

Brief Honduras Report Jan-Feb 2022

Doug Stockman

I took a working “vacation” recently and visited our Project Site in San Jose Honduras. I had found a way to ship solar system equipment from the US to Honduras for free. It was scheduled to arrive in Honduras 2 days before I arrived. The hope was to transport the equipment from the airport, where the supplies landed, to San Jose. Unfortunately, at the last minute, the shipment was delayed 2 weeks. Fortunately, there was still much for me to do in San Jose.

General Comments

I arrived on a Friday afternoon in San Pedro Sula. Travel was uneventful. Honduran interpreters Paulet and Melissa assisted me. Melissa’s 9 year old daughter April has been wanting to join a brigade for years. She got to participate in this trip. In addition to interpreting, the 2 ladies took over all cooking and cleaning duties. I kept trying to do dishes but was beaten into submission. I started calling this my “all-inclusive” resort vacation. The weather was spectacular! Overnight temps were 61-70 degrees. Daily highs 81-85. This is the dry season so humidity was very low. The brilliant blue skies combined with the breathtaking mountain views forced me to stop repeatedly so I could capture the moments in my mind’s eye. The downside of being the dry season was the paucity of water. Being careful, 4 people were able to live on about 200 gallons of water for 8 days. The average American consumes more than 100 gallons a day. I returned to the US the following Saturday. Yes, I brought more coffee back (52 lbs).



Breathtaking views while hiking to a Solar System site inspection

Standing Projects and their Status

The following projects were completed since we left in early November

- Barrels and gutters: 20 distributed to people in the village of Salitre.
- Pilas: 29 built, spread out over all the communities we work with.
- Latrines: 8
- Cook stoves (fogons): 10
- Ceramic water filters: 8 distributed.

While there we purchased enough materials to build 15 more pilas, 10 more latrines, and 10 more cook stoves. I estimate we have about 40 water filters left from the 200 filters we purchased about one year ago. New supplies cost about \$3,000 and took three trips for the transport truck to get everything to San Jose from Esperanza. I also identified a person to do home visits to ensure all projects are being built to our specifications. Given the mountainous terrain and miles of walking required to visit these homes, this is no small feat.

Scholarship Program

I carried a large amount of cash down to pay for the scholarship students’ new school year. Hopefully the new school year, which starts now, will be held at least in part, in person. The lead teacher-administrator Roney, and Paulet, our interpreter, did most of the work.



Disbursing scholarship money

This is the first time that students from Salitre were able to get scholarships. The Scholar Program is fully funded by the First Unitarian Church of Rochester.

Coffee Farmers

I met separately with the two coffee farmers we have been working with. Coffee harvesting is from November until February. It sounds like it was a reasonable harvest, although the fungal coffee plant disease “roya” is still killing many trees. I paid the farmers for last year’s sales. Given they make about \$10/lb from our sales, compared to about \$2/lb from selling locally, they are very happy with the current process. Each farmer gave me more coffee to sell and will save more for our May brigade. They re-educated me on the process they use to turn the raw coffee fruit into beans ready for roasting. They use a modified “Despolvorear” process. I can describe the process in more detail for those who are interested. I also identified another area coffee farmer who we hopefully can get coffee from in May.

Carpenter

The carpenter we worked closely with in the past died last year from Covid. We met with his nephew, who is now running the carpenter shop, and established a working partnership. He will help us build battery boxes for the solar project.

Doug’s Point “Crazy” Restaurant Idea

There are no jobs in the area and no industry. Poverty is pervasive. Combating the area’s poverty requires bringing money into the area from outside the area. The one thing San Jose has going for it are the beautiful views. An idea we have considered is creating a restaurant using a profit-sharing approach that uses the beautiful views from Doug’s Point as the location for a restaurant. It has taken multiple trips and required interviewing many people, but the owner of Doug’s Point was finally identified. We met with the owner and drove him out to Doug’s Point to verify we were talking about the same piece of land. What was proposed to the



100 degree view of the 270 degree View from Doug's Point

land owner is that he lease the land for \$100/year to develop a lookout area for people to enjoy the beautiful views. Doug’s Point is on the main road that connects the rest of the country to the Southwest areas of Honduras. Starting simply, we would put safety railings in, remove obstructing brush, and offer coffee and soft drinks for sale. People running the coffee shop would all be from the San Jose area. Coffee and local produce for the coffee shop would be purchased from area farms. Everyone involved would participate in a profit-sharing plan. This means that if sales generate revenue beyond expenses, everyone involved would get a percentage of the profit. If the land owner agrees, we hope to start this experiment in a small and slowly growing manner.

Solar Systems for Isolated Homes

The majority of homes in the San Jose area do not have access to electricity. This means most people are in the dark from about 6 pm – 6 am every night. Cooking is often done in the dark. School children must attempt to do homework by candle light, when they have them. People who were away from the home during daylight must wait until the following day to complete daily chores because of lack of light. Additionally, people have no way to charge their \$30 cell phones. About 5 years ago a group came through the area and installed small solar systems in a limited number of homes. Hundreds of people remain living in the dark every night. We are trying a small pilot project with six homes to install a very small solar system that provides four lights and the ability to charge cell phones. We created an educational solar system curriculum, tested it with a few local people, then met with 6 people interested in the pilot. When people are educated about operating a solar system they are happier and the system lasts longer. If this pilot goes well, we hope to expand this opportunity to interested people in the area.



Solar system installed 5 years ago by another group at an isolated home

Talk about Politics!

In November, a new president was elected in Honduras. For the past 12 years the Blue (conservative) party was in power. Now the Red (liberal) party holds the Honduran presidency. I definitely do not understand their political system. It appears that the party in power at the national level often decides who governs at regional and local levels. Across Honduras there is a power struggle going on. The Blue (conservative) party is trying to remain in power in states and towns. The Red (liberal) party is trying to take control of regional and local governments. This power struggle is playing out in San Jose Centro and the county seat. Both parties had separate meetings at the same time while I was there. I was invited to attend. I met for over 2 hours with the Red (liberal) party. They feel over the past 12 years to have been marginalized by the Blue party. They believe the Blue party leadership has not been transparent and may have been stealing money. The only example they offered was the \$1/year we pay to lease the land where the volunteer house resides (about \$14 total).



Potential future solar system install site

During the two hours we were in front of this group of about 40-50 people we clarified the history of our partnership, the legal agreements we have with the local government, and our desire to work with all people who can work honestly with us. Our goal remains to help the people of the area be the healthiest they can be. We discussed that we, as outsiders, cannot know with whom to communicate. We will see the identified leaders and interface with them. We agreed that communication must be transparent and all people in the area should receive the same information. However, the people of San Jose must provide us with reliable contacts that will disseminate information to all interested people in the communities we work with. Additionally, we reviewed our current projects and possible future projects. The meeting participants appreciated the open communication. Hopefully our group can be a

bridge to help these two groups communicate better in the future. It is quite clear the two groups do not trust each other and this breakdown in communication is hurting people.

I have brought this political story up to help others understand that whenever working with groups there is so much going on behind the scenes that we, as outsiders, may be unaware of. These hidden agendas by others must be addressed and taken into consideration when creating effective interventions. Building buildings or other physical structures is easy. Actually getting the interventions to meet the needs of the people long term is much more complicated.



Red party meeting

Summary

I have offered just a small slice of all that I got accomplished while there. Given I was not running a brigade with many Americans I had the time to meet with many local people and visit homes and other villages I don't normally have the time for. It was a very successful 6 days in San Jose. We as a group continue to improve the lives of thousands through this long term collaborative project. Thank you so much for your continued support!

Doug

Update on Project Status (updated 02/03/2022)

Project	Completed	Project	Completed
Cook stoves	393	Scholarships	100+ students, 45 current scholars
Filters	498	Fluoride varnish	We didn't track this visit
Latrines	181	Fish farms	6
Pilas	195	Piped water systems	5 communities
Heirloom seeds	>18,000 given		