

In Search of Community
Colinas de Suiza, Honduras;
Engineers and Circles of Friends

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Identify Stakeholders, evaluate their capacities and needs



2004 – Local Problems Identified:

- Water for 10,000 people, refugees from hurricane Mitch
- Sanitation alternatives
- Finding solutions
 - Reduces living expenses
 - Improves health



Challenges

- Expensive turn-key solution (>\$1.5 million).
- Important for all stakeholders to participate.
- Takes time to develop trust.
- Communication with 10,000 is difficult.
- Successful (expensive) water businesses already exist.
- Project required eight years to complete.
- Resulting lack of interest (on the part of water businesses) or frustration (on the part of the local people) leads to vandalism.

Circles of Friends (Trust)

- Encourage people to form circles of friends to identify a local problem on which they can all work (small business)...*builds confidence*.
- Gradually encourage the circle leaders to meet with other circle leaders to identify community-wide problems...*builds community*.
- Has been shown to be a sustainable model for community development...circles combine to address regional problems.

References:

- Tracy A. Thompson, "Circles of Change," Stanford Social Innovation Review, Fall 2011, 42-47.
- Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2009).
- Munoz, David R., "In Search of Community; Humanitarian Engineers and Circles of Friends", Intl. J. for Service Learning in Engr., Special Ed., pp. 509-524, Fall 2014.
- Video of circle project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4MsNEXN1cw> (22 min.)

External Project Evaluator Comments

(as a result of the water project)

- Family health (especially that of children) has improved.
- Families save more money (current water cost is 1/6 of that before the water project)
- Women spend more time with their children without having to carry water from a distance.
- People now have gardens and raise more of their food.

External Project Evaluator Comments (on Circle Project)

- There is a very high level of participation among village women.
- These circles have persevered with a high level of enthusiasm, unusual for the Honduras poor.
- As of June 2013, 38 circles of trust had been formed. 24 of these have decided to participate in the formation of a local credit union.
- Another positive result was the formation of a dining hall to feed the poorest children.

External Project Evaluator Recommendations

- External support should be based on respect for the past community achievements and should be aimed at strengthening those achievements. Giving help that promotes dependency incites paternalism which truncates the experience of a socially active community.
- In view of the fact that the Colinas de Suiza experience contains innovative elements, it is recommended that you systematize the experience to be replicated in other poor communities throughout Central America where there is a great lack of innovative ideas to decrease poverty.

Remaining Challenges

- With increased water comes mosquitoes that carry dengue and other water borne disease.
- Sanitation beyond pit latrines remains a challenge.
- Local government community development activities are in need of strengthening to allow continuous improvement within the rural/peri-urban communities.