the importance of drinking purified water helped other families to understand that it was not only my project, but also everyone's project.

During my first meeting I realized that the school had access to water through a pipe. For this reason, I redesigned the project so instead of building a rainwater collection system, I used that money to donate several items to the school including 20 new chairs, 2 shelves, a cooking pot and several school supplies. This decision turned out to be very positive. Several families were pleased to support me and participate in my workshops after they realized that I was supporting the community efforts for improving education and health in the community. Another strategy that I utilized was marketing. I advertised the event in several ways including handouts, hand written invitations, flyers and posters. I also left a sample filter in a family's home for exhibition during the beginning of the raining season. Many individuals were very happy after seeing water that was transparent and clean since they would normally have brown or white water.

I am pleased that more than 300 people will benefit from the project this year. As proposed, all the families were going to be offered a filter but it was their decision whether they would take it or not. Every single family in town decided to use the filter. At the end, everyone agreed to make an effort to save up money using the social structure of money recollection that already exists in the town. These families agreed to make two deposits every year to purchase the candela starting in July of 2015. After we made that arrangement I told them that I would use the remaining funds of the projects to fund the replacements for the school filters for 5 years and everyone's filters for one more year. The president of the community will be responsible for contacting the organization every year to make a single-order and

purchase everyone's filter replacement at the same time; likewise, the organization knows that it has to deliver the filter replacements in July every year. I managed to purchase filters that are locally distributed in Guatemala by other organizations. So, if for any reason, Soluciones Comunitarias stops working, the families will have access to other suppliers to replace the filters in coming years.

Fortunately, I helped one of the Senior Consultants, working for Soluciones Comunitarias to replicate the model using other funding in a different region of the country for the department of Quetzaltenango. The model is being used to provide water to 100 families using the school as the main contact for the organization and the responsible entity to collect the monthly payments for the filter. After the one month evaluation part in August, I found out that 100% of the families were happy and using their filters.

## **Section II**

I believe peace is the state in which a person can live without fears. The inhabitants of el Coyal were always worried about "el mal de mayo" (May's disease) which always occurred at the beginning of the raining season in May. During the raining season most people got diarrhea and some kids were hospitalized due to waterborne-illnesses and natural pollution of their water. So far, there has not been a single case of mal de mayo in the community which was one of the key factors that incentivized a lot of families to support the project for the future. The inhabitants of El Coyal are no longer fearful about their water and can enjoy a privilege that many of us take for granted.

The community realized that they can change the state in which they live. Although, I helped them at the beginning, it was because they recognized the need for potable water that the project was successful. They realized that they no longer have to worry about their water and in the same way they could do with other services that they lack. I hope in the long run, they can undertake new projects to address the existing community needs such as lack of access to health services and secondary education while reducing malnutrition in the local population.

The project changed me a lot. There was a huge connection between me and my family and the community. Although my dad has already retired, he was my main assistant during the project. Unfortunately, he was suffering from a bad heart condition. After the project, he got a pacemaker implanted. During all this time, we got several calls from the community members indicating that they were setting up community prayer sessions for my dad. My father told me that he was thankful for giving him a meaningful purpose to his time and energy. I agreed with him. I enjoyed every day that I shared and worked with the community members. Taking leadership of this project helped me to grow as a person and realize that I need to work collaboratively to actually create changes in my community. I also developed a new perception of what giving means. Although many of these families were very impoverished, they were always pleased to invite us for a meal or give us a present such as a chicken, eggs, milk or grains despite their scarcity. They showed me that one can be happy and kind under many conditions, including poverty.

"It is a lot of us that take for granted potable water; and unfortunately, we live in a world where clean water is not a right but a privilege."

-Jorge Clemente de León Miranda



The first meeting with the executive board (COCODE) El Coyol School, Jutiapa, Guatemala

Children participating in a workshop entitled: "What does peace mean to you?"



Families of El Coyol pose for group photo with their new water filters.

