



Public Health Report: Assessing Community Health in
Estero de Plátano, Ecuador
November 2008- January 2009

Written in collaboration with:

La Comunidad de Estero De Plátano

Fundación Yanapuma &

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Introduction:

The purpose of this report is to provide the readers with a comprehensive view of the concerns of the members in the community of Estero de Plátano and to prioritize those concerns identified by the community. Estero de Plátano falls under the Municipio of Muisnie in addition it is located in Area 4 of the Ministry of Salud Publica (MSP), which fall under the responsibility of the MSP in Atacames. It is the intention of the community of Estero de Plátano and the Yanapuma foundation to work in collaboration with the Municipio in Muisnie, the Ministry of Salud Publica located in Atacames and the Peace Corps, to identify solutions to address the issues identified by the community.

October 2008 marked beginning of the community assessment in Estero de Plátano. Conducted under the direction of Marc Julmisse, RN, MPH, Yanapuma Foundation Public Health intern, the community assessment of Estero de Plátano utilized a multifaceted approach in order to minimize missing information. The assessment incorporated observational assessments, key informant interviews from a variety of sources, and focus group discussions, culminating in a formal survey of the entire community in January of 2009.

Methodology:

Observational assessment

Observational assessments were conducted during the months of October 2008 terminating in January 2009. Data collection was accomplished with the assistance of several community members, Yanapuma volunteers, one Peace Corps volunteer and one volunteer from Loma Linda University School of Public Health. The volunteers and community members traveled to various parts of the community, visually observing the area and the living conditions of those living in the center of the community and in the outskirts of the community. The volunteers either verbally recounted their observations or provided written documentation of their observations.

Key informant interviews

Interviews were conducted with eight persons in the community. Many of the points discussed during the interviews echoed issues discussed in other interviews. The Key informant interviews were conducted with members of the

community and with community members that were leaders in various sections of the community in order to provide a more comprehensive view on what resources exist and what resources are lacking in the community.

Focus Groups

Three focus groups meetings were conducted during the month of December addressing a variety of issues. The focus groups targeted issues facing three primary groups in the community Men, Women, and Youth. Each focus group meeting lasted approximately one hour. With the permission of the meeting attendees all meetings were taped to minimize the loss of information.

Many similarities existed in the concerns identified by each group, however with slight differences. During the Men's focus group meeting six issues were highlighted as concerns, the women's focus group also identified six concerns and the youth identified two issues as their concerns. Listed below in no particular order are the issues raised by each of the focus groups:

Tele-Communication	Education
Community organization	Health
Tourism	Medio Ambiente
Access to services	Safety

Survey

The community survey consisted of 74 quantitative questions and two qualitative questions. There are approximately 520 persons in the community of Estero de Plátano and 120 households. Due to the small sized of the community random sampling was not utilized. Each household in the community was surveyed with the exception of homes where after numerous visits no one was home or the person found at home was unable to answer the questions do impairment in mental function, either through a physiological problem or artificially induced. In an effort to reduce non response bias whenever possible community members were responsible for administering the survey. A total of 23 people participated in the survey; fourteen persons from the community, the remaining nine consisted of Yanapuma volunteers, a Peace Corps volunteer,

volunteers in the community conducting environmental research and a volunteer from Loma Linda University School of Public Health.

Results of Community Health Assessment

Access to Services

Education: It is estimated that only 78.2 percent of the community has completed a primary education and less than 11 percent of the community have completed beyond a secondary education. In the focus group discussions and during several key informant interviews concerns centered around education consistently surfaced. The community of Estero de Plátano has one school providing primary education until the seventh grade, for further education students in the community travel as far as Tonchigüe or Esmeraldas. There are approximately 200 children attending the school in the community (Brian Kirkup, 2008).

Many in the community voiced their concern about the possibility of their children continuing their education. During the youth focus group discussion, the youth were asked about some of their preoccupations in the community, several of the youth expressed the need to have computers available in the school, a library where they would have access to more information, un comedor para comer, in addition some expressed their desire to continue their education beyond the seventh grade. Many of the sentiments expressed by the youth in the focus group discussions concerning education were also expressed in the men's and the women's focus group. During both the men's and the women focus group the need for the families in the community to unite and communicate with each other about their concerns was stressed. The need to build an enclosure around the school was presented in several key informant interviews and focus group meeting with both the men and the women.

Health: It is commonly held misconception that the local sub-center de Salud only provides medication for children five and under. Conversations held with the community physician revealed that the Sub-center de Salud has sufficient medications to treat a variety of acute illness in both adults and children, regardless of age; supplies are limited in cases of chronic illnesses. During the men's focus group meeting the men suggested classes in the community on health promotion and prevention.

According to the survey:

- 74.7 Percent of the community have a septic tank, 10.8 percent of respondents stated that they do not have access to a latrine (Table 2).
- 2 Percent of respondents state that they utilize the river to eliminate human waste, 5 percent (Table 2).
- Approximately 84.2 percent of respondents have electricity. An estimated 15.8 percent are without electricity and must rely on alternate sources of lighting such as candle.
- 44.6 percent of respondents depend on the river as a primary source to obtain water (Table 3). Where 52.2 percent in of respondents indicated that agua entubada their primary sources of water (Table 3). The majority of those that indicated agua entubada as their primary source reside in the center of the community.
- Only 54.5 percent of respondents in the community stated that they place cloro en the water.

In the process of conducting community interviews several community members residing in the center of the community expressed their concerns about the quality of the agua entubada. Several people from the community stated that the water from the tubes have an odor. Community members have indicated their desire to have both the water from the tubes and the river tested.

Tele-Communication: In the community of Estro de Plátano the lack of access to telecommunication services has been identified as a priority concern among all the focus groups in the community. The location of Estero de Plátano is an asset to the community in addition to being a liability. In order to access telephone services community members are required to commute several miles outside of the community, additionally they must travel 45 minutes to 1 hour in order to access internet services.

The concerns expressed by the community members of Ester de Plátano center around the potential health ramification associated with the lack of access to communications. Other concerns centered on this issue are the inability to communicate or receive communications with family members residing outside of the community. In their focus group the youth vocalized their concern that the lack of internet access in their community limits their ability to access information that will assist them in their educational pursuits.

Safety

Light: The upper section of the community lacks sufficient light. Several community members during discussion expressed their concerns about the lighting in those sections, particularly since it is on the main road where several homes with small children are located.

- 15.8 of those surveyed in the community stated that they do not have electricity in their homes, further probing revealed that some homes indeed do have electricity; however it frequently does not work. When asked as to the cause of this lack of consistency in electric service some attribute it to faulty transformers.

Park: There is only one road into and out of Estero de Plátano. Although the primary roads in Estero are dirt roads cars, trucks and buses are frequently observed speeding down the road. Several members of the community's have indicated this as an area of concern. Many of the children in the community play on the road due to a lack alternate areas of play. The risk of injury to one or more of the children in the community prompted several members of the community to suggest building a park in the community to minimize the risk.

Medio Ambiente-Río

The observational portion of the assessment served to enforce the concern of trash in the rivers and the beach vocalized by many in the community. During the observational assessments large amounts of trash located in close proximity to the river and in some instances en la playa were noted. Also noted were broken shards of glass in the sand and animals roaming freely on the beach and in the river.

There appears to be a lack of trash pick up in the community, when questioned if there was a truck that regularly passes in the community to collect the trash, several community members stated that trash pick up is infrequent. During the period of observation for over one month there was no trash pick up in the community. According to the survey 62.4 percent of community members burn their trash (Table 1), the other 13.9 dump their trash in an open field, and still another 4 percent stated that they dump their trash in the river.

Contamination of the community's water sources has presented as a major concern in Estero de Plátano. During the focus groups discussion in all three groups (men, women and youth) the subject of the abundance of trash in the river and the possibility of contamination has surfaced as a major concern. 20

Percent of those surveyed in the community identified the trash in the community as an issue.

Of 44.6 percent surveyed which stated that their primary source of water was from the river, most of those people lived outside of the center of the community.

Table 1

Como elimina la basura

	Frecuencia	Por ciento	Valido Por ciento	Cumulativo Por ciento
Valida Huecos	17	15.3	16.8	16.8
Quemarla	63	56.8	62.4	79.2
Campo abierto	14	12.6	13.9	93.1
Mar	4	3.6	4.0	97.0
NR	3	2.7	3.0	100.0
Total	101	91.0	100.0	
Ausencia Sistema	10	9.0		
Total	111	100.0		

Table 2

¿Adónde van los desechos de la letrina?

	Frecuencia	Por ciento	Valido Por ciento	Cumulativo Por ciento
Valida Hueco	13	11.7	13.1	13.1
Tanco Séptico	74	66.7	74.7	87.9
Río	2	1.8	2.0	89.9
Quemarlo	2	1.8	2.0	91.9
Afuera	2	4.5	5.1	97.0
NR	3	2.7	3.0	100.0
Total	99	89.2	100.0	
Ausencia Sistema	12	10.8		
Total	111	100.0		

Table 3

Fuente principal para obtener agua

	Frecuencia	Por ciento	Valido Por ciento	Cumulativo Por ciento
Valida Agua entubada	53	47.7	52.5	52.5
Río	45	40.5	44.6	97.0
Agua de lluvia	1	.9	1.0	98.0
Tanquero	1	.9	1.0	99.0
Agua en poma	1	.9	1.0	100.0
Total	101	91.0	100.0	
Ausencia Sistema	10	9.0		
Total	111	100.0		

Community organization

Community organization was another issue identified by both the men and the women's focus group discussion. Currently the members of Estero De Plátano have formed a directiva provisional to address the issues discussed in this report. In forming the directiva the community is demonstrating their commitment in joining together to address these concerns.

Economics

Income: 64.4 percent of the community listed agricultura as the primary form of income and 13.9 percent listed pesca as a primary form of income. Approximately 21 percent of the community stated that someone in the home must travel to obtain work. In numerous discussions with community members the lack of employment opportunities has surfaced as an area of concern.

Tourism: Several members in the center of the community have indicated a desire to have assistance in developing community based tourism. Suggestions from community members range from building a malecón close to the beach, to providing classes in English to assist the community members in communication with tourist.

Conclusion

On February 5, 2009 at 3pm the community of Estero de Plátano and the Fundación Yanapuma will hold a meeting to discuss the issues presented in this report. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the findings of the community assessment and to prioritize the list of issues to be addressed, additionally to work together with the Fundación and the Municipio in Muisne and the MSP in Atacames to develop a plan of action in order to address the issues identified by the community. It is the expectation that this meeting will serve as a first step in a building a working relationship with all parties mentioned above.
