

From our water correspondent

The winner of our competition for the new water correspondent is Kate Fogelberg, Water For People-Peru (kfogelberg@waterfor-people.org). Congratulations, Kate!

A local leader asks, 'when will you start working here so we all have water?'

The projector won't work. I knew this might happen, and had done a test run the day before, but now, with 50 local government representatives, community leaders, and volunteers from Water For People's World Water Corps® program eager to get going, nothing. We are gathered in the second floor of the municipality to begin training for a two-week baseline and mapping exercise in Northern Peru, and the projector is not going to keep us from what we've set out to do. Heavy rains, flat tyres, long lunches, and nights spent in rural health posts will turn out to complicate it, as we will find out, but first things first.

The IT person in the municipality doesn't speak English and while I speak Spanish, I don't speak techie computer talk, so after an early snack while we try to fix things, we revert to paper copies of the surveys and tediously go through each question. 'What if the water system has *polytubo* pipes: is that improved?' asks one of our local counterparts. 'How should we mark the old FONCODES latrines on the worksheet?'

wonders Leyla from the health department. 'Half of my community has a water system and the other half doesn't', a local leader asks, 'when will you start working here so we all have water?'

This is precisely the first step Water For People takes before beginning fieldwork around the world. We seek to understand the baseline water, sanitation and hygiene conditions in each municipality or district where we work. Once projectors work, or paper surveys jump in at the last minute, a team of Water For People staff, local governmental and non-governmental partners, and World Water Corps® volunteers visit every community within a political division to document the current state of water and sanitation conditions. This data is priceless, as it serves as a benchmark from which to measure progress, provides key planning information and gives us an overview of the challenges within a region.

Testing FLOW (Field Level Operations Watch) in Peru began with the 'classroom' training before heading out to the field together to complete several surveys in an effort to standardize data collection. The first community was so close to the main town where we had done training that we could walk there. It's amazing

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© Practical Action Publishing, 2011, www.practicalactionpublishing.org
doi: 10.3362/1756-3488.2011.017, ISSN: 0262-8104 (print) 1756-3488 (online)

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how quickly the environment changes: fields of corn replace the internet kiosks and the sounds are donkeys, not horns. Turning right out of town, and walking down a steep hill, we arrive at the community of La Banda.

The 200-litre barrels outside each home are the first indicator that this community has no drinking water system. Celso Bautista explains that the irrigation channel that flows through their community two days a week is where they get water. Everybody stores the water in drums; some are covered, some are not; sometimes they run out of water and have to get a neighbour to share their saved water until the next time the irrigation water flows. More than one household refers to the water as 'chocolate' in the rainy season, since the high levels of turbidity turn the water the colour of a cup of hot chocolate.

Some people have the well-recognized FONCODES latrines. Following the cholera outbreak in Peru in 1991, the central government embarked on a massive latrinization campaign, and throughout the countryside in Peru, you will see the (theoretically) ventilated improved latrines. Others have none, and motivations and barriers for acquiring toilets range from household to household. Monica Narva shudders as she talks about her latrine in the rainy season; Luis Leon Gonzales had heard of ecological, composting toilets from his cousin and was

interested in building one to take advantage of the fertilizers.

The challenges of unsupported community management were starkly clear in the next community, Casman. The dynamic water committee leader, Jose Antonio Suva, was a mover and a shaker; he had secured private finance for the water system several years ago; springs were protected, pipes buried and water flowed from the taps. A plaque celebrates the inauguration over the one public tap that has not worked for some time now. Jose Antonio had been teaching in another community – a very frequent phenomenon whereby teachers are sent to other schools or communities to teach – when he was involved in a car accident. The result was that he was away from his community for several years, during which the water system stopped functioning. Upon his return, he felt frustrated and responsible that it had fallen into disrepair. There had been no follow-up training or other extremely motivated person who could or wanted to devote their time voluntarily to making sure things worked.

The day has been a long one; from drinking our instant coffee before the sun came up that morning, to walking home as the sun set over the cornfields from day one. But we are one step closer to getting a new country programme going, bumps and all.