

2009 WEFTA Site Visits to El Salvador and Honduras

October 8 - 15, 2009

Jason Gehrig



Overall Itinerary and Logistics

Thursday 10/8: 6:15 pm arrived to San Salvador, direct from DFW on Taca

I was picked up by Johanna Butter de Barillas and Federico Barillas, who kindly offered to host me in their home on the outskirts of San Salvador. Wonderfully hospitable folks who are among Salvador's business elite and at the same time in solidarity with the members of the impoverished community of San Juan II adjacent to their recently acquired coffee plantation in the Department of Usulután.

Friday 10/9 & Saturday 10/10: Visit San Juan II

Johanna and Federico drove me to the community of San Juan II (about a 2 hour trip from San Salvador), which literally sits on the back side of a dormant volcano in a coffee-growing region of Salvador. Looking north, one can see the mountains at the Honduran border; looking south, one can see the Jalisco Bay and Pacific Ocean. In any direction, one sees more volcanos!



Johanna & Federico

Stayed the night with Don Roberto Arevalo and Doña Margarita Eugenia Ramirez – elders and leaders of San Juan II. Again, incredible hospitality from this humble family – red beans, tortillas and other culinary treats from Doña Margarita topped off with home-grown coffee. Before each meal, she sang the following prayer:

Bendice este pan Señor.
 Bendice a aquello que no tiene que comer.
 Acércate a nosotros.
 Bendice nuestra mesa y
 Enséñanos a compartir tu pan.
 Amen

Bless this bread Lord.
 Bless those who do not have to eat.
 Be close to us.
 Bless our table and
 Teach us to share your bread.
 Amen

That night, a young neighboring family came over with their little ones as Don Roberto hooked up his small black and white TV to the solar-panel charged batteries for a telenovela. The next day Johanna and Federico picked me up and brought me back to their home in San Salvador. We shared an evening meal of pupusas and tropical fruit.



Roberto & Margarita

Sunday 10/11: Caught the 5:30 am bus to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, arriving to Tegucigalpa a little after noon. Besides graffiti here and there denouncing the “golpistas,” little sign of the current political turmoil evident on the streets of Tegucigalpa, and even less so in the rural areas. Braulio Medina of Save the Children Honduras picked me up and brought me on the 4 hour trip to La Esperanza/Intibucá. I quickly began to realize that this was the same area I had visited last summer with CRS during the research for their recent publication *Water and Conflict: Incorporating Peacebuilding into Water Development*, which included a case study on the effective water governance model being implemented in Jesús de Otoro, the municipality before La Esperanza.

Monday 10/12 & Tuesday 10/13: Stayed three nights at Hotel La Esperanza. Each day went out with Save the Children staff to visit communities that benefited from WEFTA’s past support. The first day with Fernando Valle, Director of Save the Children Intibucá and the second day with Carlos, a young civil engineer. The communities visited were the following:



Fernando Valle

Monday 10/12 am: Visit to the communities of Las Aradas, Copantillo and Plan in the Municipal jurisdiction of Masaguara.

Monday 10/12 pm: Visit to the communities of Cofradia and Los Mangos in the Municipal jurisdiction of Yamaranguila.

Tuesday 10/13 am-pm: Meeting at Save the Children office in Intibucá, Visit to the communities of Lajas and Yamaranguila Centro

Throughout these two days of visits, we were accompanied by the President of the Intibucá Regional Council of Rural Water Administrators, José Hilario Osorio Giron.



José Hilario Osorio Giron

Wednesday 10/14: Braulio, with Save the Children, picked me up and drove me back to Tegucigalpa, arriving to their national office around mid-day. Talked with Braulio about future possibilities of a more direct route from Intibucá, Honduras to San Salvador. For the adventurous, Spanish-speaking spirit, it could be done. Otherwise enjoy the day-long ride through the beautiful Honduran and Salvadoran countryside, heading east to Tegucigalpa and then back west to San Salvador.

Had a very pleasant visit with the national director, Mariano Planells, who introduced me to the staff – many of whom sent their greetings to WEFTA volunteer Andrew Robertson who has a long trajectory of providing engineering support in Honduras. Mariano dropped me off at the bus stop, where I caught the 2:30 bus arriving to San Salvador at 9:00 pm, where Federico and Johanna received me to bring me to their home.



Mariano Planells

Tuesday 10/15: Took a 30 minute taxi to the international airport, catching my 9:30 am flight back to DFW.

Project specific details follow.

San Juan II, Department of Usulután, El Salvador



Contacts:

Johanna Butter de Barillas and Federico Barillas (owners of a nearby coffee plantation committed to helping their neighbors)

johabbarillas@gmail.com, federico@intercorp.com.sv

J cell: (503) 7768-5252, F cell: 7768-1448, home 2283-8963

Roberto Arevalo (respected elder of the community), 011-503-7555-5530

Roberto Ramirez Corbera (president of San Juan II directiva), 7917-3765

Francisco Machado (Alegria Municipal Council member representing San Juan II) and

Rene Sanchez Funes (Mayor of Alegria) alcalde@alegria.gob.sv, www.alegria.gob.sv,
(tel) 2668-5606, (fax) 2628-1143

Location: Department of Usulután, southeast of capital San Salvador

The following letter from Johanna Butter inviting WEFTA to visit San Juan II explains well the difficult water scarcity situation there:

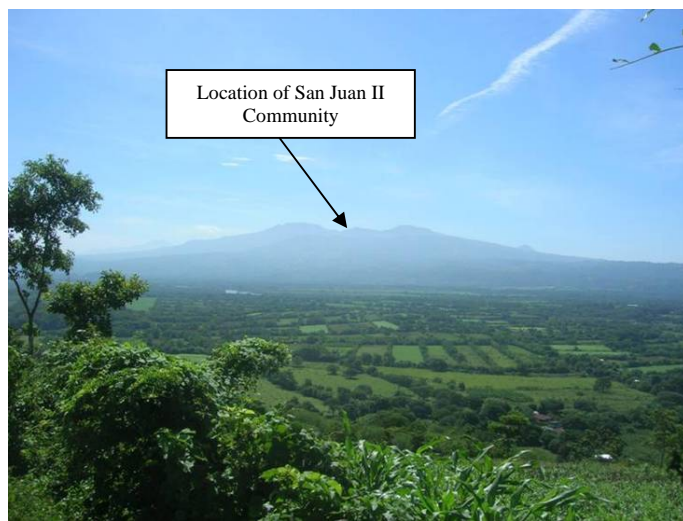
“My name is Johanna Butter de Barillas, my family owns an small coffee plantation up in the mountains of the state of Usulután, located on the east part of El Salvador, next to it, there is a community " San Juan 2" of about 80 families who lack electricity, water... The nearest towns are Berlin and Alegría. There is no paved road that leads to the community, the only access road is a dirt one in very poor condition, therefore there is no public transportation; they have to walk 4 miles to get to the nearest town. The only water available within a 4 mile range, is from a couple of water holes that are located inside [and adjacent to] our property, about 1 mile from the main dirt road... We think that the water could be transported through a pipeline to the main dirt road and from there take it to their homes, by gravity. But due to lack of money on our side, we have not been able to fulfill our dream to supply water to the people in the small village of San Juan 2... That is why we are asking for your help.”



Children of San Juan II fetching water from the spring

30 families from San Juan II are currently benefiting from a roof-top rain harvesting project. However, in addition to over half of the community not being included in this initial phase, the ongoing water supply problem they face is the extended dry season, lasting from November through April/May. The community members were very excited about the possibility of participating in a spring-fed, gravity water system. They saw this as complementing their rain-harvesting efforts, allowing for them to conserve rain water on-site while taking from the two proposed spring sources which are known to produce through the dry season up to a month or so before the end (March or so), at which time the families' stored rain water could be used.

The community leaders called for a general meeting, during which time the participating families unanimously voiced their support for the project, committing themselves to provide any manual labor required as their contribution to the project. Formal project request letters stating such were prepared and sent to WEFTA. A member of the local municipal council of Alegría, under whose municipal jurisdiction San Juan II falls, was present and quite supportive as well.



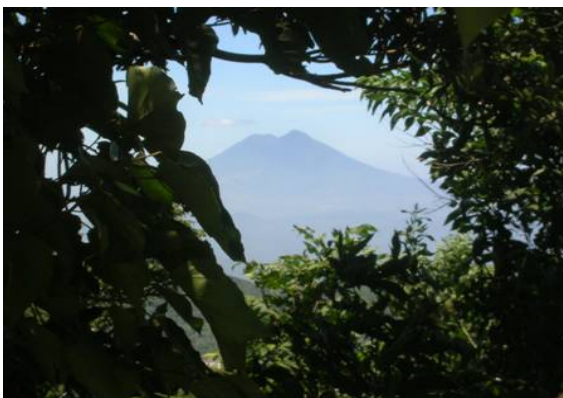
Two springs exist which could supply the community, the upper one “pozo” being located on the property of Delia Alvarenga. The lower spring “mentirosa” is located on the property of Johanna and Federico. The thinking is that the upper spring could serve the majority of homes in the upper half of the community; the lower spring serving the lower half. Johanna has been in contact with Sra. Alvarenga regarding sharing the water with the community, and will continue to do so. Example spring water use and pipeline easement agreements were sent to Johanna by WEFTA following the trip.



Community meeting in San Juan II welcoming possibility of future WEFTA collaboration for a spring-fed, gravity water system.

These agreements between the owners of the springs and the community, granting the community members permission to have access to the water for their community drinking water system as well as easement agreements granting permission for the running of the pipeline across the owners' properties are the critical path issues at this time that will make or break the project. If these agreements can be achieved, the design can and should proceed.

Don Roberto has made contact with the local office of Caritas in Santiago de Maria which has experience working in the community (caserio) of San Juan II. According to Roberto, they have agreed to participate in the project through performing a topographic survey and project design and budget proposal and will be in contact in the near future. At this point, the community envisions 15 or so “public” tapstands located along the roads through the community, strategically located near the entrance of homes or clusters of homes in order for the local residents to keep an eye on them.



Francisco Machado, council member of Alegría, stressed the importance of coordination with the local municipality. While not setting local government participation in the project as a make or break condition for WEFTA funding, I did explain how that was quite frequently the case in WEFTA supported projects for example in Bolivia and that we’d welcome a similar kind of support with this project. My sense is that if/when we get the spring agreements in place, we should proceed with

making contact with the municipality, either via Johanna and Federico, or directly through the municipal contact info above.

Additional community facts: Approximately 70-80 families in the community; elementary school (K-6th) with 80 children and 2 teachers; electricity is beginning to be extended to the community...

Other insights picked up over red beans and tortillas: It appears that some division exists in the community due to political party affiliations (polarization of Salvadoran society exists just as in the US and elsewhere; only they're still recovering from a recent civil war). The community directiva, which used to be selected by the community members themselves, is now appointed by the local municipality officials which is now held by a different political party than in the past. In talking with community members, they came to understand that in order for WEFTA to possibly participate in this project, all sectors of the community would need to be involved. I was quite happy to see Don Roberto (the elder, and former directiva president) contact the younger Roberto (current directiva president), during which time both agreed to call a community-wide meeting which ended up being very fruitful. Perhaps a small step toward beginning to overcome past divisions – water development can have that effect if done well; if not, it can sew seeds of resentment and discontent (e.g. when 30 families out of 70 or so receive rain harvesting tanks while the others are left out dry).



Local child at "Pozo" Spring above San Juan II community.

Also an interesting component of the above-mentioned rain harvesting project was the distribution of domestic filters – basically 5 gallon plastic buckets with an interior clay pot filter. These units were said to cost about \$10 per set, with filtration rates of 1 to 2 liters per hour resulting in potable water quality.

In summary, I think this project has a lot of potential for WEFTA to collaborate with the community members of San Juan II in helping secure access to safe water close to their homes. There is significant need, and based on prior experience with other WEFTA funded projects in other countries, the extent of this spring-fed, gravity water system is well within the size of projects completed/funded to date.



Fuller Center for Housing in San Luis Talpa, El Salvador

Contact: Micah Whitt & Michael Bonderer, 816-286-1380, whittms@gmail.com

Location: Departamento de La Paz, about 15 minutes from Salvador airport

Spoke with Micah prior to traveling to Salvador and together agreed that due to limited time and relative lack of need in comparison to other communities, that I would not be able to make it to their community. The door being open for future visits from WEFTA volunteers.

Based on our phone conversation, it appears that essentially they are a housing development with 60 lots, about 20 of which already have homes built on them. A couple wells on-site have been dug with water piped to each home. On the wastewater side, each pair of adjacent homes shares a septic tank with an absorption field. The water supply wells, about 6 meters deep, are approximately 100 meters from the nearest septic tanks. It appears the families there are fine with the way things are, and have not formed a water committee. Micah asked if we could look into disinfection/filtration alternatives to the current chlorination being employed. Other than that, it sounds like they are in fairly good shape, especially relative to so many other communities that have none of the above.

Save the Children Honduras, Intibucá Region (Region 2) & Consejo Regional de las Juntas Administradoras de Agua – Departamento de Intibucá,



with Save the Children:

Fernando Valle (regional director), Cel. (504) 99384453, schond02@yahoo.com
Mariano Planells (national director), marianoplanells@savethechildrenhonduras.hn
Braulio Medina (driver), (504) 95677830

with Consejo Regional de las Juntas Administradoras de Agua, Dept. de Intibucá:

José Hilario Osorio Giron, President – 9926’3590

with Asociación de Juntas de Agua y Saneamiento del Municipio de Yamaranguila (AJASMY):

Santos Higinio Gomez, President – 98476409

The following communities were visited while in Intibucá with Save the Children staff and with Hilario (president of the Regional Council (unpaid position, yet excellent dedication and desire to improve functioning of others’ drinking water committees as well)) both days and with Santos (president of AJASMY, a better funded organization with outside assistance but appears to be a less experienced/organized organization) the second day. The intention of the visits was two-fold:

1. to see how the recent \$10,000 WEFTA donation was put to work, and
2. to identify with the community members any possible future projects WEFTA may be able to help support

Las Aradas (Municipality of Masaguara)

Not a recipient of recent \$10k WEFTA donation

Constructed a drinking water committee meeting room / materials storage facility with their own funds.

Overall in good shape, next goal is to purchase property above spring to ensure quantity and quality of source water.

Dedicated leader of Regional Council, José Hilario, from the community of Las Aradas – members of council work pro-bono, with only expenses covered.



Copantillo (Municipality of Masaguara)

Received a portion of the recent \$10k WEFTA donation

Community of approximately 70 families. Used WEFTA funds as catalyst for additional funding (primarily their own) to construct a second tank (closest one in picture to the right) as well as to install a security fence around their storage tanks (concrete posts with chain-linked fencing). According to community leaders, Copantillo received approximately 16,000 lempiras (18.8 lempiras to the dollar at the time), or \$850, in construction materials from WEFTA which was then matched by their own local contributions of approximately 80,000 lempiras (\$4,255) to make the above-noted improvements. I was very impressed with this community's initiative, and with this approach of local communities using external funding less as a dependency-creating handout, and more as a strategic leverage to motivate their own benefiting families to pony up to expand their own water infrastructure. However the means – recently improved coffee prices, “remesas,” funds from family who migrated overseas, access to credit, local govt. funds – I really don't know, but there was a significant local contribution that serves as a good model for other communities working with WEFTA in the future. Also, each month, water users pay approximately \$1 (20 lempiras) for system O&M.



Future improvements: They have some stretches of their 26-year old PVC piping system that are prone to failures that they want to begin to replace; and a meeting room/office/storage facility for their drinking water committee “*junta de agua.*”

Plan de Masaguara

Received a portion of the recent \$10k WEFTA donation



This was another WEFTA success story of effective partnering of external funding with local initiative. According to Plan Masaguara community leaders, they received 14,000 lempiras in WEFTA funding (approximately \$745) which was matched by twice that amount from the local community, not including the value of their labor (which they figure a typical construction worker's salary is 100 lempiras/day). Here the community, with approximately 56 families connected to the system, decided to secure their tank facility with a new concrete post/chain-linked fence, as it lies in a remote location adjacent to the main road. The other use of funds was certainly less mainstream, extending their system with approximately 360 meters of ½" PVC piping to the public cemetery to meet the needs of properly caring for their deceased loved ones. (see above photos)

Future desired improvements include having a drinking water committee facility with a storage room attached. Also, this community faces the not uncommon problem of having a significant number of families left unconnected to the water system. As frequently occurs, for whatever reason at the original time of construction, perhaps due to lack of confidence that the system would be installed at all or that it would function properly, or perhaps due to a lack of resources or even interest, many families choose not to participate in the significant community sacrifice of building the original water system. Then once the water arrives to their neighbors' homes, they have a change of heart. Stiff entrance fees (reflecting the equivalent value of the original participant's labor) often await them. This community has approximately 30 families that do not have access to water. We spent some time discussing possible solutions to the problem. Apart from this issue, the community in recent times did buy an additional spring at a higher elevation to augment their supply.

Cofradia (Municipality of Yamaranguila)

Received a portion of the recent \$10k WEFTA donation

This community of 63 families is benefiting from WEFTA funding in order to secure their existing network of above-ground galvanized piping distribution network (due to rock) with concrete supports/anchors. They also will be replacing a number of leaking valves. The community has a 12 lempira/month water usage fee to cover O&M of the system and has built themselves a drinking water committee meeting room/storage facility. Their local contribution to the WEFTA funded improvements is in-kind, providing manual labor and local construction materials as well as covering the cost of a builder.

Their future improvements include making repairs to their storage tank, more concrete pipe supports/anchors at various points in the distribution system, repairs to a break-pressure tank and securing their tank and spring source with a chain-linked fence.



Los Mangos (Municipality of Yamaranguila)

Received a portion of the recent \$10k WEFTA donation

Los Mangos, according to community leaders, received 14,500 lempiras (\$770) from WEFTA, which was used to construct 75 concrete valve boxes (see adjacent photo) for domestic connections, concrete pipe supports/anchors and improvements to a break pressure tank. Due to some apparent miscommunication, or perhaps due to the community holding out for a donation of 75 ½” valves to go along with their new valve boxes (apparently some residences have old valves on their service lines, others will need to purchase their own for a few bucks each), the valve boxes have yet to be installed. This issue was clarified, and the drinking water system operator “fontanero” will begin installing the valve boxes in the near future.



Local Peer Formation and Accountability

Given the evident lack of experience held by this community’s water directiva relative to other ones already visited, it was quite uplifting to see the way Hilario, president of the regional water conference, advised the community leaders on organizational skills as well as more technical operations. Such regional associations of community drinking water systems have great potential – in this case of Intibucá actually being realized – for knowledge and best practices sharing, not to mention promoting greater accountability. One of the key services they provide to the community drinking water committees is a review of the financial statements with each community’s change in drinking water committee leadership

(approximately every 2 years). This kind of independent review keeps the juntas de agua operating in a transparent manner, helping avoid situations of scandal that so often can kill community organizations once confidence is lost.

As both Hilario of the regional council and Fernando of Save the Children explained, “We can focus on the ‘finca fisica’ physical resources all we want, but if we don’t also focus on the ‘finca humana’ human resources, we will fail to meet our goals.”

Lajas (Municipality of Yamaranguila)

Not a recipient of recent \$10k WEFTA donation

This was a beautiful drive out to a beautiful community that took most of the second day to and from but which I never completely understood why we visited. Had some wonderful freshly-picked fruit drinks and some great conversations with an informed elderly woman concerned about the recent Honduran water law’s opening up of privatization of water services (really more of an urban water services issue that I saw first hand with the failed attempts in Bolivia in both Cochabamba and La Paz). Had a great time with the school children and again, an opportunity for peer to peer sharing during the community meeting. It was my understanding that Andrew R. might have supported the community in some form in the past with engineering assistance, as were many other NGOs’ support mentioned.



Yamaranguila Centro

Not a recipient of recent \$10k WEFTA donation



This was a great short visit to see the lasting impact of WEFTA member Andrew Robertson's engineering, relationship building and project implementation in the water well pumping and storage tank operations for Yamaranguila Centro.

The local water operator, Sebastian Rodriguez Bejarano, has served the community for 11 years. He noted the well has operated continuously for five years without any problems. He also handles chlorine applications, and has on occasion taught fontaneros (operators) of the smaller villages in the surrounding areas how to do so as well. One problem he noted for the smaller villages, is that as their operator positions are often unpaid and rotate every couple years, there is a loss of technical know-how that at times negatively impacts operations. A tremendous resource, and very appreciative to Andrew (as were many folks I encountered during my short time in Honduras) for all the help over the years.

Addition to Revolving Chlorine Bank

The regional council has in place a means for purchasing chlorine in bulk and making it available for sale to the various community drinking water committees. This was currently being stored at the Save the Children office, for which some WEFTA funding was used to build up the chlorine capital.



Following our two days of community visits, which were graciously arranged by the Save the Children staff on very short notice, I gathered together the following pros and concerns (personal opinion) of the most recent WEFTA participation (\$10,000) in the Intibucá region of Honduras :

Pros

- The level of organization of the drinking water committees, both at community and regional levels, is exceptional, and can serve as a tremendous example for other local partners of WEFTA in other countries.
- It is my understanding that Intibucá is one of the poorer regions of an already relatively poor country of Honduras.
- A very good relationship established between WEFTA member Andrew Robertson and local communities and partnering NGOs in the area.
- Local Administrator of Funds, Save the Children Honduras, led by a highly competent and enthusiastic director Fernando Valle in the Intibucá region, in his own words, “served as a facilitator of WEFTA funds to respond to the needs identified by the regional drinking water committees council itself.” Save the Children employed transparent practices in making the corresponding construction materials purchase and distribution to the dozen or so benefiting communities, reflected in the “Informe Financiero” report made to WEFTA.
- Excellent initiative-taking by some of the local drinking water committees in using WEFTA funds as a catalyst for local efforts to gather other and their own funds to make needed improvement/expansions.
- The use of WEFTA funds for repairs and expansions of existing water systems is a support provided to existing drinking water committees that many times is neglected by NGOs – improvements to existing water systems that are identified by the community members themselves.



Concerns

- Local Administrator of Funds, Save the Children, did not appear to provide much construction supervision/guidance regarding how the construction materials were actually to be used. While some communities, like Copantillo and El Plan, successfully implemented their projects – often with WEFTA support matched by much larger local contributions, other communities’ progress was much more limited. This was the case for example, in Los Mangos, where WEFTA funds were used to construct 75 concrete valve boxes, but none were yet installed.

- Lack of clarity on behalf of local NGO administering the funds (Save the Children) regarding how/where most recent WEFTA funds were distributed was evident as entire second day of my two-day visit to the area did not involve one visit to a community benefiting from the most recent \$10k WEFTA donation (although yes, communities benefiting from prior supports by Andrew).
- Moreover, the stated purpose for each community improvement noted in the financial report often did not match that actually carried out in the field, again probably due to a lack of time/resources for Save the Children to visit the various communities (I understand about 12) that benefited from recent WEFTA funding.
- There is a relatively significant presence of international NGOs in the area. In fact, one of the objectives for the AJASMY council of juntas de agua in Yamaranguila is to “coordinate the support from external cooperation” to avoid NGOs from tripping over each other in their efforts to do good.
- While allowing the regional council to determine how to use WEFTA funding, it became clear that active drinking water committees (approximately a dozen) were awarded a piece of the pie. Not entirely bad, but some communities already had most of their principal water and sanitation needs met. For example, a frequent request being made for potential future funding by WEFTA was to use it for constructing drinking water committee meeting halls (a request basically denied, see more on priorities below).



Agreed Actions to be Taken:

While meeting at the Save the Children regional office in Intibucá, Fernando Valle and Hilario agreed to the following:

1) In early November, the Intibucá Regional Council of Drinking Water Committees will be meeting. They have agreed to provide to WEFTA, via Save the Children, the following update on how the \$10,000 WEFTA funding was utilized by the end of November:

- Community Name
- Project Description
- # of Benefiting Persons/Families
- Status of Project (completed or in progress)
- Other Contributions to the Project (other funding, local in-kind or in cash, etc.)

2) At the same meeting, the council will identify proposed projects for WEFTA to consider funding in the coming year, again with Save the Children support. These are to include:

- Community Name
- Project Description & Intended Purpose
- Municipal Jurisdiction
- # of Benefiting Persons/Families
- Total Project Budget
- Other Expected Contributions to the Project (other funding, local in-kind or in cash, etc.)

3) Agreed that priority would be in order of (from highest to lowest):

1. New drinking water and/or sanitation projects
2. Repairs/improvements and expansions of existing water system infrastructure
3. Construction of meeting halls for drinking water committees (I took the liberty to make it known that this would not be an option for WEFTA funding at this time)
4. Purchases of property above springs to protect water quality (not an option for WEFTA funding at this time)

Looking to the Future

It was communicated that while WEFTA would be interested in reviewing proposals for new projects, additional funding was not guaranteed. However, communities that were organized and ready to contribute significant local resources (in-kind or in funds) toward priority water and sanitation projects would be appealing for WEFTA to consider supporting.

Should WEFTA fund future projects in the area, it will be important that arrangements/expectations be made clear with local implementing organizations (e.g. Save the Children Honduras) of the need for more frequent project supervision. This may involve including some project funds from WEFTA designated for that purpose, or preferably, be provided by the local organization from its own resources as their contribution “contraparte” toward the project.



Another contact in the La Esperanza area that I did not follow up with on this trip is Enrique Lozano. Apparently an expansion of the La Esperanza system in the neighborhood of Maniadero is in the works. Andrew Robertson has been helping prepare plans and hydraulic calculations. I will send the WEFTA project questionnaire to Enrique, asking him to follow up with Andrew and Lou.

Misc. Suggestions

While introducing WEFTA to various groups, I thought it would be quite helpful to have a brief write-up in Spanish explaining the purpose of the organization, contact information, project proposal formats, etc. Perhaps we could make these documents available in Spanish as well on the WEFTA.net website for our Spanish-speaking local partners overseas.